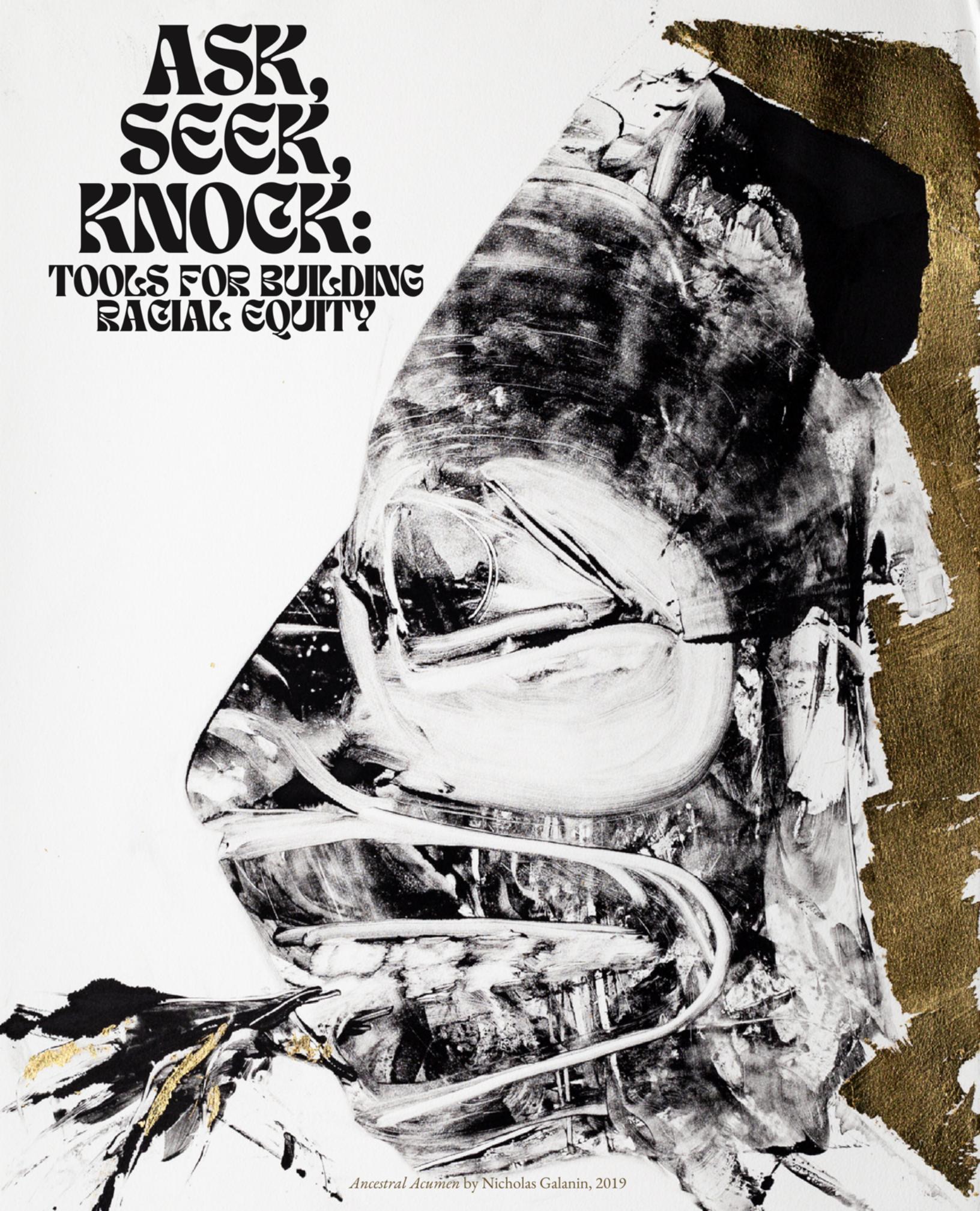


ASK, SEEK, KNOCK: TOOLS FOR BUILDING RACIAL EQUITY



Ancestral Acumen by Nicholas Galanin, 2019

A Letter from the Editors

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

- Jesus, in Luke 4:18-19, emphases added

Throughout the New Testament the word that is often translated as “righteousness” is also the same word for “justice.” **The larger truth that this points to is that there is no righteousness that is devoid of justice, and true justice has at its heart righteousness.** Too often, however, we reduce “righteousness” to just mean personal piety. Even more it looks like: I do my quiet time, I tithe my 10% or more, I round up at McDonald’s for the Ronald McDonald House, I read my Bible somewhat frequently, and I don’t cuss (or, at least, not that much).

But this understanding of righteousness is often more motivated by a religious checklist or sense of sin-management than it is an active form of justice. Personal piety over communal justice has been the focus ever since the first Puritans settled on stolen lands. But when Jesus invites us to eternal life, the abundant life, he’s inviting us to a way of living and being that is greater than being known by the things we abstain from. **It's a life that is distinguished by what we are for. “By this everyone will know you are my disciples: by the way you love one another” (John 13:35).**

And what we see in the selected passage from Luke 4 is exactly that. In this Trinitarian movement where the Spirit of the Father rests upon, empowers, and anoints the Son, it is towards the fulfillment of God’s work. Jesus embodies both righteousness and justice. Both are absolutely critical - vital for life in the Kingdom, part and parcel of following The Way of Christ Jesus. **We breathe in righteousness and breathe out justice.** Every inhale needs an exhale, which in turns leads to another inhale, and so on. The question, especially considering our history of emphasizing righteousness while treating justice as optional, remains this: What does justice look like?

For an answer we look to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Taking Jesus’ words seriously - and the prophetic lineage from Isaiah that Jesus is quoting - righteousness lived out as justice looks like proclaiming good news to the poor. There is something inherent to this good news that is good news specifically to the poor. It looks like proclaiming freedom for prisoners- not just spiritual freedom, but freedom from incarceration too. It means recovery of sight for the blind- both in miraculous restoration and in the restoration and strengthening of access for all communities, including the blind, the deaf, and the disabled. The way of Jesus looks like setting the oppressed free. Interestingly, this is a separate point of emphasis for Jesus from “freedom for prisoners.” Oppression is inflicted just as much culturally, societally, and institutionally as it is interpersonally. It is the understanding that even if there were no oppressive individuals in power, the systems would still benefit some and marginalize others. All of this, Jesus summarizes, is what the year of the Lord’s favor looks like.

These things are not just acts of justice for justice's sake, but for our own being set to rights. To work for freedom and goodness and healing and wholeness is not just an internal journey, but one that leads us to work for freedom and goodness and healing and wholeness for those around us as well. **The life that Jesus invites us into - the eternal life, the God-soaked form of life - is a life that is just and righteous.**

As we continue to ponder what justice looks like in public - or wrestle with what it means to follow Jesus and advocate for racial justice - let's together set a tone for the rest of this ASK issue reflecting on the interplay of righteousness and justice. May we see this journey of growth and challenge as central to our own formation and as a faithful response to Jesus' invitation to the life of beauty, wonder, light, and love.

Editors: Jake Apple • Tim Burge-Lape • Kristina Heckelman
Grant & Mikhaela Romoser-Claunch • Caleb Romoser

A Lived Experience

BY: CLAIRE BUHRMESTER

During my second year of college, I was hit with the full weight of what it means that each person on earth is created in the image of God. Growing up, I received the message that God looked at humans with a sort of disturbed disdain. Learning that I (and you!) are created in the image of God and that we reflect God's beauty back to others really changed something in me.

Later on in college, I read "I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness" by Austin Channing Brown with a few members of my campus ministry. In that group, a peer who was Black-White biracial told a story about being pulled over by a police officer. During this routine stop, he was treated with contempt. He and his car were searched. He was given a large fine. He was made to feel afraid. What made this story even more impactful was that another member of our group, a White female, was pulled over that same weekend. She was let off with a friendly warning. We live in a society where some people are not treated as holy image-bearers of God due to the color of their skin.

My anti-racist journey continued in graduate school. Currently, the field of school psychology is dedicated to anti-racism and social justice. I am grateful for the education and conversations I was able to have during my education these last three years at SIUE. However, I entered into a broken profession in a broken world.

School psychologists assist students in the areas of academics, behavior, and emotions. A big portion of my job is determining if students are eligible for special education services. Data shows that children of color are overrepresented in special education. Not only that, but some of the tools used by school psychologists, such as one of the most common intelligence tests, have recently been shown to be unfair to Black children.



Additionally, school systems give out more frequent and more severe discipline to students of color. This practice is a key element in the school-to-prison pipeline. Anti-racist work is a very real and challenging part of my professional life.

I am still learning how to be an anti-racist. In my first month as a school psychologist, I caught myself in a microaggression when I was struggling to pronounce a student's name. His mother was gracious, but I know these things make an impact on marginalized people's daily lives.

Through it all, I am grateful for the reminder years ago that ALL people bear God's image. When I walk down the hallway, the smiles I see on children's faces provide me a glimpse of our loving Creator.

I want to continue to engage in education, self-reflection, and advocacy efforts in my personal life. The children I encounter every day deserve that from me.

The Power of Names &

BY: TIM BURGE-LAPE

Genesis 32:22-32a

The same night he (Jacob) got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

In Hebrew, the name Jacob means to come behind or to supplant, literally coming from the word 'heel.' If you're not familiar with the Old Testament story of Jacob, the short version is that he was born second to his twin brother Esau. The story tells us that he came out of the womb grasping Esau's heel. His name, therefore, is both literal and metaphorical in this story. He spends his entire youth chasing after his brother, never believing himself good enough for his father. With the help of his mother, Jacob cooks a stew for Esau and trades the meal for Esau's birthright (inheritance). From that point, he goes on the run, fearful of what his father and brother might do to him once they're in a right state of mind. At some point in his life, Jacob makes his way back to his homeland and has the above encounter with whom Jacob believes to be God. God gives Jacob the new name of Israel, meaning God contends.

What stands out to me in this story is that names and the words we use matter. Jacob's name originally has a meaning that seems to haunt him wherever he goes. But, on the night he is returning home to seek amends and shelter with his brother, he wrestles a blessing out of God and God renames him Israel. Israel, now returning home with God's blessing, has a new name that signifies a shift in his own self, as well as in the way others will now perceive him. He once was the kind of person who was always grabbing at the heel of his brother and now he is one for whom God contends. This is no small matter. God changes names so that we might experience healing and learn how to pave a new path forward.

This story makes me think quite a bit about the debate in the Americas, specifically the U.S., regarding the renaming of Columbus Day as Indigenous People's Day. What was taught to me in my history classes growing up was that Columbus discovered the Americas and that we should celebrate it because it was what led to the founding of the United States. What I learned as I grew older and read Indigenous accounts of colonialism was that Columbus didn't discover anything. The notion of discovering the Americas is misleading and harmful, specifically to Indigenous peoples who have been in the Americas long before any Europeans traveled here. I also learned about the horrific physical and sexual violence of both Columbus and his crew towards the Indigenous people they encountered.

Over time, I encountered more and more reasons to not celebrate Columbus or the day we had set aside for him as a nation. Just a couple years ago, I became aware of the push for Columbus Day to be recognized as Indigenous People's Day, and it immediately felt like the right move. Over time, I encountered more and more reasons to not celebrate Columbus or the day we had set aside for him as a nation.

Just a couple years ago, I became aware of the push for Columbus Day to be recognized as Indigenous People's Day, and it immediately felt like the right move. Groups of Indigenous peoples have been pushing for this day of recognition since the 1970s from different parts of the Americas all the way from Berkeley, California to Quito, Ecuador.

Reframing Our Histories

It seems to me that just as God changed Jacob's name to Israel so too can we decide to change names. As we become more aware of our histories and the way we tell them, we can choose to name things differently in an attempt to honor those who have been harmed through the forming of our nation and the empiricism that followed. The story of Jacob wrestling with God and God changing his name to Israel is an important reminder for us. Not only can we change our minds along the way, but we can also change the name of something, whether it be the name of a day or a building or a town. It also points out that changing a name can be a good thing. It can bring us closer to Shalom, towards wholeness and Goodness. One of the ways to move towards the Shalom promised in the Kingdom of God is to recognize and acknowledge the harm we have caused and to change our course of action.

With that in mind, I'm led to think about Thanksgiving Day. In several Native communities, the day is known as The National Day of Mourning. The first observance of this day was in 1970. Wamsutta Frank James was invited to speak at a commemorative Thanksgiving event in Massachusetts, but when the organizing committee reviewed his speech, they did not approve it and instead submitted their own speech they wished him to deliver. In protest of the event, Wamsutta organized the National Day of Mourning. The protest has since been held each year on the fourth Thursday of November. It has focused on the education of ongoing struggles Native Peoples face in the U.S., as well as dispelling the myth of the first Thanksgiving. Allen Salway, also known as @lilnativeboy on Instagram, says this about the National Day of Mourning,

“Some may choose to celebrate the resilience of those who have suffered under European colonialism while others may mourn those who have suffered. Whether you fast, feast with loved ones, cook foods Native to your area, or eat traditional meals, today can be about recognizing our collective strength and mourning all that we have lost along the way. Rest is essential because there is much work left to do, and the only way forward is together.”

While Allen is speaking to other Native People in this quote, I think it holds wisdom for those of us who are not part of the Indigenous community. It is important as Christians to seek to understand our history and the harm our ancestors have caused. In addition, it is also important to transform our understanding into tangible actions. We can learn from Native Peoples about what it means to work collectively, to recognize and mourn the past so that it can transform our future, and to rest. Rest is an essential component to the transformative work of racial justice. To rest is to set down the chains of White Supremacy and say that work and money do not control us. We control us, and that is one of the first steps towards making the changes in us that are necessary for racial justice. With so much justice work to be done, I wonder, what would it look like for us to learn from and collaborate with Indigenous people?

How might God be inviting us into changing the words we use to name things? How would this affect the way we tell the story of our national identity? Of the founding of our nation and the removal of millions of Indigenous folks from the lands we now live on? And how might it transform us moving forward, listening to and learning from Indigenous Peoples? How might we accompany God in the work of justice, of restoring what has been made wrong?



Art by @chiefladybird on Instagram

Resources

For the Family

WATCH

PBS kids talk about race, racism, and identity



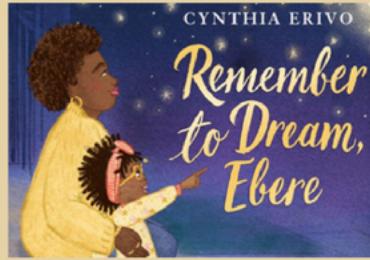
Have you ever wondered what a conversation about race with your family would look like? In this video, we get to watch real families

have honest conversations about race, racism, and identity in age appropriate ways. Watch as a family, pause throughout, and take the chance to explore how your kiddos are processing their world.

READ

Remember to Dream, Ebere by Cynthia Erivo

In this heartwarming story, we meet Ebere and her mother. Every night as mommy tucks Ebere into bed, she always says "Remember to dream." As Ebere eventually falls asleep, she is swept up into her big, bold, colorful imagination! Erivo hopes this book stands as a reminder to all littles to be big and bold, even if the world is telling you to be small!



LISTEN

Stories Podcast: The New Kid



Stories podcast explains that this episode is "a special collaboration with Melly from Stoopkid Stories! Together, we tell the story of Isabella and Adaliya. When Adaliya and her family move into the neighborhood, Isabella is eager to meet her and introduce her to all the other kids, but...it doesn't quite go the way anyone planned. What went wrong?"

FOLLOW

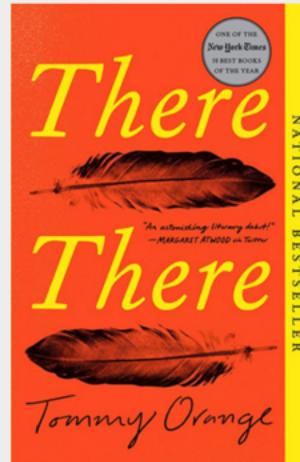
The Conscious Kid on Instagram

Working to "support families and educators in fostering healthy racial identity development and disrupting racism and bias." Don't have an instagram? Check out their website at theconsciouskid.org.

God is a Black Woman by Christena Cleveland, PhD

For years, Christena Cleveland spoke about racial reconciliation to congregations, justice organizations, and colleges. But she increasingly felt she could no longer trust in the God she'd been implicitly taught to worship—a white male God who preferentially empowered white men despite his claim to love all people. A God who clearly did not relate to, advocate for, or affirm a Black woman like Christena.

Her crisis of faith sent her on an intellectual and spiritual journey through history and across France, on a 400-mile walking pilgrimage to the ancient shrines of Black Madonnas to find healing in the Sacred Black Feminine. *God Is a Black Woman* is the chronicle of her liberating transformation and a critique of a society shaped by white patriarchal Christianity and culture. Christena reveals how America's collective idea of God as a white man has perpetuated hurt, hopelessness, and racial and gender oppression. Integrating her powerful personal story, womanist ideology, as well as theological, historical, and social science research, she invites us to take seriously the truth that God is not white nor male and gives us a new and hopeful path for connecting with the divine and honoring the sacredness of all Black people.



There There by Tommy Orange

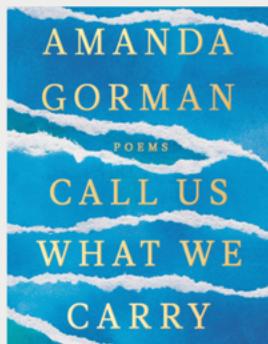
A wondrous and shattering award-winning novel that follows twelve characters from Native communities: all traveling to the Big Oakland Powwow, all connected to one another in ways they may not yet realize. Among them is Red Feather, newly sober and trying to make it back to the family she left behind. Dene Oxendene, pulling his life together after his uncle's death and working at the powwow to honor his memory. Fourteen-year-old Orvil,

Read • Listen • Watch • Follow

coming to perform traditional dance for the very first time. They converge and collide on one fateful day at the Big Oakland Powwow and together this chorus of voices tells of the plight of the urban Native American—grappling with a complex and painful history, with an inheritance of beauty and spirituality, with communion and sacrifice and heroism

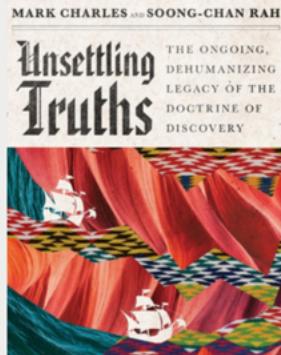
Call Us What We Carry by Amanda Gorman

Formerly titled "The Hill We Climb and Other Poems", the luminous poetry collection by #1 New York Times bestselling author and presidential inaugural poet Amanda Gorman captures a shipwrecked moment in time and transforms it into a lyric of hope and healing. In Call Us What We Carry, Gorman explores history, language, identity, and erasure through an imaginative and intimate collage. Harnessing the collective grief of a global pandemic, this beautifully designed volume features poems in many inventive styles and structures and shines a light on a moment of reckoning. Call Us What We Carry reveals that Gorman has become our messenger from the past, our voice for the future.



Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing, Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah

This prophetic blend of history, theology, and cultural commentary reveals the far-reaching, damaging effects of the "Doctrine of Discovery." This book, though not using the same language, explores exactly what Dave has been teaching on Sundays - about the harm of power-over systems and the wicked fusion of religion with empire. As the authors illuminate power-over dominating systems were intentionally built into the foundation of our nation, even preceding its "discovery" by centuries. This book is a sobering and honest theological reflection as well as an invitation to a better way of being.



Reservation Dogs from FX, and available on Hulu, features the lives of four indigenous teenagers in rural Oklahoma as they navigate friendship, loss, and life as native teenagers in America. The show is the first series to feature all indigenous writers and directors, along with an almost entirely indigenous cast and production team. The show has earned awards and nominations from the Critics' Choice Television Awards and the Golden Globes.

@revjacquilewis

Rev Dr. Jacui Lewis is a pastor at Middle Church in New York City. She is an author, activist, and public theologian who has written for many media outlets in addition to her own books. She also hosts a podcast called "Love. Period." Her work often centers on the development of an antiracist, just, fully welcoming society for all.

@notoriouscree

James Jones is a Pow Wow hoop dancer and artist who has brought Cree and Native art to Tik Tok and Instagram. His videos often feature his incredible dancing in conjunction with lessons on Native history and culture.

@modern_warrior_

Lance Tsosie is a member of the Navajo tribe and an activist, thinker, and educator on all things Native. On his page, you'll find everything from dog photos, calls for action on the closure of American Indian schools, to critical reflections on pop culture like the movie Oppenheimer.

@blackliturgies

Cole Arthur Riley is the author of This Here Flesh and the creator of Black Liturgies on Instagram. On Black Liturgies, Arthur Riley shares prayers and reflections she's written about her faith and spirituality.

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we'd be honored for you to join us
Sundays at 10am in person,
or streaming live on YouTube