

Sarah Nahar

Selected Audio Transcript

I really encountered the Columbus monument most while marching with Black Lives Matter in the summer of 2020. It was in the midst of the pandemic, we were protesting police brutality, and as we moved, marching, through downtown, seeing the Columbus statue was a reminder of the connection between history and current events. Him standing there atop other symbols glorified the colonial narrative, and it devalued other histories, Indigenous histories. And so I recognized, as we chanted, that the Doctrine of Discovery compelled Columbus to do what he did and to act towards those he met on arrival not only with disdain and devaluation, but the Doctrine of Discovery as a precursor to international law gave Columbus the power of the state, and the church supporting him in many ways, to be the first cop. He was an agent of the state permitted to use lethal force on others. So people protested then, and we continue to protest in this generation.

So we're in the street rallying for our lives, because we've been unable to have our humanity uplifted in society's major institutions. So seeing Columbus elevated there between the institutions of the courthouse and the cathedral is painful, because it's a monument to someone for whom our lives did not matter, and who used lethal force on Black and Brown people via the state. And so we need some symbols and central places that uplift all beings.

I want people to know that Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty are linked. Throughout history, sometimes we have been pitted against each other because of the limited amount of resources that have been available to our communities, as well as the different ways that white supremacy has impacted Black and Indigenous communities. For Black folks, it often seeks to exploit, and for Indigenous folks, it often seeks to erase. And so by reframing our struggle, not as one for scarce resources or competing against each other, but about the ways that we need each other, for Black liberation, for Indigenous sovereignty, and how we can learn from each other's struggles and resistance to racism and colonization -- it's by showing solidarity with each other that we will be stronger together. And that's what was happening as we were marching and coming together around these connections. Let's find symbols for our connections. And of course, being stronger together also includes European and Americans, and European Americans and others, to see that their welfare is bound up with the welfare of all of our neighbors. It's not possible to segregate any longer. This era cannot be one of us versus them. It's a time of all of us or none.

Biography

My name is Sarah Nahar, and I am a PhD student in religion at Syracuse University, and in environmental studies at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. I am the descendent of both willing and unwilling settlers in the United States, fugitive Mennonites, many religious, economic persecutions in Europe, and also the descendant of unwilling settlers, people who arrived on these lands through the human trafficking that happened in the Transatlantic Trade in African people.