

# Philip P. Arnold and Sandra Bigtree

## Full Transcript

Interview Conducted October 22, 2020

### Interviewer

Can I ask you both for a brief bio, for how you would want to be introduced to a broad audience of people on the street or people who might interact with this project?

### Phil Arnold

Sure. You want me to start, Sandy?

### Sandy Bigtree

Yes.

### Phil Arnold

Okay. So my name is Phil Arnold. I'm the chair of the Religion Department at Syracuse University. I'm also core faculty in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Syracuse University. I'm the founding director of the Skä•noñh Great Law of Peace Center and was responsible for creating the narrative there. And I'm also the president of the Indigenous Values Initiative, which is a nonprofit organization formed to educate the general public about the Haudenosaunee and Indigenous issues.

### Interviewer

Thank you.

**Sandy Bigtree**

My name is Sandy Bigtree from Syracuse. I'm a citizen of the Mohawk Nation. But I did grow up in Syracuse, and I grew up performing on radio and television from the early ages, three years old, throughout my entire childhood, on a weekly basis, every single week of my life. In 1978 I had a band, and the Onondaga Nation asked me if I would bring my band down to the Nation to help draw non-Native people to the territory, so they could educate them on the Indigenous roots to American democracy through the Haudenosaunee. And I took that very seriously, and kind of redirected my life work. And I left performing and met Phil, we came back, that's the work that we're doing. I was on the collaborative board for the repurposing of Sainte Marie among the Iroquois into Skä•noñh, so we could share that message of the Haudenosaunee.

**Phil Arnold**

And you're on the board of –

**Sandy Bigtree**

And I'm on the board of the Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm also on the board of the American Indian Law Alliance, which sponsors the work of Betty Lyons at the United Nations.

**Interviewer**

Thank you very, very much. The questions that we've got start out targeted around the monument and then broaden out from there. So I'll start by just asking, what are your thoughts about the Columbus monument in Syracuse?

**Phil Arnold**

Well, I've been here about twenty-six years teaching in Native American Studies. And I've used the monument as a reflection of colonialism and what's been called the Doctrine of Discovery in the

narrative around Columbus. It's an example of that in stone. And so students have been interested in reflecting on that, given their own experience with Columbus Day and the way they've been educated in American schools. So it has been a useful teaching tool, but only in a negative way. Also, it's an example of how changing the narrative of the origins of the American experience, from the fifteenth century on, can lead to other sorts of relationships. So, one based on conquest and discovery, so to speak, can lead to other kinds of narratives, hopeful narratives. So teaching Indigenous students but also non-Native students, the statue has been very useful. It's sort of less insulting to me than other students of color will say, but it is still, obviously, an egregious statue that I've felt, since visiting here in the early 80s, needs to be changed.

### **Interviewer**

Thank you.

### **Sandy Bigtree**

Through my work with Phil at the Skä•noñh center, I have a new insight into what this statue represents. Even though I grew up with Sainte Marie among the Iroquois, you know, and that dreaded French fort—which I always had, like, a gray cloud when I drive by it because my father kind of raised me to have that feeling of that site—I didn't really know the particulars of it until I got involved in this work. And that the French fort, even though it existed in the seventeenth century, for only twelve months, was a failed mission. The replica of that memory went up in 1933. And they built the opening around the Onondaga accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior in exchange for handing over to the French six hundred square miles of land, which included the lake. I found that appalling. And they made central to that opening the white stone canoe, with the Peacemaker coming across the lake in the white stone canoe to deliver his message of peace, which formed the Confederacy, which is the Great Law of Peace that so influenced the founding fathers of this country. So it's a magnificent event that happened there thousands of years ago. This event of the Sainte Marie opening was a vilification of that sacred story. They didn't even have a Peacemaker. They had a white man dressed up as Hiawatha, who

literally came across paddling in a canoe. So the reason I tell this story is because of the power of what that white canoe made that year, in 1933. In 1934 the Columbus statue goes up; Columbus sits on top of an obelisk that decimates the white stone canoe in the bottom. And in my sense, now understanding this, I can only see that as supplanting—a fascist, white supremacist ideology cutting through this Indigenous influence that widens the scope of how we live, in this Indigenous way of peacemaking with the natural world. So it is particularly egregious, the way it's positioned in front of the courthouse of law. Columbus is backed by the law as he's looking through the Catholic Church to continue his mission westward.

### **Phil Arnold**

Other elements of the statue that—So we have twin Haudenosaunee boys. They're now men. But seeing four disembodied Native American heads at the feet of Columbus has always been very difficult for our family. Also the reliefs, the bas reliefs, the scenes of the captives that Columbus had taken to the court of Isabella and Ferdinand in Spain in 1492, 1493, are also very painful to look at because they are in a submissive pose in front of the king and queen. So I know all of these messages go to the superiority of Europeans, of Christianity, and those kinds of things, but as someone teaching in Native Studies and also in Religion, these messages of the innate supremacy of Christianity over and above the worldviews of Indigenous peoples is constantly goading. So a lot of these things the mayor is going to be taking out, and that's good news. But the statue, the heads, the scenes will all be going, but not Cristoforo, the Discoverer of America; that will remain. So it continues to be problematic.

### **Sandy Bigtree**

Right, so the obelisk will continue to dissect the white stone canoe, and then the inscription that Mussolini requested be there is “Cristobal Colombo, discoverer of America.” And I just want to interject that in 1934, a member of the Nazi Party in Germany was given U.S. citizenship in this country. His last name was Kuhn. By 1936, he created the German American bund, which was in Buffalo, New York. That was the center of the Nazi Party. This is the air of what's going on these years.

In 1939, three years later, most everyone's heard of that Nazi convention at Madison Square Garden, filled to the 20,000 seat capacity of that place.

**Phil Arnold**

So yes, what Sandy's saying is that the Nazi Party, fascism, was on the rise in the 30s. It corresponds with the raising of the statue. Of course, we all know that also, at that time, Italian Americans were under assault. So we have to recognize that negative history of our past as well.

However, Italian Americans do not have that same status as they did a hundred years ago. However, Indigenous peoples still are subject to all kinds of assaults and negative stereotypes and all kinds of cultural issues.

**Sandy Bigtree**

And silencing.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes. So yes, we can appreciate, and I think we wrote a letter to the editor at Syracuse.com, basically being sympathetic to the plight of Italian Americans in the late nineteenth century and then into the twentieth century, but that's not the case now. And Columbus still comes to represent these well-worn fascist narratives that are, frankly, on the rise again today.

**Interviewer**

Thank you. What do you think that people should learn about the history of Columbus and the effects of his voyages?

## Phil Arnold

Well, I will say that there's been a lot of back and forth in our local newspaper. And the argument that Columbus was really a nice guy, and that he never directly was responsible for assaults against Indigenous people or anyone else, is just patently false. I mean, sure, there are the occasional "academics"—I put that in scare quotes—that have written books on how wonderfully what is—or this whole narrative of discovery as being fundamental to the American experience, all those kinds of things. Fine. But no, I mean, Columbus was a monster, even by the standards of his day. After his second or third voyage, he was brought back to Spain in chains, put in prison. In the last fifteen years or so we've discovered the charging documents. We've found what his charges were. And they were essentially torturing not only Indigenous people, exterminating Indigenous people—we know that from Las Casas and others; he would chop off hands if there was not the right amount of gold and all these kinds of things. These aren't in his letters, by the way, of course. So it depends on what text you're reading. If you look in the diaries, for example, this stuff doesn't show up. But if you look in Las Casas, it shows up. If you look in other supporting legal documents, it shows up.

So these people created the Inquisition. Just to be clear here, the clergy—and in 1492, Spain was embroiled in what's called the Reconquest. They kicked out Jews. They were pushing out Moors, who were essentially Muslims, back into North Africa. Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity, or either that or they died or were sent out on a ship of fools. And some people hypothesize that maybe Columbus was a Jew. Because we don't really know, but there's all these kinds of speculations. So this is going on, and the church, its legal practice was essentially torture, to figure out who was and who was not a witch—this happened to women during the time period—who was and wasn't an infidel, enemy of Christ. These kinds of things were going on. Now in that world, Columbus is regarded as a criminal. So that is a standard that would be way beyond our own sense of what's a crime against humanity. Sorry, I'm talking a little bit much, but it really upsets me that people think Columbus is somehow innocent.

Okay, there's that. But then there's also that he sets a kind of precedent for our relationship with Indigenous people that carries on through Latin America, and into North America, even though he was never here in North America. So really, the symbolism of Columbus has nothing to do with North America. He was never here. It's not a narrative that really is connected to who we are. So it bothers me that there are all these paintings of Columbus in our nation's Capitol, all these reflections on the Columbian moment, Knights of Columbus, all these kinds of things were set up to think of Columbus as the bedrock of our history. And that, to me, is just going to lead us nowhere in this country. Even worse, it just makes a viable future more questionable.

### **Sandy Bigtree**

I would also like to interject that the Italian philosopher of the day was Machiavelli and made very clear how history would be recorded and taught to the general populace so that they would defend these regimes that are taking over. I mean, this is all going on at once, and you can't just write a clear history without incorporating these philosophies, the use of iconography. Anyone taking their first class in advertising learns about the power of imagery. And in the founding of the American democracy, they used the clutch of the arrows, which was what the Peacemaker had demonstrated at Onondaga Lake. The Peacemaker said if you unite the five arrows, they're unbreakable. And it was a whole ritual that he did at the lake. So Haudenosaunee leaders were telling the founding fathers about this imagery and about the story of the bundle of arrows, and that's why it was incorporated into the eagle's clutch. The eagle is also held in imagery among the Haudenosaunee because it has the highest vision and can see the farthest distance, and that's what's clutching those arrows for protection. So that's what that image represents, and it goes right back to the Haudenosaunee. Ten years after that, you started seeing more of the imagery of the Roman fascia symbol. And that's a bundle. But in the center of that bundle is a hatchet, which kind of reflects on an authoritarian government. In the 20s, leading up to this fascist movement, Mussolini incorporated that fascia as his symbol for fascism. And in 1922, when the Lincoln Memorial was constructed in Washington DC, they used the two fascia to hold his arms on. And you look at MSNBC and I'm sure they're aware of this, or anyone who photographs or uses this

imagery; you look, that's the enormous fascia holding and supporting the hands of Abraham Lincoln. So all this stuff plays in the human psyche. It's just a soup of muck we have to start thinking through. And, you know, cleaning it up.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes. So the point that Sandy is making very eloquently is that Columbus does not represent democracy in any way, shape, or form.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Right.

**Phil Arnold**

Okay. And the Haudenosaunee do. So we're right in the middle of Haudenosaunee territory, in the heartland of Haudenosaunee territory. This is where the Peacemaker came. That's the inspiration for democracy. Now you can talk about the Greeks, you can talk about British Magna Carta, you can talk about a lot of other influences. Certainly, there are a number of different influences in democracy. But Columbus is the farthest thing from democracy that we have in this country. There is no reflection of that in his narrative. And yet our children learn that narrative. They do not learn about the Haudenosaunee and the Peacemaker, which is an egregious thing.

Now, I don't have a \$1 bill. But if you look on a \$1 bill, or a presidential seal—

**Sandy Bigtree**

Yes, a presidential seal—



**Phil Arnold**

You will find that there is a clutch of thirteen arrows in the eagle's talon. Flip it over. That is the Peacemaker's message right there. And that's what has persisted.

[Phil and Sandy show the image]

**Phil Arnold**

So those are symbols of peace, right—

**Sandy Bigtree**

Through unity.

**Phil Arnold**

And there's nothing in the European experience up until—through the Middle Ages, through the Crusades, or the Renaissance, there's nothing in there that people could even imagine a kind of egalitarian, democratic ideal of representative democracy. So frankly, we're in a kind of—Put it this way. In religion, we spend a lot of time talking about narratives, about mythic narratives. And in America, we're just frankly confused about where we come from and how we got here. And this is what we're seeing right now on the ground being played out in the 2020 presidential election.

**Sandy Bigtree**

These statues are so important in New York State because this is the Empire State. So much started here, including the influence of the Haudenosaunee in establishing American democracy. This is who we all are here. And that story really needs to get out so people can begin to decolonize the inhumanity of man.

## **Phil Arnold**

There's a reason why this is not just an Italian American versus Native American kind of debate.

There's a reason why it was Black Lives Matter that created the petition that drove the re-evaluation that's happening now in Syracuse. Black Lives Matter are the people that are on the ground, changing the narrative in Buffalo, for example, or other cities. It's not Native people, you know, because they're basically 1% of our population. No, it's other people of color. They understand what this narrative means to them. So it's something I think non-Native people need to embrace. My folks go back to the Mayflower. We've been here a long time. And so we have to re-evaluate the narratives that come to put us here, and the reason why we're here, before it's too late, frankly. I mean, there are consequences. How does the death of George Floyd result in Columbus statues coming down, okay. There is a direct line there that people in religion pay a lot of attention to. Symbols, myths, narratives, these things are important. People of color understand that as well. And they—These are people in the street. The people have spoken. That's what I told the mayor. The people have spoken on this issue. And he made the right choice.

## **Interviewer**

Thank you. You've talked about this to a great extent, especially in the discussion of the Peacemaker and the Great Law of Peace, but one of the things we really want to be incorporating into the project is histories, stories, objects, images, the things that create narrative, and that participants think that others should be more aware of. Are there other things you want to say about the other stories and histories that you want people who come to the site to learn about?

## **Phil Arnold**

Yes, I'm going to show you another coin. This is an object that I just happen to have at hand. This is a US coin, minted. And it shows—

## **Phil Arnold and Sandy Bigtree**

Sacagawea.

### **Sandy Bigtree**

Show the other side.

### **Phil Arnold**

On the other side is the clutch of five arrows surrounded by the Haudenosaunee Hiawatha belt. It's really hard to see [onscreen]. You can find it online. This was minted in 2010. And what it shows is how the United States was influenced by the Haudenosaunee back in 1987. By a joint resolution of Congress, they acknowledged that the Iroquois—they called them the Iroquois back then, but we're talking about the Haudenosaunee—were influential in the development of Western democracy. This is thirty-three years ago now. Why don't we know that? Why isn't that taught in our schools? It was acknowledged by Congress. The legacy of Onondaga Lake is a significant place in that narrative. Talk about an object, you know, Onondaga Lake, the most chemically polluted lake in the country, is a sacred place for the Haudenosaunee and should be for all Americans. But that narrative has been hidden from all of us. And I tell that to my students. I say, "I don't blame you for not knowing this. Nobody does. But why don't we?" Why don't we know that it influenced the founding fathers in the eighteenth century, that it influenced the founding mothers in the nineteenth century? We're celebrating, this year, the one hundredth anniversary of the women's right to vote. Why don't we know that the Haudenosaunee had something to say to the Founding Mothers at Seneca Falls in 1848? Why don't we know that? Because you can't take land away from the good guys. You can't steal land from people that are your friends. So the narrative of conquest has to be primary in terms of the land, in terms of how we inhabit or occupy this land: Indians are gone, they had nothing to do with anything, therefore, land is free and available for anyone. That's the narrative. Now if the Haudenosaunee are celebrated as one of the founding influences of American democracy and American influence, what does that mean in terms of the theft of land that's been happening over the last 240 years? That's what

we're dealing with here. And Columbus represents that legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery, which is essentially U.S. law, property law, that says when a Christian arrives in the lands of non-Christian people, those lands automatically are deeded to the Christian nations and states. That came about in the Supreme Court ruling in 1823, and is upheld in 2005.

## **Sandy Bigtree**

Right, with *Oneida v. Sherrill*.

## **Phil Arnold**

So that's what we're dealing with here. It's a narrative that informs our legal process, property law, and that sort of thing. So excuse me for getting upset about this. But it goes right to the heart of American identity. So the Columbus statue—yes, it's just a statue, but it represents far more in terms of the battles that are being waged, the cultural wars that are being waged right now, that have to do with our survival into the future.

## **Sandy Bigtree**

Basic to the Great Law of Peace and the founding of that and establishment of it, which culminated at Onondaga Lake—Integral to that was the role of women. The way back to peace was through the women and the re-establishment of the clan system and each person's connection and identity with the natural world. That's the founding block of the Confederacy. So women were so vital to this relationship with the natural world. Then you reflect on the witch burnings, why when the Roman Empire swept through Europe, women were the target, because they had all the wisdom and knowledge of the sacred bond to the natural world.

Then, another aspect of the founding of the Great Law is the acknowledgement of grief. You cannot move forward and come to peace if you ignore the grief people hold on. So this condolence of each individual is vital to understanding peace. To this day, when traditional leaders are raised up, they go

through this condolence because they're replacing a person who has just died. And you can't replace someone into that title unless you acknowledge the grief of the family, and then what's ahead, because you really are going to be hit hard being a representative of your clan because everyone will be coming to you. So all of those elements are so vitally important. We have Matilda Joslyn Gage, who is writing about a lot of this stuff. She worked on equal footing with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Yet she was written out of that whole movement until Sally Roesch Wagner brought her back into the light. She lived in Fayetteville, New York. She lived right in Onondaga territory; you should go to the Gage house. Every documentary, you're beginning now to see Sally, because she's so articulate. You're seeing more of her telling this story. But how dare you talk about the movement without including Matilda Joslyn Gage. And she wrote most of that history, because she was the most prolific. You know, so history is manipulated, and so much is left out of that. I think the real richness is what people have excluded from including in history. That's what we really need to feed on.

### **Phil Arnold**

I'm thinking in terms of artifacts and material objects. The Skä•noñh Center is changing things around here, and we're proud of that. So school children are now learning about the Haudenosaunee rather than about the Jesuits. They're learning about the value system of the Haudenosaunee. It's changed the way people tend to think about the lake. If the lake is a sacred place, and it's been a sewer for so long, well, maybe we should change our ways, right? Of course, we have to also acknowledge the long view of the Onondaga, the Onondaga Nation, and their leaders have advocated in various ways for themselves, and also for the Great Law of Peace. This has been going on way before us. It'll continue after us. But I think that we probably helped shift the narrative, at least locally, and we hope in wider circles into the future. So the Skä•noñh Center is something we're proud of, because we literally decolonized the narrative of the French fort, Sainte Marie among the Iroquois, and now it's the Skä•noñh Center. It has a completely different meaning and valence.

**Sandy Bigtree**

And it was challenging.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes. That's a whole other thing.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Yes. We'll tell you about that on the tour.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes, later.

**Interviewer**

That I'll be interested in hearing about as well. Just picking up on or furthering one of the last things that you had said, about thinking about objects and artifacts, one of the things that we're going to be able to do with this project is to not just expose people to audio narrative, but also to expose people to visual images, at least some. Are there any other specific visual images or things that are at the Skä•noñh Center that you think we should take images of, that you would want us to expose people to or that you would want to make people more aware of?

**Phil Arnold**

Sort of reflecting on alternatives to the Columbus statue, you mean, sort of thing?

**Interviewer**

Reflecting on alternatives to the Columbus statue, but also just like you've been talking about, offering different historical narratives, the things that people aren't learning, by and large, in history classes and in school, and that they should be learning.

**Phil Arnold**

Well—

**Sandy Bigtree**

Well, the wampum.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes, the wampum belts, certainly the wampum belts. We have a number of replicas of the original belts. And if you go into the Great Law of Peace room, as you come upstairs, there are a number of belts. There's the One Bowl One Spoon Belt, there's the Hiawatha Belt, there's the Everlasting Tree Belt—

**Sandy Bigtree**

Two Row.

**Phil Arnold**

No, the Two Row comes later, during the contact period.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Yes.

## **Phil Arnold**

But there are a whole bunch of these wampum belts created at the lake during this period when they're developing the Great Law of Peace over a thousand years ago, maybe several thousand years ago, so all of those things are still in the possession of the Onondaga. That's another story completely, but—There was a film crew from PBS that over many years created a series of three episodes—

## **Sandy Bigtree**

Native America.

## **Phil Arnold**

Native America series. And we helped with the second episode, which was really featuring wampum and featuring what happened at the lake. And what we did was, we arranged for the original Hiawatha belt to be returned, to return to the lake. And then there were children there and there were politicians and there were all kinds of people at the lake, at this event that was filmed. The wampum belts, even in replica, are very powerful, because they are living symbols. And what was amusing to me is that they brought out this very old wampum belt, the Hiawatha belt, and everyone is encouraged to touch it. So this would drive a museum person crazy, that they would—it's like the opposite of what a museum person—but we were all encouraged to touch it. Not just Native people were there. Sandy touched it. I was encouraged to touch it. Kids were holding it with reverence. So it was quite an event. It's like a different status of an object. So now it's the flag. You've seen the flag, the Hiawatha belt. So that all was returned in the 80s from an anthropology Museum in Albany with a number of other belts, but that becomes the central belt. The central image. In fact, it's now a tattoo on one of our sons' bodies.

## **Sandy Bigtree**

But the belt is made out of shells. Wampum shells, they're quahog shells. And it was those shells that were part of the ritual process of absolving grief in the origin story that took place at Onondaga Lake



with Hiawatha. So there is that element of the acknowledgement of grief woven into every treaty belt or wampum belt, and it's considered to be alive. That's why everybody is encouraged to touch this belt, because it goes way back to the founding. So there are all these levels, you know? Powerful.

**Phil Arnold**

So yes, I would say that's the main one.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Oh, and lacrosse!

**Phil Arnold**

Oh, yes.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Lacrosse was played—that was part of the process too, of the men playing this game at the lake. And men from all the clans, they come and play. It's a ritual game. It has kind of a cosmological effect, which I won't go into but it's held very sacred and it's still played ritually in Haudenosaunee communities. But many of the elements are in the game we know, in Box, the movement, swiftness.

**Phil Arnold**

Right.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Native players play with a different mindset than non-Native players, for sure. And it's used to heal people. At the Nation if someone is ill they can call for a game. So it's a very powerful game. It goes way back thousands of years.

**Phil Arnold**

And part of that narrative of them coming together in peace, the Five Nations coming together in peace, has to do with lacrosse. So I suppose the wooden lacrosse stick would be another object that would be—And that wooden lacrosse stick is still made. The best wooden stick maker is here at Onondaga: Alf Jacques.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Mm-hmm.

**Phil Arnold**

He's world famous. And we work with him as well, for our Wooden Stick Festival, which we couldn't have this year, but usually we have in the Fall, in September, at Onondaga Lake.

**Sandy Bigtree**

He plants the trees. When he takes one down, he goes right through the entire life of a tree. He's made them his whole life, and his father made them before him.

**Interviewer**

Thank you. That's really neat. I didn't know that about lacrosse.

**Phil Arnold**

They call it the Creator's Game or the Medicine Game.

**Interviewer**

Are there other ongoing experiences or cultural practices or values that you would want visitors to the site to learn about?

**Sandy Bigtree**

Just, I would mention that all ceremonies at the Nation are rooted in gratitude. They don't pray. The whole culture is rooted in establishing a good mind, so that all people can come together in agreement. And you're not able to do that unless you acknowledge the natural world. I don't know if you've ever heard of the Thanksgiving Address or heard it recited, but that's what it's doing. It's taking you out of yourself and expanding your view that this life is much larger than your single experience.

**Interviewer**

Thank you. I guess I've got two more questions if you have time for them. You talked a little bit about this at the beginning, when you were introducing yourselves, but is there anything more you want to say about how your personal history or family histories shape your feelings about the monument site and the lake and this general constellation of spaces?

**Sandy Bigtree**

Well, I know the effect white supremacy has had on my family. My grandfather was sent to a boarding school, Thomas Indian Boarding School in New York. My great grandfather took him out of it, though, after a short time and put him on a ship to England to perform in Buffalo Bill's wild west show, where he didn't return to any of the schools till he was an adult, got married, and that had a huge impact on him, being away from his territory. So we lost a lot of our traditions through that experience, as did a lot of Native people. That's where the name "Bigtree" came from. It's not an Indian name. Any person who has a last name, it came through an assignment from the church. We don't name ourselves that way. We're named after our—there are a certain number of names within a clan, you

hold on to that single name until you die, and it's passed on to the next person. Because as you live, the natural world recognizes that one name that you have. So you have that special connection. But that was taken away through the church. Then they established the patriarchy, took away the matrilineal—tried to. Of course, growing up with the name “Bigtree,” publicly, you always had to deal with a lot of misconceptions people had.

**Interviewer**

Thank you.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Okay.

**Interviewer**

My last question really is, What do you think would be ideal next steps for that site, in the downtown circle, once the statue is removed?

**Phil Arnold**

Well, once the statue is removed, it's still going to be Columbus Circle. I think that's the plan. I think it needs to be Peace Circle; it needs to be celebrating the Great Law of Peace. I might have the minority voice in this, because there are a lot of different ideas that we've discussed, just among ourselves, in our nonprofit and otherwise, but I think we need to celebrate our Indigenous legacy here in Syracuse. I think students are ready for it. I think young people are ready for it. I think we need to move away from a narrative of conquest, as I was saying. So I think we could have a celebration there, of some kind, of the Great Law of Peace and the roots of a Western democracy.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Right.

**Phil Arnold**

I think it would have a profound change, something like we're trying to do at the Skä•noñh Center.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Mm-hmm.

**Phil Arnold**

We even said we would be willing to take the statue at the Skä•noñh Center and put it outside the fort.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Yes.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes, because the fort is something else that celebrates the legacy of conquest and colonialism. It's iconic in the county and in the state. It's a seventeenth-century French Jesuit fort that they spent a lot of time getting historically correct. And right now, we're changing the narrative of that fort as well. So I think it goes along with the Columbus narrative as well. So I'm all for preserving those narratives as a kind of moral tale, you know, but not downtown, not in a privileged place of our public and civic lives.

**Sandy Bigtree**

Yes, so the Indigenous roots to American democracy that made it unique in the world and has a vision for all of our future living in health, in goodwill. I think that's definitely vital.

**Phil Arnold**

That's good, yes.

**Interviewer**

Absolutely, yes. Is there anything that hasn't come up in the conversation or that I haven't asked about that you want to share?

**Phil Arnold**

Plenty. But this is pretty good, I think.

**Sandy Bigtree**

It's a pretty good start.

**Phil Arnold**

Yes.

[Brief conversation about the project and potential people to get involved]

**Interviewer**

Thank you both so, so much for taking the time and sharing your views and your experiences today. I really appreciate it.

## *Biography*

My name is Phil Arnold. I'm the chair of the Religion Department at Syracuse University. I'm also core faculty in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Syracuse University. I'm the founding director of the Skänoñh Great Law of Peace Center and was responsible for creating the narrative there. I'm also the president of the Indigenous Values Initiative, which is a nonprofit organization formed to educate the general public about the Haudenosaunee and Indigenous issues.

My name is Sandy Bigtree from Syracuse. I'm a citizen of the Mohawk Nation. But I did grow up in Syracuse, and I grew up performing on radio and television from the early ages, three years old, throughout my entire childhood, on a weekly basis, every single week of my life. In 1978 I had a band, and the Onondaga Nation asked me if I would bring my band down to the Nation to help draw non-Native people to the territory, so they could educate them on the Indigenous roots to American democracy through the Haudenosaunee. And I took that very seriously, and kind of redirected my life work. And I left performing and met Phil, we came back, that's the work that we're doing. I was on the collaborative board for the repurposing of Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois into Skänoñh, so we could share that message of the Haudenosaunee. And I'm on the board of the Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm also on the board of the American Indian Law Alliance, which sponsors the work of Betty Lyons at the United Nations.