

LAURA FLANDERS- Exploitation of Black and Indigenous people was integral to the founding and formation of the United States, and to the economic power that enabled the country standing today as an international superpower. But the nature of that exploitation wasn't exactly the same. In this month's episode of "Meet the BIPOC Press", I'm happy to welcome back Mitra Kalita of Epicenter NYC and Sara Lomax-Reese of Philadelphia's WURD. Together they're the co-founders of URL Media, and network of independently owned and operated black and brown media outlets, and together every month they host this special episode. Today, they're gonna explore the intersections between blackness and indigeneity. One of our guests, Kyle Mays, asks, "How can we imagine and put into praxis a world in the aftermath of settler colonialism and white supremacy?" To answer that question, Sara, Mitra, over to you. I look forward to joining you at the end of this episode.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- Thanks so much, Laura, it's great to be back after a brief hiatus. Today we're going to be talking about this intersectionality of Black and Indigenous peoples, our struggles, our shared oppression and our shared strength. And to have that conversation we have Levi Rickert, who is the founder and the publisher of "Native News Online". He's also the author of "Visions For A Better Indian Country" and he's a citizen of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. And we're also joined by Dr. Kyle Mays, who is from the Saginaw Chippewa Nation, and he's an associate professor of African American studies, American Indian studies and history at the University of California in Los Angeles. He's also the author of "An Afro-Indigenous History of the United States". So, welcome Levi and Kyle, it's great to have you with us. There's a lot of shared history between Black and Indigenous people, but a lot of that history is unknown and untold. And so, I wanted to kick the conversation off with asking about what are the differences, what are the shared experiences but also those things that have been unique around the oppression of Black and Indigenous peoples? And I'll start with you Levi Rickert from Native News.

LEVI RICKERT- First, let me start with the shared things that we have in common with African Americans, and you go back historically when slaves would actually leave plantations, they would be, in some cases actually they would go to the Seminole Tribe down in Florida, some Choctaw Nation, Chickasaw Nations, and actually would hide out and they would be welcomed by the native people back in the 1800s, and I would even say the 1700s; so there's that common ground there. I would say the difference has been, and it really came to light during the 1960s during the civil rights movement, when some American Indians felt as if they really didn't need to become part of the civil rights movement, because we had treaties. However, to me, that is... And I was a child, obviously, back then but thinking back, we should have joined because what treaty has been totally fulfilled, absolutely zero. So, to me, that was a lame argument but that was one of the biggest differences back then.

KYLE T. MAYS- We can begin with one of the most important native intellectuals in the 20th century, Vine Deloria Jr. who wrote, "Custer Died For Your Sins, An Indian Manifesto". That the major differences between African Americans and native peoples was that Indigenous peoples were seeking treaty rights, or simply for the United States government to honor the treaties, and as Levi pointed out, they have violated every treaty or at least not honored every treaty that they've ever made with every nation in the US. And the second part of that is, African Americans are fighting for civil rights or integration. But what sort of gets flattened in that particular history using someone like Stokely Carmichael, who had changed his name of the Kwame Ture. He's very adamant in saying that, "This was native people's land, and as African Americans should we be seeking integration into the US, and what things in common do we have with Indigenous peoples?" And I think that was a powerful moment in the history of Black and Indigenous interactions. Now, as far as similarities, I think there are many similarities, whether it's a shared ideology about what sort of oppression that they're experiencing. Now, we can say that people of African descent were enslaved, and Indigenous peoples experienced settler colonialism, that is the taking of their land. And those are historically different phenomena, but the commonalities if we really consider those Africans who were kidnapped from the continent, those were indigenous peoples who had their own languages, land and cultures. And even though they were enslaved that was not just evaporated or erased, and I think that's an important thing to really think about in pre-revolutionary America.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- There's this shared oppression, clearly Black Americans and Native Americans have experienced, although it's very different. But I also see that there are challenges around acceptance and embracing of Black people in particular, Because as I look at you, Kyle, you look like a black man, you look like a Black American to me.

KYLE T. MAYS- This is true.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- And so many of us, as Black Americans, have Native American ancestry but we can't necessarily trace it directly to a Native American Tribe, but it seems like there's not necessarily the reciprocated embrace of Black people who have native heritage in the Native American culture, as there is in the Black culture. And I wanted to see if we could talk about that differentiation.

KYLE T. MAYS- I think one of the differences to consider is that Indigenous nations have their own protocols as to who is a citizen or not. And while someone might look black, someone might look white, and I'll get to what I consider anti-blackness sometimes. While someone might look black, someone might look white, it's about your citizenship within that particular nation. Now, many issues, whether it's blood quantum, and so forth, have been imposed upon Indigenous nations. And I would argue that they do have the ability, if they desired really, to alter some of those protocols as to who can become a citizen or not, but it's not very simple either. Now,

certainly, I think there are various forms of anti-blackness. My family is from Detroit and they certainly experience various forms of anti-blackness, but they're also prominent activists in the City of Detroit around education, around culture in the City of Detroit, at least since the 1960s. So, it is a thing, but there's also been various forms of, we'll say, native erasure from Black people as well. So, it's a very complicated issue, whether that's nationhood and how, we'll say, Afro-Indigenous peoples are treated both by Black people and Indigenous peoples.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- Levi, what do you say about that?

LEVI RICKERT- Well, and let me just say this. When I attend national conferences, for instance, the National Congress of the American Indians. First time I went there, and years ago I was really struck with the notion that, "Wow, Native Americans come in all colors and sizes, so to speak." You can see a blonde, blue eyed Native American, you can see who someone appears to be African American Native American. And I wanna say this, that we have come a long way and I will speak about the Cherokee Freedmen, which was very controversial. I mean, Representative Walters held up some housing legislation because she didn't feel as if African Americans who are Cherokees were getting the proper due justice. And the current Chief, Chuck Hoskin, has really brought the tribe, I'm gonna say, light years, and it's an evolving situation. And the good news is, it's going in the right direction where they are embracing the African Americans who are in fact Cherokee. So, throughout the United States you see various tribes, one one tribe here in Michigan here on Potawatomi, when I go to their functions it seems that there are, I wanna say, a good 25% who are African Americans. And so, they are totally embraced, some are on tribal council, And so it's good news we are moving in the right direction.

S. MITRA KALITA- I think the country is just starting to catch up to some of the history and the overlaps that you're mentioning. Levi, can I ask you what changed over the last two or three years? We've talked, of course, on this show a lot about the death of George Floyd, I don't know if that's what prompted it or if there's something more that led us to this current consciousness.

LEVI RICKERT- Certainly the George George Floyd killing, and then the riots and the uprising that took place afterward. You could see they're coming together. I mean, for instance, the Washington football team's name was changed as a result of what happened to George Floyd. You can tie it back with AOC telling a radio station that it's time for Snyder to change the name, and all of a sudden corporate America was really, really aware of the fact that George Floyd was... There was some legitimacy to the concerns surrounding his death and how African Americans and brown people were treated, quite frankly. And so, when AOC tied that in they asked the Mayor of Washington, she agreed, and then next thing you know FedEx pulled the funding. When corporate America, that's the sad reality, oftentimes in America it's always driven by money but at the same time, in this case, it worked out okay but there has been a shift and I'm happy with it. I, personally, through the years have totally embraced African American

community. I grew up in a church that was African American predominantly, and so I just feel as if it's time and I'm happy it's happening.

S. MITRA KALITA- Kyle, what do you think, what's changed?

KYLE T. MAYS- I think the real beginning of the change was probably the activism around the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2015. And so for me, that was also the Flint water crisis, and that was a watershed moment where you also had the movement for black lives actually making a statement in solidarity with the resisters at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who were resisting the Dakota Access Pipeline. So, for me that was really the first moment, at least since the 1970s, where you found this major intersection of Black and Indigenous protesters. So, those are two particular events that I recall very recently that really started to see a shift in Native consciousness, as far as Black people really being aware and invested in a very mainstream sense of the things happening to Indigenous nations and, in this case, in particular Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

S. MITRA KALITA- We often at URL Media talk about centering Blackness in our own organization, as well as the organizations we work with. Do you hear that in a different way, given your overlapping identities? I just wonder as an Afro-Indigenous both scholar and person, how you hear that.

KYLE T. MAYS- Yeah, it's pretty complicated for me so I'll use as a jumping point the Combahee River Collective Statement, authored by folks like Barbara Smith and so forth in 1977. And they have a, and I'm paraphrasing here, they have a quote here that says, "When Black women are free all people are free." Now, on the surface that makes a lot of sense but I would always think differently about that in the sense of, and this is related to centering Blackness, so if all Black people are free does that necessarily mean a return of land to Indigenous peoples? And I think that has to be a part of the conversation, so I think it's imperative to not only center Blackness but also to center Indigenous peoples, because upon whose land were African Americans exploited? This was Indigenous land and, thus, I argue in the book that the enslavement of people who are African descent and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples are foundational to US democracy. And so, I see that both of these things have to be centered if in fact we're going to move forward.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- Kyle, I was watching a talk that you gave and one of the questions was about cultural appropriation versus appreciation, cultural appreciation. And one of the things that happens a lot now in places are land acknowledgements, where there's a recognition that we are on Indigenous people's lands, and there's a ceremony or some type of acknowledgement that happens. And I'm curious as we look towards Indigenous People's Day on October 10th, what is

actually, legitimately, going to move the needle to improve the lives of Indigenous people in this country?

KYLE T. MAYS- But I think one of the major things is, one, honoring the treaties, that's just sort of a basis. And, two, returning land, so there's certainly a LANDBACK movement. The city of Oakland have returned some portion of Oakland, or at least acknowledge it as being Native land, which is fine. And the Onondaga Nation, the state of New York returning acres to them in central New York. So, we can talk a lot about the changing of things and things getting better, more representation, but to me, fundamentally, it has to about returning land because returning land will deal with all sorts of issues around white supremacy, settler colonialism, and so forth.

LEVI RICKERT- And, Sarah, first of all, let me thank you for using the term Indigenous People's day versus Columbus Day, so we're already making progress. And I was happy when you did that, but, to the point, the land acknowledgement is a big piece and it makes me stop, and I'm a Native person And I kinda smile when I see it and I hear it happening when I'm at a public event. And I think it's just really, really, they're, again, showing their respect to the people, our ancestors were here and the acknowledgement of the land and acknowledgement of the waterways that this country through corporate greed has totally, totally destroyed our environment to the point where we are in a major, major crisis. And so, it all ties together but just the land acknowledgement, water acknowledgement, but I'm gonna go right back to fix the needs of American Indians ae need to really keep the gas pedal on getting Congress to appropriate the proper level of funding. We still have some of the highest levels of disparity when it comes to health disparity, lack of housing, talk about a third of the people on the Navajo Nation do not have running water or electricity, that is third world living conditions and this is what our native people are still living with; and we need to really work hard in... I wanna say this, we have made progress, we even see some short term progress even since the Stimulus from the pandemic funding, but money does solve a lot of problems and the average American's one paycheck away from being homeless, so tell me money doesn't make a difference. It makes all the difference in many cases.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- We're coming up on a very contentious midterm election in November that could reshape the way government happens in the country. And I wanna see if both of you could speak to what are the key issues in Black and Indigenous communities, those intersectional issues that are going to mobilize turnout in those communities.

LEVI RICKERT- There, again, I'll say with a smile on my face, we had the first ever Alaska Native who beat Sarah Palin to become a Congresswoman. Mary Peltola, when I asked her about it, I said, "Mary, you're pro-choice and what's the issue for you around that?" And she said, "For your audience, I'm reminded of how often Native Americans, Alaskan Natives were sterilized without their knowledge or consent." And this happened during this 1970s, it's very well

documented. And she said, that is one of the bases of what her thought process is, and I saw something on Twitter just this morning she put on that the government should not tell Indigenous people when and where to have children. And so, I think that's gonna be a big piece of the midterm elections, certainly issues around sovereignty. We did a study and we're about ready to launch a survey to really glean from our community, what's important for them during this election. But I'm gonna borrow from the last presidential election where we surveyed our audience, and it was sovereignty issues. American Indians still want to protect their sovereignty as nations. Right now, we have a critical Supreme Court case, *Brackeen vs USA* coming up in November, November 9th I think it's gonna be heard. And it's really a pushback to the Indian Child Welfare Act from 1978. And what really frustrates me about this, it's been going on for a number of years now, and now it's at the Supreme Court but the-- And the big pushback has been from the Goldwater Institute. Well, back in 1977, when Barry Goldwater was a US Senator, who this institute was named after, he voted in favor of the Indian Child Welfare Act. And it just makes sense that tribal nations have the right to raise our children, and that really bothers a lot of right-wing conservatives but those are some of the key issues for us.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- How about you, Kyle?

KYLE T. MAYS- Yeah, echo all those things, but I particular focus on urban areas as well. So, housing, issues around housing, the ability to afford housing, as we know, interest rates are really high and the ability to purchase a home. And I'm in LA, increasing homelessness among all sorts of populations with people of color, Indigenous peoples, both from Central America and South America who have come over here, and also Indigenous peoples local to Los Angeles. So housing is one of those major issues that has been ongoing, both on and off the reservation. And clean water, whether that's Jackson, Mississippi, whether that's Flint, whether, as Levi mentioned earlier, on the Navajo Reservation and various reservations with clean water. And those environmental issues remain at the core, whether you're on the reservation or in a city, so those remain very important issues throughout Indian country.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- Thank you both so much for being with us on "Meet The Bipoc Press" today.

KYLE T. MAYS- Thank you.

LEVI RICKERT- Thank you, migwéché, my pleasure.

LAURA FLANDERS- Well, thanks, you two. That was a great conversation. As you did Mitra, I was particularly taken with that interesting point about homelessness, houselessness, and land rights. That connection, I wonder how that's getting handled in campaigning and, more broadly, I was interested in organizing, are there examples that the either of you are aware of, even this

election season, where that alliance between African Americans and Native Americans is coming into play?

S. MITRA KALITA- One thing that struck me was Levi's feeling, the acknowledgement and even the mention of Indigenous is such progress. I think the other point that does relate to politics, as you're asking about, is the Dakota Pipeline. It really struck me, how it can feel like the turning of the screw from a news cycle perspective, but then when you stack all these events against each other, again, you start to see how that really does affect change. I might sound overly positive, Laura,

LAURA FLANDERS- Well, just to even the score I will point out that that Mary Peltola victory in Alaska, while huge against Sarah Palin, was in a special election which is gonna be refought this November with a whole lot of people paying a whole lot more attention, and probably pouring more dark money into it.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- The thing that was interesting to me about the conversation is that we don't always or often have a focus and a spotlight on this intersectionality between Black and Indigenous cultures, communities, movements. And I think that one of the things that excites me about URL Media is that we kinda force those conversations, because we are showcasing the content that Native News Online is doing, alongside what the Haitian Times is doing, alongside what Epicenter NYC is doing. And so, we're bringing all of these different cultures and perspectives together in one place and identifying those shared experiences, those shared challenges. And one of the things that Kyle Mays said in one of his talks, was that that's a very dangerous thing, history has shown us. He pointed to Fred Hampton who was a young man, I think he was 21 in Chicago, who was bringing all of these different groups, racial and ethnic groups, together to fight for, to overturn poverty and to overcome all of these areas of disenfranchisement that cut across different racial and ethnic groups. And he was essentially murdered by the state, so there is a historical framework that makes this work somewhat dangerous; because to mobilize People of Color writ large can be very transformative and, again, very challenging to the system.

LAURA FLANDERS- Well, URL Media is doing intersectionality in action and that's why we love checking in with you every month. People wanna know more about the Fred Hampton story, I encourage you to check out "Judas And The Black Messiah". I appreciate you both and look forward to next month's episode of "Meet The Bipoc Press", Sarah Lomax-Reese, Mitra Kalita, thank you.

SARA LOMAX-REESE- Thank you.

S. MITRA KALITA- Thank you, Laura.

LAURA FLANDERS- For more on this episode and other forward thinking content, subscribe to our free newsletter for updates, my commentaries and our full uncut conversations. We also have a podcast, it's all at lauraflanders.org.