

THE

~~Columbus~~

ASSEMBLY

THE COLUMBUS ASSEMBLY (2022)
A PROJECT BY CARLOS MOTTA

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LISTENING AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT
INDIGO GONZALES MILLER

IN THIS MOMENT
I WORK TO MOVE BEYOND AN ATTEMPT,
AN ATTEMPT AT EXPLAINING OR DRAWING OUT AN UNDERSTANDING
OF OUR SHARED SETTLER HXSTORIES

WE ARE ON THE LAND OF THE DISPLACED
CARVED BY GLACIAL-RELIEF-MARKED WATERWAYS
WE ARE ON THE LAND OF FLINT, CLAY, AND SANDSTONE
FIRST INHABITED BY BEINGS OF LAND, AIR, AND SEA
THOSE WHO TAUGHT THE NEW SETTLERS TO ATTUNE TO THEIR MOTHER
THROUGH THE MUTUAL CARE OF HUMXN, PLANT, AND ANIMAL KIN

THE LAND WAS CARVED YET AGAIN WITH THESE TEACHINGS
INTO EARTHEN MOUNDS BY THEIR DESCENDANTS
AS A KEEPSAKE PASSED DOWN THROUGH STORYTELLERS, MEDICINE
KEEPERS, AND LAND PROTECTORS
AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SHARED RELATIONS
NOT BY BLOOD,
BUT BY CYCLES OF THE SAME GRANDFATHER SUN AND GRANDMOTHER MOON
LOOKING UP, IN AWE, OF THE SAME FATHER SKY FOR RELIEF AND
PROTECTION
BARE HANDS AND FEET STRETCHED REACHING OUT AND WITHIN MOTHER
EARTH
REACHING OUT AND WITHIN MOTHER EARTH, BY BARE HANDS AND FEET,
TO CARE FOR OUR COMMUNITIES, THEREFORE OURSELVES

IN THIS MOMENT
I WORK TO MOVE BEYOND AN ATTEMPT,
AN ATTEMPT AT EXPLAINING OR DRAWING OUT AN UNDERSTANDING OF
"WHOSE STORY IS BEING TOLD?"
AS THE FRAGMENTS OF THESE WRITTEN AND SPOKEN HXSTORIES CONTINUE
TO WEAVE AN INCOMPLETE, EVER-CHANGING LIVING ARCHIVE

AS A RESIDENT OF THE DISPLACED
BY REGION AND HERITAGE
ON THE LAND OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY REMOVED
I HONOR THE LABOR, LIVES, AND DREAMS CONSECRATED BY THE BLOOD
OF HER
PROTECTORS AND BROKEN TREATIES THROUGH THE REFLEXIVE PROCESS OF
LISTENING

LISTENING AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WHAT I DO AND DO NOT KNOW
LISTENING AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF WHAT I CAN AND CAN NO LONGER
CARRY
LISTENING AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT, IN THE STILLNESS BETWEEN EACH
BREATH,
OF ASKING: WHO AM I, IN RELATION TO YOU?

Discussions for this project began in the “before times,” in February 2020, just prior to the first COVID-19 lockdown. They continued during the widespread protests decrying police brutality that summer, and the attendant debates around symbolic commemoration in public space. Quarantined in our respective homes in New York and Columbus, we watched as monuments to imperial, confederate, and colonial figures were toppled by protesters, defaced, or sometimes officially removed. Institutional names, too, were put into question.

The project took shape under the influence of these historical movements and was directed toward the institution’s very location. There are at least twenty-four cities in the world named in honor of Christopher Columbus; Ohio’s capital city is the largest. The nation of Colombia, too, bears the Italian explorer’s name, as does a day of celebration, Columbus Day. Yet all of these commemorations are disconnected from the legacy of their namesake, which has long been contested. We began to think about renaming as a way to articulate suppressed histories and envision more equitable futures. We asked: What is in a name? What is at stake in the demand that a name be changed? How might traumatic histories be rectified? What sort of conversations and civic processes should happen along the way, and in what contexts: government policy, cultural institutions, intersectional public engagements? How might society change?

The Wexner Center Artist Residency Award offered an opportunity for dialogue around these questions. We asked scholars, artists, writers, and activists to participate in three roundtable discussions, divided according to theme. “Commemoration, Public Space, and Social Justice” addressed legal, historical, and public policy perspectives. “The Future of History: BIPOC, Queer, and Trans Perspectives” debated commemoration from the perspective of those colonialism has oppressed. And “Renaming Columbus and Representing Community Values” gathered perspectives from Ohio to weigh the value of changing the city’s name, and to what.

The groundwork was prepared by providing a written prompt for each discussion. We also shared a document, a timeline of overlooked social and political histories, titled “An Incomplete History of Columbus.” This timeline included the origins of the city, its establishment as state capital in 1812, the violent removal of Native Americans from the state, and the ongoing frictions around the politics of commemorating Christopher Columbus, including an exorbitantly expensive quincennial celebration in 1992. It resolved with the removal of monuments outside City Hall and Columbus State University in 2020.

We held these convenings in the fall of 2021 over Zoom, over a year after previous summer's uprisings. Within that span of time, our questions had developed a more quixotic tone. While there was acknowledgement of the power and danger of symbolic gestures, there was greater emphasis on systemic interventions and mutual aid, and many more questions posed about alternatives to naming or western forms of commemoration.

These discussions were transcribed and transformed into a script for *The Columbus Assembly*, a multichannel sound installation that is premiering at the Wex within the larger exhibition *Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols*. What appears in this booklet is the fuller flow of these discussions, edited for clarity and readability, and conveying a sense of repeated and urgent themes. Readers may trace ideas and personal accounts to their respective speakers, and reflect on their own relationship to history, memory, land, citizenship, and community.

-Carlos Motta and Lucy I. Zimmerman

ROUNDTABLE 01:
COMMEMORATION, PUBLIC SPACE, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

PARTICIPANTS:
KATE BEANE, GINA DENT, JOHN LOW, ANA MARÍA REYES, CHASE STRANGIO

DATE:
NOVEMBER 1, 2021

What legal arguments and approaches can be implemented to change the name of the city of Columbus, Ohio? Is working within the limits of the law and existing legal structures productive to advance the rights of marginalized and immigrant communities? If so, can you think of potential forms of reparative justice that are informed by interpretive uses of the law? In what ways might there be legal strategies to achieve inclusive symbolic representation?

ANA MARÍA REYES To answer the prompt, what comes to mind for me first is the importance, but also the danger, of symbolic gestures. As we know from international human rights law, symbolic reparations aim to address social transformations on a broad scale, beyond a specific victim or context. The problem is that they are often used to obscure more important changes that need to happen. Changing the name of a city must be accompanied by deeper structural changes, or such a process becomes the easiest way not to do the work that needs to be done. We need a process that doesn't get lost in a symbolic gesture that might absolve people from making the sacrifices necessary to having a plural-racial democracy in this country.

JOHN LOW Our meeting today started, as many meetings now do, with a land acknowledgment. Ana María's comments remind me that when the text of this land acknowledgment was submitted to The Ohio State University Faculty Senate it was tabled because it was historically inaccurate. The Cherokee were never in Ohio; this is not their ancestral land. So we need to educate ourselves. It is probably easier to educate ourselves about Columbus than about whose ancestral lands Ohio State occupies. I think land acknowledgments and a process like changing the name of the city could prompt people to learn. I have students here at Ohio State who have never met a Native American. And because of the great ethnic cleansing and cultural genocide that happened in Ohio, they know nothing about Native people beyond the fact that the Cleveland Indians are changing their mascot.¹ A land acknowledgment can be an opportunity to talk about who used to live here so these students are not living guilt-free on stolen land.

I've been on a committee and argued for renaming Cook County's Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day and have a colleague at Newark Earthworks Center who is on a committee deciding the fate of the Christopher Columbus statue in downtown Columbus.² Even if these efforts are unsuccessful, at least the process asks for people to reflect on the history. That's one part of it. The other part—and this is drawing on Howie Echo-Hawk's 2020 article "Fuck Your Land Acknowledgment"—is to pose the question: "Therefore, what?"³ It's a profound question. Answering it takes a lot of work.

1 Ethnic cleansing refers to the forced removal of ethnic, racial, or religious groups from a given area. The settling of North America included the forced removal and killing of Native Americans. For more information on the history of ethnic cleansing, consult "American Indians," Ohio History Central, accessed July 12, 2022, https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/American_Indians. On the change of the Cleveland baseball team's mascot, see Maria Givens, "The Long Road to a Reckoning on Racist Team Names," Vox, July 28, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/first-person/22596477/cleveland-indians-racist-name-change>.

2 A statue of Christopher Columbus located outside Columbus City Hall was removed in 2020, as was another statue of Columbus on the campus of Columbus State Community College. See Hanif Abdurraqib, "The Vanishing Monuments of Columbus, Ohio," The New Yorker, June 24, 2020, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/the-vanishing-monuments-of-columbus-ohio>.

3 Howie Echo-Hawk, "Fuck your land acknowledgment," [howieechohawk.medium.com](https://howieechohawk.medium.com/fuck-your-land-acknowledgment-f32ae2564591), February 10, 2020, <https://howieechohawk.medium.com/fuck-your-land-acknowledgment-f32ae2564591>.

GINA DENT I come at these questions from a different perspective. My dissertation work focused on how African Americans solidified a cultural definition of themselves in literature. I was tracking how Black writers argued about cultural change. And I was interested in how those writers introduced a new African American literary canon. What did it mean to create a literary history that was shared among people who were connected culturally? What did it mean for colleges to teach that literature and thereby to create a people who would think of themselves as having a shared culture? What happened when there were interventions into these canons? I was studying the introduction of this African American canon, but also the damage it created.

I started to think about my own attachment to that canon. I am very ambivalent about the removal of these canons from universities. I currently teach at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where there are no shared canonical texts that students are taught to read. It is, in a way, more difficult to teach because there is no foundation. On the other hand, I think maybe what you end up with on the other side of that sort of education is more interesting.

Another interest of mine is how the law is naturalized as an element in these kinds of changes. In my teaching I talk to students about the role that law plays in their lives, and how they naturalize this role and support it, even when they disagree with individual laws. I remember walking in New Orleans maybe ten years ago with some friends, lawyers, who were involved in cases in the South around lynching. We came across one of these monuments to the Confederacy, and one of them said, "These really have to go!" We laughed! We thought we would fight individual cases in court and the statues would remain. Some of us even thought that we needed those statues in our face to get people radicalized toward change.

We've obviously moved into a different era. I believe that statues coming down and changing names will have not only a symbolic but a generational effect. We are no longer fighting these cases one-by-one; the free-for-all aspect may be disappointing, but it's the way toward making true decolonial change. I am also thinking about John's question: "Therefore, what?" What can we build, not only educationally, but in terms of reparation and redistribution?

KATE BEANE The public education piece is important. That's how you help people understand not only what is happening around them, but why. Why it is important to communities. But we also need to be aware of the backlash that will come and think about how to respond to it.

I led, with my family and communities, the campaign to restore the Dakota name, Bde Maka Ska, to what was previously called Lake Calhoun in Minnesota.⁴ It was hard work. There was sacrifice. I get hate mail, and our family gets hate mail. I need to be careful about my children's safety.

4 Find coverage of Beane's campaign at "Kate Beane: Returning Home, Restoring a Name," University of Minnesota, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://twin-cities.umn.edu/news-events/kate-beane-returning-home-restoring-name>.

Often people don't realize the sacrifice and safety issues that come into play, the violence directed at organizers, but also tribes and communities. Misinformation pervades online commentary. There were times when I didn't want to do it anymore. I had young children, I was pregnant, I was tired, I worked full time. I asked, "Is it really worth it?"

I live in Minneapolis. George Floyd was murdered a block from my kids' preschool.⁵ I live two blocks from the Third Precinct police headquarters that was burned down. The reality of the violence of the place where we live is very real to me—as a Dakota person whose ancestors were literally removed from Minnesota, but also today in my neighborhood. I am interested in understanding how these things impact young people today. We've engaged the young Native population through the work we did around Bde Maka Ska. When we changed those signs at the lake, the crowd was full of high-school-age Native youths who helped drill in the signs. They contributed and the renaming became part of their story because they advocated for it. They felt their voices were heard in their homeland, where often they felt they were not heard.

I remember when Derek Chauvin was on trial for George Floyd's murder, and Floyd's girlfriend was on the news. She was asked where he liked to go in Minneapolis. She responded, "His favorite place was Bde Maka Ska." We spent years fighting people who complained it was too hard to pronounce; now it was normalized on the news and pronounced correctly. It was a place that was important to this person. During such a traumatic moment, that felt good.

If you are doing this work, you must be prepared for backlash. I am under attack right now by a conservative lobbying group who has been trying to get me fired for two years, and which has made public presentations using pictures of my children. They've gone to the legislature. It is a scary time to be doing this work. Not only do you have to make sure that the correct information is out and support public conversation, but you have to understand how to protect the people doing the work and the communities who will be affected by the misinformation that will come out. You need supportive tribes, and community tribal engagement.

CHASE STRANGIO From my perspective, it is a matter of listening and learning. Where do demands come from, and what tactics can we use to effectuate those demands? If renaming and reclaiming public space feels healing, how do we, each of us, support those interventions?

Yet the law is still an organizing principle in our lives, one that is normalized. Anything that interfaces with the legal system is ultimately connected to complicity and violence. Our legal system cannot be extricated from the historical violence that allowed the constitutional structure to exist.⁶ So, what kinds of redistributive

5 On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a Black Minneapolis resident, was killed by Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, during an arrest. Floyd's murder, alongside other police killings of Black citizens, led to a series of uprisings which included the burning of the Third Precinct of the Minneapolis Police Department on May 28, 2020.
6 Systemic inequality, or the idea that violence and exploitation are inherent to current systems of governance, is often cited as a challenge to social transformation. See "Systemic Equality: Addressing America's Legacy of Racism and Systemic Discrimination," American Civil Liberties Union, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.aclu.org/news/topic/systemic-equality-addressing-americas-legacy-of-racism-and-systemic-discrimination>.

practices can we use through the law to care for people who are experiencing the backlash from reclaiming public space? As Kate was talking about, there is violence that results from making demands of power. I am also wary of any organizing structure that would rely on legal renaming alone without some demand for redistributive change. Because such a gesture is ultimately going to be absorbed into those complicit structures and used to create individualized victim narratives. Which are not, I don't think, helpful in the end for long-term redistributive change.

At the same time, I think that every organizing demand, and tool to realize that demand, can be part of a public reckoning. I grew up in a predominantly Jewish town, and my understanding of what happened in the occupied territories of Palestine was without truth or historical context, because I was told only one narrative about it. In demanding a public reckoning through naming and redistribution, or whatever people are asking for, we can contend with our own complicity and violence. We can reckon with our potential to shield others from the continuation of that violence. We can begin thinking about creative solutions.

Texas has recently passed this bounty law that deputizes the public to prevent people from exercising their constitutional right to abortion.⁷ What if we created public bounty structures where the public was the enforcer of positive things, so that we could seek the creation of funds for protection, care, and collectivization? On the other hand, I think that our engagement with law should be destructive in nature, not collaborative with the law itself.

REYES One complication in this country is that the US exports models but does not import them. There's a lot to learn from transitional justice processes that have happened elsewhere, in terms of their heuristic approach. A truth commission in this country would, I think, be a valuable educational tool, as well as a way to legitimate voices that have been silenced.

Let's go back to the statues of Christopher Columbus. Over time, Columbus has become a symbol of Italian American contributions to the history of the nation. Italian Americans did not have power and latched onto the symbol of Columbus as a strategy.⁸ We need to deal with this. Through a truth commission we could open a space of dialogue where Italian Americans could talk about their real contributions to American culture. Columbus did not contribute to the United States. If we acknowledge that, we can find ways to honor Italian Americans' contribution so that they don't have to ventriloquize that honor through an existing symbol of power.

We also need to talk about, without erasing history, what belongs in the public sphere versus in a museum. As Gina was saying: What do we teach as the canon? We can't eliminate the history of

⁷ See Sabrina Tavernise, "Citizens, Not the State, Will Enforce New Abortion Law in Texas," *The New York Times*, July 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/09/us/abortion-law-regulations-texas.html>.

⁸ From the 19th century to the present, ethnic communities in the US have developed strategies for integrating into a white, Anglo-Saxon settler community. Such strategies included denying their ethnic heritage or claiming it despite potential backlash. See Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

white supremacy because we'll just fall right back into it—which is what we're seeing now.⁹ There's a lot to be learned from transitional justice mechanisms.¹⁰ This country has not engaged in even a semblance of transitional justice. Not in the face of settler colonialism, not in the Reconstruction period, and not in the era of Civil Rights.¹¹ There is no healing when there are not robust debates. I'm not optimistic about this coming from the federal government. What if the city of Columbus created a model of a truth commission? It's something to think about. Kate's experiences are the main reason we need institutional truth commissions. When it comes from grassroots social movements, the retaliation is murderous. There are international human rights laws that would protect you, Kate, as a human rights defender, for what you did. But the US does not subscribe to the Inter-American system; it funds and therefore controls it but does not ratify itself being under its jurisdiction.¹² Pushing the US to be accountable to an international body would be another way to go about it. There are many kinds of transitional justice institutions. A truth commission is just one that is comparatively easy to realize. You have justice tribunals, reparations, memorials—there are many avenues that could be pursued.¹³ But the truth commission is the most central one for the US, because we are talking about perpetrators that are still alive, alongside centuries of systemic oppression.

If there was a robust truth commission, it would be easier to rename the city. The narrative has been that Columbus is an Italian from Genoa that discovered the Americas, right? But once you know what Columbus did in Española, once you know how many hands were cut off because they did not bring back gold, once you know he was called back to Spain to answer for corruption, once you know the ideology of the Spanish conquest, it would become less of a badge of honor for Italian Americans to be associated with his name.¹⁴ Truth commissions can change oppressive narratives and help to destigmatize people.¹⁵

STRANGIO One challenge we've seen is the utter disregard for international law in the US, unless it supports power as it currently exists. With the rightward political shift of some countries in Europe, you suddenly have right-wing lawmakers in the US citing international law to support their positions. Everything in the legal system adapts to maintain power. We need a truth commission about how the US Constitution is part of it; we have to expose the structure for what it is. I don't know that justice is possible under our current constitutional structure. Our constitution was designed to maintain genocide and chattel

9 See Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
 10 See Alexander L. Boraine, "Transitional Justice: A Holistic Interpretation," *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 60, no. 1 (Historical Reconciliation) (Fall/Winter 2006): 17–27.
 11 Settler colonialism refers, among other things, to the assimilation or removal of Native tribes. See Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire* (Minneapolis: University Press, 2011).
 12 The Inter-American System, more formally the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, is an autonomous judicial institution devoted to examining allegations of human rights abuses in the Americas. See "Human Rights Protection: The Inter-American System," University of Texas, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://tariton.law.utexas.edu/c.php?g=457708&p=3128778>.
 13 See, for example, Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 15, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>.
 14 See Elise Bartosik-Velez, *The Legacy of Christopher Columbus in the Americas: New Nations and a Transatlantic Discourse of Empire* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014).
 15 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, South Africa, 1996–2003, was a restorative justice body organized to investigate human rights violations in South Africa after the end of apartheid. It is generally regarded as a successful example of such processes.

slavery.¹⁶ It has repackaged those horrors through child separation at the US border, through carceral systems and the taking of land. I agree that a public truth commission needs to happen—but what of the fact that our constitution always adapts to maintain these violent structures? We need something different in its place if we're going to make any lasting change.

LOW Canada held truth and reconciliation commissions; I think they finished in 2015.¹⁷ My sense is that these commissions have been a disappointment as far as First Nations people are concerned. Ana Maria, you gave a great summary of why Columbus should not be honored. To me, it is dumbfounding that we need to have this conversation. Stalingrad and Leningrad got renamed. Why not Columbus?

From what I heard, the meetings about the removal of the Columbus statue here had five Native people and forty sons and daughters of Italy, and they don't care. Don't assume that people want to reject a racist past. They don't. They don't want to give up power. They don't care what Columbus did, whether he was or was not worthy. They're not going to give him up without a fight. How do we get people to share power? How do we get people to acknowledge that there is white privilege in all of us? If we don't have a revolution, things aren't going to change very much. Unfortunately, I think things might go the opposite direction. I think there's a very real possibility that states will outlaw critical race theory, removing statues, and changing names. I think there's a very real possibility Trump will be re-elected.

It's a challenging time. But for Native people this is nothing new. I suspect my elders would say, "What have we always said? Keep your head down. Don't complain too much. Because you know what? We are finally at the point of developing a Native American middle class. We've got economic development, mainly in the form of casino gaming. None of our elders is living with a dirt floor; everyone has running water now. No one is starving. That was not the case fifty years ago." And so, therefore, what are you risking? Whenever we stand up, we usually get nailed to the wall. The name Columbus should offend everybody. But it doesn't, and if you want to change it, Native Americans are going to get blamed for it.

DENT John, you used the word "revolution." I put that next to Chase's idea that we need a different Constitution, which would likely require something along those lines. But what does revolution mean? Words change connotations based on the work that people do. Are we still using "revolution" in the same way? I'm thinking, for instance, of the incredible proliferation of gun ownership, the mass consumption of ammunition—that level of potential violence—and I wonder what we mean by "revolution." Where do we sit with the potential

¹⁶ Chattel slavery unilaterally denied enslaved Black people human rights and made them property in the eyes of the law. Contemporary critics like Michelle Alexander argue that mass incarceration is part of the long legacy of chattel slavery. See *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York City: The New Press, 2010).

¹⁷ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, held from 2008 to 2015, was organized by the parties of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The primary mandate of the commission was to investigate the history and impact of Canada's residential school system, created to assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society, which often incorporated physical abuse. In 2021 it was reported that 751 unmarked graves were found at the site of a former residential school in Saskatchewan, Canada, which many saw as a symbol of a nationally sponsored genocide of Indigenous people.

of violence? I've lost my stomach for a lot of the things that appeared radical to me when I was younger. Is revolution violently changing the circumstances? Or does it mean a radical reinterpretation and then creating the grassroots institutional and interpretive environment to make change? And how do we measure that as against many Americans' senses that they are in a demographic war, and who feel threatened that they will become a minority?

STRANGIO I have no real answers, Gina. Some days I think, well, the answer is not more gun regulation, it's expanding access to guns for people who are at risk of state violence.¹⁸

The welfare state as we currently understand it, in the form of so-called "public assistance programs," is set up to keep people engaged with bureaucracy to prevent organizing and to quell dissent.¹⁹ I look instead to small-scale, extra-legal caretaking and community safety. And to security structures that look at the consequences of interfacing with the law directly. These exist alongside the American legal system as it has always been constituted and, potentially, will always be constituted. You have different models for this. People have historically provided food and shelter, or bail-whatever is needed in different moments.

It's hard to maintain resistance. Obviously, we can't go from where we are now to a rewritten constitution or an armed revolution. I think about what happened to the Arab Spring, for example. There were these grand uprisings—but then, because of the legacies of colonialism, there was a re-entrenchment of the same structures of power. The international systems set up to attempt rectify those historical wrongs are just like the welfare state, devoted to maintaining power and control. I don't know how to get from public reckoning and history-and-memory to the real changes that are needed, except to engage creatively at the small-scale level of survival, so that people can build solutions without being annihilated.

REYES Kate, what was your experience? There was a brutal reaction against you, but I think you could help us think about ways of using the tools we have.

BEANE The best way to do that is to talk about the process. When I talked in graduate school about restoring the name Bde Maka Ska, I was laughed at. "That's crazy. Good luck with that." It was hurtful. But we did it anyway. Initially we were told there is no process to change the name of a lake. So, we demanded that a process be created, and then we followed that process. That process was challenged—it went to the Minnesota Supreme Court—and was upheld. We had to go through all these levels of government—county, state, and national—and strategize at each step. Who can make the recommendation, who can write the petition? It took five years.

¹⁸ Historically, gun control legislation in the US has been levied against gun ownership among racialized minorities. See, for example, Adam Winkler, "Racist Gun Laws and the Second Amendment," *Harvard Law Review*, June 21, 2022, <https://harvardlawreview.org/2022/06/racist-gun-laws-and-the-second-amendment/>. See also Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Loaded: A Disarming History of the Second Amendment* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2018).
¹⁹ See Ange Marie Hancock, "Contemporary Welfare Reform and the Public Identity of the 'Welfare Queen,'" *Race, Gender, and Class* vol. 10, no. 1 (Race, Gender, and Class in American Politics (2003) 31–59.

I once took part in a truth and reconciliation task force organized by the city of Minneapolis. I was brought on last-minute because other Native people from tribes who aren't indigenous to Minnesota asked, "Why aren't any Dakota people here?" We were an afterthought. I asked myself: What are we going to do at the city level? It is still federal law that it is illegal for Dakota people to be in Minnesota. These laws are not ours; these borders are not ours. And yet we must work within these structures to advocate for ourselves and what we want.

Restoring the name Bde Maka Ska was all about community advocacy. We organized around storytelling. Never once did we say, "We want to change the name of the lake." We started talking to legislators, county commissioners, neighborhood groups, park groups, said who we were and started telling our story. Our family came from that village site, but there was no information, nothing that talked about our history there.

We were told, "Well, you could put an interpretive center there, but not restore the name. You can't have everything." Neither my twin sister nor I graduated from high school. But I went on to receive my doctorate, she went to law school, and one of the things that we realized is that to become successful we needed to set the bar high. Too often in our communities the bar is set too low, and we needed to let young people in our community know: If you're told "No," and it's something you believe in, keep going. Figure out the system, figure out how to respond. It's going to be hard. But if it's something you believe in, the community will support you.

A lot of our organizing was among different communities. We spoke with Hmong and Somali communities, immigrant communities who did not feel welcome at that lake. That lake is prime real estate in South Minneapolis. It is a very white, wealthy neighborhood. Those people were coming out to the meetings, saying, "This lake belongs to us." We had to remind them that the parks belonged to all of us. We built solidarity among neighborhood groups. People from the Somali community came to public meetings because they wanted a stop sign installed across the street from their church, so they didn't have to worry about getting hit by cars. Children would testify for the stop sign and say, "And, by the way, I support Bde Maka Ska."

We supported each other. Building that bridge was key. We didn't go to these communities and say, "This is what we want to do." We told a story and asked them for their recommendation, and it was that they wanted to see the name changed. We said, "Well, there already is a name. The park board and the city just won't acknowledge it." They were horrified; how can they not acknowledge this name? That's when issues of white supremacy came up—understanding that it's not even really about the name. Minnesota is a Dakota name. It's about who has the power, and the power structure, to name it. Many of our supporters were in North Minneapolis. They knew that when a Whole Foods store was built, or their neighborhood's name was

changed, they were at risk of eviction. We got a lot of support when we talked about the power of naming, tying that to the history of colonialism and gentrification in the city.

The group that took the case to the Minnesota Supreme Court was called Save Lake Calhoun, led by a wealthy man named Tom Austin. He lived by the lake and with a small group, settler descendants and hobby historians, put together a campaign against us. They had advertisements in the newspaper saying, "The Dakota radicals are taking over our lake. Our lake is going to be erased. This iconic place is going to be gone forever." Racist rhetoric. Another argument was that it would take too much money to change the signs. But the park has their own signage company and would in any case be updating the signs. Anyway, when we looked at our receipts for the work we did, we spent all of twenty dollars boosting Facebook posts to let people know to come to meetings. They spent upwards of \$80,000.

REYES Kate, you have beautifully illustrated the power of narrative, and how binding that can be at a human level. It builds solidarity. I thank you for your story.

ROUNDTABLE 02:
THE FUTURE OF HISTORY: BIPOC AND QUEER PERSPECTIVES

PARTICIPANTS:

KARMA CHÁVEZ, MARCELO HERNANDEZ CASTILLO, JOSEPH M. PIERCE, MARTIN JOSEPH
PONCE, SUSAN STRYKER, MABEL O. WILSON

DATE:
NOVEMBER 2, 2021

How does the present moment provide an opportunity to reconsider the role of symbolic and historical representation in public and civic discourses? What are ways to decolonize, queer, disrupt, fragment, and/or transform future forms of commemoration? Are forms of symbolic commemoration important today? If so, how can they be designed, created, and implemented critically from non-hierarchical and non-normative perspectives?

JOSEPH M. PIERCE I think this is a space where we can be blunt. Like land acknowledgments can be performative, renaming a city can also be performative; it veers us into the realm of multicultural inclusion rather than decolonial praxis. The land itself must be an agent in the process of naming or renaming. Not what we want to rename a place, but what the land requires of us as we attempt to be in good relations with it. What is the origin of the land, according to the peoples who sustained it for millennia? That origin story of the land can be a guide. More than a name, we need a history.

MARTIN JOSEPH PONCE When I was thinking about the history of this place, one of the things I looked at was the Ohio History Connection's entry on Native Americans. It goes from the prehistoric era to the 19th century wars and the removal of the Wyandotte and Miami tribes. Ohio does not currently have any federally recognized Native nations or tribes. The demographic information we have from the census lists something like 0.3% Native American and Alaskan population in the city. This erasure of Native presence in the city is what naturalizes "Columbus" as just another name and not the bearer of genocidal dispossession and removal. But if we are to take the proposal to rename the city seriously, then we must ask: for whom? On whose behalf? I think we would need to come together and educate ourselves on the deep roots of this naturalization of colonialism. As a land-grant institution, Ohio State has played a significant role in that naturalization. There is a Land Grant Brewing Company here, for example, that totally erases the history of the university as a beneficiary of the Morrill Act.¹

SUSAN STRYKER I want to return to Joseph's prompt to listen to the land. It reminds me of some Māori legal activists I met in New Zealand who were doing work to change national parks so that the autonomy and sovereignty of the land itself was recognized.² Caretakers were appointed to translate what the land needed into what human populations could hear.

I'm also interested in ritual. How can you work with people to engage in transformative social processes? How can you use a project like this as more than a physical or conceptual work of art, but as something that makes bodies move together—with each other—differently? So that you are somehow dissolving the existing relationships

¹ The Morrill Act of 1862 authorized the federal government of the US to give each state and territory that had not seceded from the nation during the American Civil War 30,000 acres of land for each senator and representative serving in Congress. Ohio received 630,000 acres of land. In 1870 the Ohio General Assembly, using funds generated from the sale of this land, chartered the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, the institution that in 1878 would become The Ohio State University. See "Morrill Act," Ohio History Central, accessed July 12, 2022, https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Morrill_Act.

² In 2021, the Māori party launched a petition to change New Zealand's official name to Aotearoa, the Māori name for the country. See Tess McClure, "New Zealand Māori party launches petition to change country's name to Aotearoa," *The Guardian*, September 13, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/14/new-zealand-maori-party-launches-petition-to-change-countrys-name-to-aotearoa>.

between populations and territories, and coming up with different stories, different ways of relating, for people who are here now. What are you listening to and what are you valuing in that making of something new?

I would also want to avoid the subject of white reaction to a renaming project, so that we are not just taking down a statue and putting it in a warehouse, but instead are doing a public ritual or action that brings to the surface the histories invested in that object. And so that we are not only talking about pain and trauma but using the process of removal or renaming to make a different sociability in the present that is fully accountable to those histories.

A few years ago, I went to Moscow. Outside the art museum in Gorky Park there's a sculpture garden of all the defaced and dismantled statues of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin that were taken down after the collapse of the Soviet Union.³ It was quite powerful. It said, "There were reasons these monuments were built; there were reasons they were taken down. We will put these defaced monuments in a city park, and people can make of it what they want."⁴

MABEL O. WILSON Questioning the city's name is caught up in other questions. Why has so much coalesced around Christopher Columbus, anyway? He wasn't the first European who made it to this continent. What work does commemoration do? What work does history do? What work does the law do? What work does property do? How does the land *not* become state property or a legal domain? How does it *not* become a site of pleasure or extraction? Can the land be something else outside of these frameworks? All of these are tools of domination. We need to unpack those categories in the same way that we would question Columbus.

KARMA CHÁVEZ Building on this: the concept of naming is itself part of Western epistemology and the will to know. To know, you must name. Knowledge demands visibility. Renaming doesn't get us outside that logic. It doesn't get us closer to what Joseph was talking about.

I lived in Madison, Wisconsin, for many years. Like elsewhere in the country, they are debating about whether to rename Madison Memorial High School. They've come up with four options, including one that would rename the school after Bruce Dahmen, the school's principal from 2005 until his unexpected death in 2014. In the press coverage of this process, the committee debating options expressed concern that if the school was named for an individual, it might turn out that they, too, had undesirable traits, and the school would need to be renamed again. One of the committee members, Amber Janssen, was quoted: "Bruce Dahmen's the best boss I ever had. That being said, I think our issue stems from the fact that we continue to name buildings after human beings."⁵ That impulse—connecting the

³ Stryker refers to Muzeon Park of the Arts, a park shared with the State Tretyakov Gallery and the Central House of Artists in Moscow.

⁴ NPR reports that 168 Confederate symbols, including nearly 100 monuments, were removed in the US in 2020 after the protests following the murder of George Floyd. Rachel Treisman, "Nearly 100 Confederate Monuments Removed in 2020, Report Says; More than 700 Remain," NPR, February 23, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/02/23/970610428/nearly-100-confederate-monuments-removed-in-2020-report-says-more-than-700-remain>. There have been ongoing debates among historians and preservationists across the political spectrum about what should happen to the statues and symbols once removed.

⁵ Elizabeth Beyer, "4 Finalists Remain for Madison Memorial High School Name Change," Madison, September 20, 2021, https://madison.com/news/local/education/local_schools/4-finalists-remain-for-madison-memorial-high-school-name-change/article_6d00b561-00d1-5fdc-b959-80214624902.html

names of people to cities, monuments, buildings, professorships, whatever—is at the heart of this.

MARCELO HERNANDEZ
CASTILLO

As I see it, intergenerational trauma begins at the body and leaves the body through language. Yes, language matters. And it can be more than performative if we broaden the category of violence, what we identify as violence. If people can't conceive of violence as being inherent in a name, they might not be compelled to enact measures for equity or that recognize legacies of violence. I see renaming as a first step.

STRYKER

Much of this is about American exceptionalism. I've been doing historical work on gender variance among settler populations in the 17th and 18th centuries. The idea of North America and the "spirit of Columbia" is that it allows a new kind of person to take shape. This idea is threaded through the English-language colonial literature of the time. "When we plant England's seed on America's soil, you get this new kind of hybrid creature, a new kind of person that embodies the spirit of Columbia!" That myth is about how the white settler goes native, kills off the actual Indigenous people, and becomes a new kind of creature. A new person on a new land in the new world. How do you undo that story and invent a new one? That is why I think about ritual and performance: doing things with words that bring people together to construct a new sociality. One that refers to the land and to the people that have lived here, and what they lived through. How do you invoke that insurgent ground? How do you make something new, something better than the last 500 years have been?

PIERCE

I sometimes teach Columbus's letters in my classes, to discuss what he says about the Caribbean, and to draw out the difference between Columbus and, say, Vespucci, who is the person who figured out he was in a different, new place. Columbus didn't really know.⁶ Those specificities can be powerful—can uncover the reality behind the myth of Columbus.

To respond to Susan, who is asking how we might create something new. The land and its stories already have the answers to that question. We must listen to the land on its own terms, its own epistemology, as opposed to a Western epistemology that reads the land as an object. It's not a question of creating a new form of sociality but infusing our sociality with lessons we draw from the past and from the land itself. And to do that we have to listen to the Indigenous people who have been engaged in those relationships forever.

STRYKER

Yes! I agree. I'm not thinking about inventing something, an exercise in self-fashioning, but about how we might get outside the Eurocentric world order of the last 500 years. How do we think and act our way out of that? We might turn toward the premodern past, the non-Western, the Indigenous, the futuristic—to speculation, or imagination.

WILSON

I've been doing work on the formation of Washington DC. It was important that the capitol

6 R.H. Major, ed., *Select Letters of Christopher Columbus, with Other Original Documents, Relating to His Four Voyages to the New World* (trans. R.H. Major) (London: Routledge, 2010).

city was located on federal, not state, territory: that is the District of Columbia. It was originally an abstract square, an enlightenment geometry, within which sat Washington City, named after George Washington, a figure of war and the first president. There is something about the colonial mindset that is embodied in the use of that term, Columbia—a sense of westward expansion predating the ideology of Manifest Destiny. The white settler project is part of that national formation and entangled with the name Columbus.

PIERCE A land acknowledgement is still claiming the ability to recognize the land, in the same way that one claims the right to name the land or rename it. But the land is not asking for that. So what is the land asking for? What if, when we offered a land acknowledgment, the land replied: “Thank you but return me to myself!” That would be closer to an Indigenous epistemology. What stories tell us where the land comes from? That’s why I am curious about the origin stories of the different communities that live in Ohio. In the Cherokee origin story, a water beetle goes to the bottom of the ocean and brings up the land. The land expands and becomes Turtle Island.⁷ There’s a world above, and a world below, and we live in the middle world. Our world came from below and is connected to the world above. And that connection teaches us something about our responsibilities to place. It’s not just a surface, but a below and an above; it’s not just the land but the water, the mountains, the trees, and the air. These origin stories are the original instructions about how to relate to the land.

PONCE I want to return to what Marcelo said about expanding what constitutes violence in a city, and the weirdness of a question about commemorating a city that is not dead, even if we wish it was. There are a couple things about Columbus, Ohio, worth noting. The city has a terrible record when it comes to policing and killing Black Americans.⁸ It is a racially and economically segregated city. There are massive wealth and income disparities. The university, the financial sector, and the healthcare industry have gentrified some parts of the city while rendering other parts disposable. Columbus has a reputation for being LGBTQ+ friendly, though that reputation rests on the suppression of underprivileged queer and trans people of color in the city. This came to a head at the 2017 Pride parade, when queer and black trans activists, called the Black Pride 4, tried to have a moment of silence during the parade. They were arrested, treated poorly, and indicted.⁹ So now we have an alternative Pride celebration, Columbus Community Pride, as well as BQIC, the Black Queer and Intersectional Collective.¹⁰

What if we were looking back from a future, a utopia, in which all this deep, structural oppression was obliterated? What would the commemoration of a city that was no longer this

7 See Christopher B. Teuton, *Cherokee Stories of the Turtle Island Liars' Club* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

8 See Céili Doyle, “Franklin County has one of the highest rates of fatal police shootings in Ohio and the US,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/local/2021/02/23/franklin-county-has-top-rating-fatal-police-shootings-u-s/4507751001/>.

9 Find an account of this in Prince Shakur, “Ohio’s Black Pride 4 Were Arrested at the Stonewall Columbus Pride Festival and Parade,” *Teen Vogue*, December 6, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/ohios-black-pride-4-were-arrested-at-the-stonewall-columbus-pride-festival-and-parade>.

10 For more information, see Columbus Community Pride, <https://columbuscommunitypride.org/>, and Black Queer & Intersectional Collective, <https://bqic.net/>, both accessed July 12, 2022.

problematic look like? I'm thinking about queer, and queer-of-color, futurities. Who has a future, and who is allowed to embody or represent that future? Can we project forward five generations and imagine a place that would be worth celebrating? As opposed to commemorating the city of the present, which is not at all something to be celebrated.

STRYKER What role does narrative play in this? I am interested in how ritual, incantation, and storytelling can be collective practices in which you materialize the world you envision.

CHÁVEZ I wonder if commemoration necessarily points us only toward the past. The dictionary definition of "commemoration" includes "making honorable mention" of something. I linger on that definition; it has a different temporality, than, say, a memorial. It's not necessarily enduring. Can a commemoration be prefigurative? Can it point toward the future?

WILSON The West sets up a particular trajectory of time, and a way of understanding time, and the same with being and knowledge. All of these ways of thinking are problematic. They produce hierarchies and regimes of domination. They're weaponized.

As someone who works with the built environment, I think about the material presence of monuments, memorials, and statuary—the materials of bronze, stone, and granite. Those forms are created to last more than a human life, so that they can continue to do their work. But no monument does so alone. They are part of a system of archives and museums that produce these sites and these histories. That is why they're often so difficult to dislodge.

How would we make a form of commemoration that did not rely on Western forms? This is what we discovered in the Memorial to Enslaved Laborers. When you go to a slave archive, well, there's nothing there but violence. Humanity has been erased. You can't get names or dates, so commemoration doesn't work. It was never meant to work for people who were enslaved and turned into property.

HERNANDEZ CASTILLO I think the spectacle of commemoration is the antithesis of what Susan was talking about, ceremony and ritual. Ceremony and ritual have active presence, versus commemoration which is passive.

PIERCE Ohio is home to whole host of mound cultures, right?¹¹ The Great Serpent Mound is not far from Columbus.¹² The Cahokia Mounds, produced by one of the most elaborate societies of the Pre-Columbian world, are a couple states over in Illinois.¹³ A mound is a built environment, an archive, a ceremonial structure, and a memory-making device. That's a model of the built environment we could think along with.

11 See Sarah E. Baires, "White Settlers Buried the Truth About the Midwest's Mysterious Mound Cities," *Smithsonian Magazine*, February 23, 2018, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/white-settlers-buried-truth-about-midwests-mysterious-mound-cities-180968246/>.

12 "Serpent Mound," Ohio History Connection, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.ohiohistory.org/visit/browse-historical-sites/serpent-mound/>.

13 Find an extensive consideration of Cahokia, alongside other Indigenous cities, in David Graeber and David Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021). See in particular the chapter "Full Circle: On the Historical Foundations of the Indigenous Critique," 454–504.

WILSON I've been researching the establishment of the Smithsonian Institution and the ways it circulated knowledge, particularly around Indigenous people as mound-builders. They understood Indigenous peoples as dying civilizations to create a rationale for taking their land. In the language of racial science, these societies were "degenerating"—a complete misreading that then became institutionalized. This was literally in the Smithsonian's first publication.¹⁴

This also connects to my involvement with removing the statue of Theodore Roosevelt from the American Museum of Natural History.¹⁵ The Museum was a center for eugenic activity in the early 20th century, which is why the statue places Roosevelt at the center with a Native American man and an African man on either side. I sat on the Mayoral commission to talk about the removal, and the question split down racial lines. Everyone who could claim Euro-American heritage wanted to keep it because it was beautiful and historical; every person of color was like, "It's offensive. Can you not see this?" It was remarkable.

That process was initiated by Decolonize This Place, who often gets left out of the narrative of the statue's removal.¹⁶ They forced the museum to take a position, even though the monument was on city land. The museum produced an exhibition and by doing that, opened the question to a broader audience, both internally and among the public, so that the museum could have an informed decision as to removal. I was interviewed about it and said, "Wouldn't it be great to mine that history, to talk about the institution's historical support of eugenics?" It's easy for the institution to remove that statue. It's more difficult for them to reckon with that legacy.

PIERCE There was a Decolonize This Place action a few years ago.¹⁷ They started at the Museum of Natural History, walked across to Seneca Village, and then to the Metropolitan Museum. From an institution founded on eugenics and the theft of Indigenous bones, to Seneca Village, the first free Black settlement in New York, to the Met, which has its own baggage. This walking tour taught about these things through a collective and decolonial lens.

STRYKER That is what I mean when I talk about ritual. It's not an object or monument, it's a social process that you keep revisiting, because the work that needs to happen is ongoing. And that makes it harder to sweep difficult histories under the rug. Does renaming become a way of saying, "We no longer need to have this conversation"?

CARLOS MOTTA Can we talk more about the potential effect of changing the name—not as a performative or aesthetic gesture, but as a way of signaling change about the conditions of the present, such as migration or discrimination? Would this be a way of pointing out those systemic problems? Do you think it could have more concrete effects?

14 See *Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, Vol. 1* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1848). A digital version of the text can be accessed at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/page/9042162#page/13/mode/1up>.

15 See "Addressing the Statue," American Museum of Natural History, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/addressing-the-statue>.

16 Find Decolonize This Place at <https://decolonizethisplace.org/>.

17 See Joseph M. Pierce, "Museums Must Engage More with Indigenous Peoples," *The Art Newspaper*, November 5, 2019, <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2019/11/05/museums-must-engage-more-with-indigenous-peoples>.

WILSON When we worked on the Memorial to Enslaved Workers at the University of Virginia,¹⁸ we were dealing not only with the university's hugely problematic history, but with the present problems of fair wages, and the rising cost of rent in nearby communities. The Black community in Charlottesville still refers to the university as "the plantation," and with good reason. One of the things we realized in the process of making the memorial was that we still lived in the wake of slavery—that this wasn't over. One person on our design team, Frank Dukes, is a community organizer. He started an initiative called UCARE, University and Community Action for Racial Equity, a nonprofit that addresses university's history of slavery and organizes the descendants of enslaved people to hold the university accountable.¹⁹ So, we weren't just making a thing, a memorial. We were cultivating communities and building trust. They still, rightly, distrust the university. But they have the ear of people who can push the agendas UCARE put in place.

PONCE Posing the name change to the people who reside in this city would be a provocation. Whether it would chip away at some of the domination and marginalization happening here, I don't know. But it would provide a space to consider what that name means to people who have been erased by it. It's not just that there are so few Native peoples here in Ohio, but that there are Indigenous people who have ancestral ties to the area—the Eastern Shawnee, for example—who are having conversations about re-establishing those ties, if not moving back permanently. On the other hand—and maybe my view is too jaundiced—Columbus is dominated by Ohio State football, by retail, and by the healthcare industry. The city is at the center of a red state. I love the ideas we are talking about, the different epistemologies being put on the table, and would be curious to listen in on the conversations that came out of it, to see how they would go. But for the average person at the bar, it's asking a lot.

PIERCE I appreciate what you're saying. Naming and map-making are epistemological projects. Place-making is a social project. The point isn't to change the name of the place but to change the meaning of it. How do you change the knowing of a place that then makes the naming of it obvious? As opposed to trying to rename it and hoping people will go along with it.

¹⁸ See "Memorial to Enslaved Laborers," University of Virginia: President's Commission on Slavery and the University, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://slavery.virginia.edu/memorial-for-enslaved-laborers/>.
¹⁹ See "University and Community Action for Racial Equity," University of Virginia: School of Architecture, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.arch.virginia.edu/ten/projects-services/university-and-community-action-for-racial-equity>.

ROUNDTABLE 03:
RENAMING COLUMBUS AND REPRESENTING COMMUNITY VALUES

PARTICIPANTS:

ANNA AKBAR, LAURA BARRERA, AMBROSE DUPREE, INDIGO GONZALES MILLER, SAEED JONES,
TWINKLE PANDA, MARY E. THOMAS

DATE:
NOVEMBER 9, 2021

What would it mean to choose a new city name and how would that process reflect the intersectional interests of communities in Columbus? How would you want to see the values of stakeholders of this city be represented? Are forms of symbolic commemoration important today? Can marginalized and immigrant communities identify in opposition to the current name or in solidarity in relationship to a new name?

AMNA AKBAR I want to start with the question of agency. Who is making the demand to change the name of the city? To what end and for what purpose? I think it would be great to change the name to symbolize that we're moving toward a more just future. But without any real organized pressure, it's not going to happen.

SAEED JONES It's worth thinking about the cultural context now. If you go to your neighborhood school board meeting, even the basic facts—say, as regards the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s—have become supercharged. It has become increasingly difficult to have conversations about who we are, how we got here, and how we identify as a community. The idea of renaming the city strikes at the very core of all that. The environment has gotten stormier even in the time between the initial proposal and this conversation. How can we have a thoughtful dinner conversation when people are already throwing plates?

INDIGO GONZALES MILLER I'll add further context from an Indigenous perspective. I'm Southern Ute. My tribe is in Ignacio, Colorado, and I am also a descendant of families that migrated from central Mexico. There's a lot of history in Ohio when it comes to Indigeneity. We're in Native Heritage Month right now and are being invited by every department at Ohio State that wants to bring in a token Native person and ask for our perspectives.

Among my Indigenous friends and elders, the conversation is that it is a problem to think that we need to right the wrongs of Christopher Columbus by replacing the name of the city with the original name of the land. Ohio, like other states, has removed tribes. At these various panels I am commonly asked how Native people can be supported. Well, they're not here. They're in Oklahoma. That's their home now and they don't want to come back to Columbus. They don't want to associate with Ohio because of past traumas; there's blood in the soil.

This gets to the question of invisible borders. Tribes had been in and out of this area over the centuries because of resources: food, plants, animals, and water. Central Ohio was one of the spiritually important places on Turtle Island; this is known through archaeological records. There are mounds, sacred objects, and artifacts from central Mexico, Africa, First Nations Territory, and from Europe.¹ Yet there are no federally recognized tribes in Ohio.

¹ See "Hopewell Culture," Ohio History Central, accessed July 12, 2022, https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Hopewell_Culture. See also Graeber and Wengrow on the Hopewell Interaction Sphere in *The Dawn of Everything*, 469–76.

Christopher Columbus gets linked with Indigenous people. But Columbus was never here. He was in the Caribbean islands. We were here. And so there is this almost humorous dialogue transpiring: trying to give people their homeland back when maybe they don't even want it, versus what can be done for people who have claimed space here.

AMBROSE DUPREE The whole question of renaming feels somewhat superficial. There so much work to be done—infrastructure and change and power shifts—prior to the point of renaming the city. But it's important in the sense that it's about identity—who we are. What does the city mean to people? Who are we as a people living here? We must do that soul-searching.

MARY THOMAS Columbus is a settler city. Indigo made that clear. But is the question of “who” the right way to answer this question about naming? I wonder if that pulls us into the matter of identity or authenticity, finding a proper “who” in time and place. Can we think of a different form of naming other than one tied to a group of people, an identity? There are other lives in Columbus: plant lives, animal lives. The land itself is in motion; in the time of the planet, it used to be near the equator. If we think about this long timeframe, if we think of the land as more lived-in and multi-dimensional than just “who,” there might be another way to think out this political question—rather than always locating politics in the now of a social movement.

GONZALES MILLER When it comes to monuments and structures that are supposed to commemorate or honor people, I think moving away from icons and toward plant life, animals, or the location itself as the monument would be better. That way people experience it in their own context; they don't have to understand by looking at someone else. In my medicine practice I welcome all people to work together toward healing trauma, because we all share things. We share the same sun, the same moon, and the same air. I don't want them to have to learn to engage with me or to be politically correct to talk to me. That's exhausting!

What iconography is tied to this city? I'm thinking of Malcolm Cochran's *Field of Corn (with Osage Orange Trees)*, 1994—these huge cement sculptures of corn.² That, to me, is a great way to represent Columbus, Ohio, rather than a human being who did something in the 1800s. We all know what corn is; we all have our own connections to corn. But it's not culturally specific. Kids can engage with it too. Food is a great unifier.

JONES Indigo, you really liberated us. I want a name; we need a name; names are useful. I think we all understand, in the end, a new name will not correct irreparable harm. I'm a writer and I think words are powerful. But I don't think that is a power that words have.

I briefly taught in high school, and I would give students a topic, a scaffolding. It was a magical structure. What would you rename Columbus if you

2 "Field of Corn (with Osage Orange Trees)," Dublin Arts Council, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.dublinarts.org/featured-items/fieldofcorn/>.

could? You might ask the students to answer this question in partners, and then come together to form groups to discuss. Then one person from each group shares back their discussion with the class—we have representatives speak up. Then, as a class, we vote. A similar thing could happen at the neighborhood level. You start conversations with people on your block, and it grows before getting to the all-in conversation. Let's use it as an opportunity to learn how to talk to one another.

I also thought of Toni Morrison—a person, of course, but moving away from the patriarchal structure of commemoration. She is a proud daughter of Ohio, part of the state's wonderful literary history.³ What if we renamed Columbus after her most famous book: *Beloved*, Ohio? To honor her, but also—and I try not to center them, but white people would get involved in this conversation at some point—to call up the Ohio spirit. People here love the Buckeye nation. If we are taking away something, what are we giving back? The name, *Beloved*, functions in two ways. It's a nod to literary history, and to a novel about the history of enslavement in the United States. But people would also love to say, "Oh, *Beloved*, Ohio." That is a rhetoric that would make people happy. People could like the same thing for different reasons.

CARLOS MOTTA There's a difference between inheriting a name and naming with intention. One of the ideas behind the prompt was to think about how an inherited name affects your life. How do people relate to a name that has been naturalized through everyday use? It's a wonderful idea to give a name that is a beautiful word, but that is also situated in a specific history to which communities would adapt and respond. I suppose what I am asking is: Does the name of the city affect the way your life takes place in it? In relationship to your subjectivity, your relationship to your community—especially considering that you are all involved in rectifying injustices and working for the betterment of others. Or is this name something that exists in the background, and it's not so important?

DUPREE I wasn't involved in the conversations at the time, but the group I work with, BQIC, used to stand for Black Queer Intersectional Columbus. They changed the organization's name to Black Queer Intersectional Collective. While the organization is based in Columbus, it is more about the people in it. That change allowed us to expand the reach of the group outside Columbus. So that was a case in which the name did have an impact on our politics and our idea of what the group was going to be.

GONZALES MILLER I like the idea that the prompt could become a tradition of not deciding on one thing, but of gathering and being in conversation. But there are so many divisions in Columbus. There are places you don't go if you look a certain way. There are histories of redlining and divisions between urban, suburban, and rural communities.⁴ There's Ohio State itself as a "city university." Those

³ Alongside Morrison, notable Ohio authors include Hanif Abdurraqib, Rita Dove, Harlan Ellison, Nikki Giovanni, Paul Laurence, Wil Haygood, Nnedi Okorafor, Mary Oliver, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jeff Smith, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Clara Ann Thompson, Brian K. Vaughan, Bill Watterson, Edmund White, and many others.

⁴ See Lila Asher, "The Relationship Between Historical Redlining and Census Bureau Community Resilience Estimates in Columbus, Ohio," *Economy and Space* Vol. 53, No. 8 (2021) 1859–61. Available digitally at <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0308518X211035410>.

divisions make these conversations difficult to have; there are so many cultural groups in different small communities.

THOMAS We live our lives in neighborhoods rather than the city itself. As Indigo said, there are places you don't go. I like the idea of playing around with scale as well as time. What is the scale of this place? What is the scale of the name? Should it be limited by the boundary of the city? Is it an Ohio name, a planetary name? Is it a name that's of a different spatial dimension?

JONES Toni Morrison was obsessed with names; naming and renaming were a huge part of her work.⁵ Some names are inherited, some are given. You see this in *Song of Solomon*. The city changed the name of a street, but Black people kept calling it by the old name. Some names are haphazard, some names are willful.

I also think about cost. The act of naming is expensive. Think about how much taxpayer money—our money—was spent on putting pictures of Donald Trump in federal offices, for example. How much are you willing to pay? I would love a new name, but I'm more interested in what I've learned about tribes being removed. That's not something I understood until today.

TWINKLE PANDA I think renaming the city should be tied to the redistribution of wealth. It can't be just symbolic. The activism I've done in Columbus includes being part of a socialist organization, and through that group I've met comrades like Nick Estes of the Red Nation, organizing in in Arizona for Indigenous sovereignty and the Land Back movement.⁶ Red Nation's "10-Point Program," a reference to the Black Panthers, talks about restoring treaties and building a world where there's no capitalism.⁷ They taught me about a writer, jaye simpson, who argues that Land Back means supporting Black, Indigenous and trans women as well.⁸

People live on scraps in Columbus. There is discrimination in housing, schooling, and policing; it is regular and violent. While I think the renaming of the city is a worthwhile struggle, I would hope it's tied to the actual redistribution of resources—what people need to get by.

AKBAR What you are saying resonates with my struggles with the question. I remember seeing on Twitter that people were talking about how the US Department of Defense was considering renaming one of its military bases after Harriet Tubman—just ridiculous.⁹ One thing that has been so exciting about recent social movements—both movement organizations and the national rebellions of 2020—is that that their demands are so materialist.¹⁰

⁵ See Samantha Schreiner, "Naming, Identity, and Intersectionality in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, *Beloved*, and *A Mercy*," *English Academy Review* Vol 36, No. 2 (2019) 38–48.

⁶ Nick Estes is a member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, assistant professor of American Studies, University of New Mexico, and co-founder of The Red Nation. The Red Nation is dedicated to the liberation of Native peoples from capitalism and colonialism. They center Native political agendas through direct action, advocacy, mobilization, and education. See "About," The Red Nation, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://therednation.org/about/>.

⁷ See "10 Point Program," The Red Nation, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://therednation.org/10-point-program/>. See also "(1966) The Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program," BlackPast, accessed July 12, 2022, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/primary-documents-african-american-history/black-panther-party-ten-point-program-1966/>.

⁸ See jaye simpson, "Land Back means protecting Black and Indigenous trans women," *Briarpatch*, September 10, 2020, <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/land-back-means-protecting-black-and-indigenous-trans-women>. The author makes the case that the "Land Back" movement means returning land to those who claim it as their ancestral home, but also decolonizing one's mind. As simpson puts it, "It's your job to betray the very patriarchy and transmisogyny that upholds the current colonial state."

⁹ Samuel Benson, "Here are the possible new names for 9 Army bases that honored confederates," *Politico*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/17/confederate-army-bases-new-names-00018187>.

¹⁰ Akbar expands on this line of thought in "The Left is Remaking the World," *The New York Times*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/opinion/sunday/defund-police-cancel-rent.html>.

Defunding the police is not about hiring more cops of color, or training them better, or writing better laws, or banning certain policing practices. It is about materially undermining and taking apart the structures that we live in. And then building new structures—redistributing wealth. Renaming a place could be meaningful if it is connected to other material struggles and demands.

LAURA BARRERA I've been thinking about, and struggling with, what is at stake. A bunch of intellectuals in a room deciding that Columbus is a bad name—I don't know. There's maybe not that much at stake there. I do think that the process of renaming matters. But if it doesn't come with material redistribution of wealth, I agree there isn't much at stake in a name change.

MOTTA The process of rethinking names and toppling monuments has been fixated on specific historical characters, like Columbus. But if you think of the name of many other places—San Francisco, New England, British Columbia, et cetera—they all reflect histories of colonialism. Yet there is this desire to topple monuments to bad individuals, and maybe bring down the very idea of commemoration. Actually disarticulating colonialism is more difficult. Redistributing access to material goods, making reparations, thinking about the meaning of land: these acts are much more complicated.

JONES It makes you wonder: Does the city *deserve* a new name? It's not that I think shame is good, but thinking about our country's past, frankly, it's earned. Addressing the history of colonialism is not linear; there's no finish line. So do we let the community off the hook? Are we inadvertently giving the city the opportunity to put this past behind them? I wonder: Should the name be "Columbus Killed" or "Columbus Murdered"? I think I would rather live in a community committed to revising and reckoning than one that was committed to erasure.

We're seeing that people in power are lying to us in real time about the January 6 insurrection. Oh my God! If that's the case, well, *shit*. The name is almost the only thing holding us to an ongoing conversation. As you said, this is the largest city in the world to bear the name of this colonizer. So long as that is the case, the city is always going to have to reckon with it. I don't have an answer here, but I do worry that sometimes white people are... white people. White people and colonizers are more invested in *not* being called racists or *not* being called colonizers than addressing racism and white supremacy.

GONZALES MILLER A lot of Indigenous people feel the same way. But trying to articulate it can be hard. How do you try to get things to happen for the Indigenous community without sounding whiny? People come up with different tactics for engaging these systems. Some people go into politics, some people go into mental or physical health systems. Many people right now, especially Millennials and Gen-Z, are trying to place themselves for when the older generation crosses over, so we can use our youth to transition toward what Columbus becomes.

It warms my heart that other communities want to participate; that makes it a decolonial process. If we're saying that we're going to destroy things just to replace another culture as the majority, we're still being colonizers! And white people are not the only colonizers. Every group around the world has colonized some space at some point over the history of human existence. We need to change our relationship to the terminology of colonizer, settler, imperialist, and have those terms describe something that happened-or is happening. The most colonial thing you can do is make something permanent and settle; a decolonial method means working with time and space being ephemeral. That would be a more open conversation, I think.

LUCY ZIMMERMAN Anna and Laura, we had an earlier conversation about the law. We were talking about building relationships among people, and how that might be in direct opposition to what the law is set up to do, which is to divide people and to punish them.

BARRERA Laws are generally not made to bring power to people; they're made to keep certain people in power. Law can be most helpful when you're using it to support the goals of impacted people—as a supplement.

AKBAR Law is unquestionably a tool of power. We live in a capitalist state where wealth is concentrated at the top, and statecraft and governance have been for decades about divesting from the public sphere and collective space and investing in the market. And also in some fantasy of the individual and the family being the metrics of what is good and how people rise and fall. That's part of what has fallen apart through COVID, and why there have been all these uprisings: Striketober,¹¹ the rebellions of 2020, the building of mutual aid groups, and so on. These are a challenge to this concept of the state and law, to the fact that we live in a prison state, to the fact that we don't live in a democracy.

Many of the demands these days are about the legal process. Movements are becoming engaged with law in a direct way. One example is bail funds, which are a form of mutual aid that has proliferated in the last decade. Black and brown communities are acknowledging that they live in an oppressive system where people are held in jail because they can't afford bail. They are pooling resources so that people can be free while they organize, whether it is for abolition or ending mass incarceration. They interfere with the legal process. Or think of the movement to defund the police. There are efforts to put that funding into a participatory budgeting process. That requires building a legal framework for communities to give direct input, to say, "We have this amount of money; how do *we* want to spend it?"

How you answer Lucy's question also depends on your politics. Socialists are oriented toward the state; they're trying to seize the state to make it look different. Anarchists may be trying to build something completely outside the state. Your attitude toward law is an ideological question. But because we live in a prison state, the law is so powerful that even ardent anarchists

¹¹ Jasmine Kerrissey and Judy Stepan-Norris, "US workers have been striking in startling numbers. Will that continue?" *The Washington Post*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/11/11/us-workers-have-been-striking-startling-numbers-will-that-continue/>.

are still engaged in legal processes, because those processes are central to the most terrible things that can happen to people. Deportation, incarceration, and eviction happen through the court system. These lead to people being vulnerable to terrible violence. Standing in solidarity with people fighting those systems requires engagement with the law.

MOTTA This conversation has been centered on commemoration and symbolism, words that are tied to aesthetics. Aesthetics may have little ability to substantively change the conditions of marginalized groups. So what, then, is the role of aesthetic practice?

THOMAS In advance of this conversation you shared an incomplete history of Columbus, which was really a timeline of the state. Millennia were condensed into a single line, but after that it was really a narrative of how the city was built as a state apparatus, and the resistance to that apparatus. I wondered: Why is *that* the timeline that will orient our conversation? Why do we have to care about the state apparatus at all? I fall on the spectrum of anarchism, so I am totally disinterested in state history except as it impacts life. If we think from the perspective of life, and beauty, what conversations can we have? If we start with a view centered on the state, we have a very different idea of what a community is. But a community is not defined in response to the state. It can be very different configurations of life, joy, and desire. It can be about nonhuman life or even the materialism of a place that's not about life at all.

JONES The word, Columbus, was already translated before it got to us. I think a conversation about names and aesthetics is necessary because the English language is almost inherently colonized. I say that as a writer who loves the English language; I'm quite fond of it. But we can't detach ourselves from it. It doesn't seem fruitful to use a new name to address the irreparable harm that was done to these tribes. So I am more interested in the aesthetic conversation. There's an inherent value in getting people to talk who don't usually talk. I think that is an art, and something that lives beyond the life of this convening right now. We are having a conversation that will inform how we relate to one another moving forward.

GONZALES MILLER I do research and work related to Oceania and Māori people. And one thing I have been thinking about is how a person's identity, who they are as a person, is based on what type of colonizer they got. The language that becomes the norm shapes things. I think if someone looks up Columbus, Ohio, on Wikipedia, they should see a multi-language translation and articulation—something that adds value rather than replaces or takes away. In New Zealand and Auckland there are multiple languages everywhere: on the buildings, on the plaques. And by doing that, by including Indigenous language alongside the colonizer's language, they've been able to give a mountain the same rights as a person.¹²

12 Eleanor Ainge Roy, "New Zealand gives Mount Taranaki same legal rights as a person," *The Guardian*, December 22, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/22/new-zealand-gives-mount-taranaki-same-legal-rights-as-a-person>.

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AMBROSE DUPREE is a queer Jamaican American essayist, community organizer, and artist from Columbus, Ohio. His organizing work centers on grassroots collaboration on racial justice, reproductive rights and LGBTQIA+ issues, specifically those uplifting Black, trans, and queer lives. He has done this work as a core organizer of Black Queer and Intersectional Collective in Ohio, and with the Los Angeles LGBT Center's Leadership LAB deep canvassing campaigns.

INDIGO GONZALES MILLER is a Two-Spirit Black and Southern Ute (non-enrolled) artist, educator, and medicine practitioner based in Columbus, Ohio. With other Indigenous artists, Miller was involved in *Potu faitautusi: Faiā'ōga o gagana e, ia ululumamau!*, a global Indigenous reading room and screen-print project at the Columbus Printed Arts Center. Her work is rooted in the pedagogical practice of Indigenous ways of knowing while holding space for all peoples. In doing so, she maintains her Two-Spirit duty as a sacred witness for all relations and to be a Good Ancestor for the next seven generations to come.

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This volume accompanies the eponymous multichannel sound installation in *Carlos Motta: Your Monsters, Our Idols*. Polyvocality and collaboration were central to its production and content. We extend our sincere appreciation to the interlocutors in the roundtable discussions. Their candor and insight complicated and enriched the questions this project posed. We thank Indigo Gonzales Miller for their many contributions to the residency project over the past year, including the poem they wrote for this booklet, and graduate curatorial intern Arielle Irizarry for their support in organizing and facilitating these conversations. We are eternally grateful to Julian Myers-Szupinska and Dan DiPiero for their diligent editorial work on the roundtable transcripts. Jakob Weinzettel and Christian Dutilh, of Composite Co., exceeded our expectations in the design of both this publication and the installation of *The Columbus Assembly*. Working with the vocal performers—Michael Charles, Noah Demland, Felicia de Rosa, Marcus Morris, Sara Pardo Fishburn, Vicki Saunders, and Joseph Ze Soza—was a pleasure. We are grateful to them for believing in the work. Thanks are also due to Joey Gurwin for sound production and Lidia Tamplenizza for her sound-editing, advice, and wizardry. Finally, we want to acknowledge the hard work of all the employees of the Wex, and especially the staff in the exhibitions department for their unwavering support in bringing this work into the world.

—CM & LZ

This volume accompanies the multichannel sound installation *The Columbus Assembly* (2022)

A project by Carlos Motta

Eight channel sound installation with carpet and text mural on wall

Installation dimensions variable, 26 min.

The script for the sound work was adapted by Carlos Motta from conversations with Amna Akbar, Laura Barrera, Kate Beane, Marcelo Hernandez Castillo, Karma Chávez, Gina Dent, Ambrose DuPree, Indigo Gonzales Miller, Saeed Jones, John N. Low, Twinkle Panda, Joseph M. Pierce, Martin Joseph Ponce, Ana María Reyes, Chase Strangio, Susan Stryker, Mary E. Thomas, and Mabel O. Wilson

Performed by Michael Charles, Noah Demland, Felicia de Rosa, Indigo Gonzales Miller, Marcus Morris, Sara Pardo Fishburn, Vicki Saunders, and Joseph Ze Soza

SOUND EDITOR

Lidia Tamplenizza

SOUND PRODUCTION

Joey Gurwin, Oranjudio

INSTALLATION DESIGN

Carlos Motta and Composite Co.

Text mural “Beloved” inspired by the words of Saeed Jones

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