

# What Are Indigenous Religions? Part 2

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

indigenous religions, native, religions, people, indigenous peoples, land, indigenous, called, folks, united states, practices, water, life, talking, place, history, nerds, specific, sacred, book

## SPEAKERS

If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Megan Goodwin, Bonus Ending, Simpsons, A Little Bit Leave It, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, Dr. Abel Gomez

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Megan Goodwin 00:17

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. For 2021-2022, our work is made possible through a Public Humanities Fellowship from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We are grateful to live, teach, and record on the current, ancestral, and unceded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki and Aucocisco peoples. As always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website. What's up nerds! Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:48

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia.



Megan Goodwin 00:55

Ilyse, I would like to begin the podcast by just saying how proud of you that I am.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:00

Why? Because I haven't yelled at people on the internet in-- our bracket here says "insert number of days," but I'm gonna have to say hours-- six hours? I haven't yelled at people on the internet in six hours?



Megan Goodwin 01:13

Because you were at the library. I see you. But no! No. Because you're letting me do another, mostly-US and definitely North American episode. I cherish both your flexibility and your generosity! \*laughs\* Well, flexibility or a deep awareness that when you want something done particularly, it is a game of chicken that I cannot win. \*laughs\* Mmm, if that is a criticism of me, I don't understand it, and I won't respond to it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:38

\*laughs\* Anyway, nerds, our last episode was all about indigenous religions and we use Japan as a way to think about it. And we told y'all that this catch-all, umbrella term was both useful to describe people's lived practices AND a product of imperialism. Guess what? We've got more of that today.



Megan Goodwin 02:00

The devil, you say. Today, we're in the second episode of this two-episode dive into Indigenous Religions. But like Megan said-- and not as a threat, really-- this one will focus on how definitions of indigenous religions work in, mostly the US, but certainly in the Americas for indigenous peoples. But bonus: we've got Dr. Abel Gomez chiming in. Yay, I love him! Dr. Abel Gomez is an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. His work is about place, memory, and identity, particularly within Indigenous, Latinx, and Neo-Pagan religious traditions. He was also a 2021 Public Scholarship Fellow with Sacred Writes. He'll introduce himself and his work later on, and don't worry nerds! You know we are assigning their homework for homework too.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:51

Don't be stupid, be a smarty! Come on, join the lesson plan party!



Megan Goodwin 02:55

\*laughs\* Nooooo! No, you didn't. Ohh, okay, but you did. Let-- let's keep this simple, we say always, optimistically. Today, we're still talking about Indigenous Religions for two reasons. First, because-- as we continue to tell you on all of the episodes-- religion, it's imperial. And second, because we think you can't call yourself religiously literate without, again, knowing what these religions are, how they came about, why they matter to scholars, sure, but regular folk and, especially, their practitioners. \*record scratch\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:35

Seriously, Goodwin!



Megan Goodwin 03:37

What?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:38

We're doing the same thesis again!



Megan Goodwin 03:40

Yep.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:41

We've had two previous episodes--



Megan Goodwin 03:43

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:43

--with the same damn thesis!



Megan Goodwin 03:45

Yeah! That's how important it is! You're welcome! The lesson plan is **HERE**, and it's here to stay! Well, in that case, the 101 on today-- \*clicks tongue\*-- the section where we do professor work. So if the lesson plan is here, and it's here to stay, Megan, maybe you can anticipate my questions-- which I admit to changing slightly just to bother you and your sense of order-- \*maniacal laugh\*-- okay, so. One, why are we **STILL** talking about indigenous religions? Didn't we already do an episode on that? And two, if this catch-all phrase shifts over time and place, what use is it? Why are we using it, let alone using it twice? I see you. I see you challenging my teaching, I see you being snarky, because you write the words that come out of my mouth, and I'm not falling for your damn hell ass nonsense! Shit, fine, FINE, FINE! Alright, let's hit it!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 04:47

\*laughs\*



Megan Goodwin 04:48

Okay. We're still talking about indigenous religions because there are so many of them, because they are still here. Indigenous practices, cultures, and peoples are not just in one place and we truly did not even begin to scratch the surface when we talked about global indigenous religions last time. And we used Shinto as an example, which is great, but... there's **SO** much more! Yeah, that makes-- that makes total sense. The world is a big, magical, horrible, horrifying, wonderful place. Terrible, horrible, no good, very bad, magical, wonderful place. Yes, yes. Okay. And second, I always want to keep talking about religious practices and cultures and peoples who don't get talked about by mainstream anything. And I cannot say this frequently enough. Indigenous religions and people are consistently, shockingly, historically erased in every and all metrics we use to measure who gets counted, who gets remembered, who gets acknowledged as people, and certainly who makes it into, like, a global religions textbook. Yeah, yeah. And I think for me doing indigenous religions in two parts-- and to be honest, I'm going to try to come back around to African Diasporic religions towards the end, so... so thinking about this as our first three episodes is, like, a little bit of a unit but-- I think doing indigenous religions in two parts is about present tense histories and communities. So Indigenous religions in my experience, across degrees, and universities, and frankly, whole ass continents, IF they are included in the syllabi, are usually part of history. Mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:20

And I literally never sat in a class, across all these degrees and places I've taught, where-- where Native traditions were taught as if they were alive, thriving, and current. That is to say, when my crew didn't run the syllabi--



Megan Goodwin 06:35

Yeah. That hurts my soul! Cool.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:38

It should! And I'm gonna-- I'm gonna like-- you're gonna indulge me, because of the script but, that includes my own educational experience. So, in my senior seminar in college-- I know, 40 billion years ago, but wait for it-- was on Native traditions. We were seven students strong in this tiny little seminar that was truly, like, you took one senior seminar and then you graduated. Mine that year was Native traditions by happenstance. One of my classmates on day one identified herself as Native, talked about her tribal membership, talked about healing and her role as the daughter of the healer of her particular community, and I watched this professor answer all of her present tense statements with past tense words to describe her own, like, literally local!-- she was from the LOCAL community-- I-- it was horrifying. And to be clear, I want to-- I want to be clear. I'm not sure I acted like an ally or an accomplice in those moments. This is like a memory I'm sharing, this is not a moment where I'm like some sort of hero here. I do remember being horrified, I am still horrified by this story. It sits with me... just in one of those places that just bubbles up out of nowhere. But the moral of this like, tiny little primary source adjacent tale, is simple-- that Native religions, yes, they're part of history, of course, but they're also part of current events and current people's lives. And when WE act-- that's professors teaching courses, people on the street, the media, whatever-- when we act as if they aren't, we just participate in imperial, colonial, white Christian supremacist discourse that tries to disappear Native folk-- like my classmate!-- in real time. And WE are not here for that.



Megan Goodwin 06:49

Oh. Yeah. Disappear is... ow. That hurts.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:33

Yeah, on purpose. D-Do you want to carry on with that hardly crappy baton I'm passing? Or should I do it?



Megan Goodwin 08:40

Ummm... I mean, if it's a stone cold bummer, then, sadly, yes! I always want to pick up the crappy sad bummer baton. Why am I like this?! Ah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:51

We love you how you are



Megan Goodwin 08:53

Hey, thanks. Uhh, okay, nerds. So if you've been following the news in the summer of 2021 at all, you probably heard about the literal thousands of unmarked graves of Indigenous children found in Canada, most of which were tied to schools. State-run boarding schools, which also have nebulous relationships with religious institutions for Indigenous children operated in Canada between 1863 and 1998. 1998 was the year I was a sophomore in college. \*sighs\* More recently, in September of this year, a white woman went missing and was later found dead in Wyoming, and it caused a media frenzy. All over the US, lots of international media were clamoring to find her, find the man suspected in her murder. Meanwhile, in Wyoming, 710 Native women have gone missing between 2011 and 2020. All domestic violence victims, all missing women, deserve to matter. All children deserve to matter. No one deserves to go missing and just vanish without care and... the murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls in Two Spirit movement has really done so much more work than they should have HAD to do to draw attention to this issue. So, in this episode, when we talk about Native populations and violence, we're not talking about history, the past, here at ALL. We are talking about real experiences of real people that are still happening. But when we render real people invisible, you better believe it's easy to ignore the violence that they experience. Yes. All of this. These are actual people, actual communities, who still reel from imperial and colonial violence, from the violence of settler-colonialism, from the violence of religious domination, cause it is ongoing. And I want to add too, Megan, while we're, while we're here, that our focus isn't JUST a social justice, let's name systemic racism moment. This is actually a real world religions moment because, in the world religions model-- Which is our whole deal for this year!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:14

--it is indeed. So in this world religions model, which is a product of colonialism and imperialism, religions were designated and thought about as minor and major.



Megan Goodwin 11:24

I feel like this sounds so familiar. Didn't we talk about this already?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:27

We did! In Episode 103 and 104, in fact.



Megan Goodwin 11:30

Never NOT love a callback.




Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:33

Anyway. So this major and minor, there's- there's more to it than just, "These guys are real important, and those guys aren't." It is more than just a shitty valuation of whose religions and cultures count more. It is also about whose religions and cultures were assumed to be lasting. Minor religions were often imagined as on the way out, in decline, about to go extinct, incapable, incompatible, I should say, with the modern world. So when we say that we want to include indigenous religions in our syllabus, I'm reminded of what Dr. Castor taught us just a few episodes ago--

these religions, these people, weren't expected to survive white imperialism, and especially white Christian imperialism. So despite having a whole ass world filled with people who do minor religions, who are Native people, the minor religions of the world religions paradigm were actually anticipated to be gone, to disappear.


 Megan Goodwin 12:32

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the context of what's now the United States? That was the policy until the literal year that I was born, which seems like a long time ago, but in the history of the world, it is not at all. Until 1978, the OFFICIAL POLICY of what is now the United States of America, was that Native culture SHOULD disappear, that Native people should be-- I think they like to say, the government folks, like to say encouraged, but-- basically forced to give up their culture, their language, literally their children, all of their ceremonies, all of their relationships, and certainly all of their land and just be grateful that we, white now Americans, let them, Native people who were here always, stay. \*sighs\* So we have literal disappearances of Native people in what's now the US and Canada, to say nothing of in other nations and continents. This is absolutely an issue in South and Central America-- truly--

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:36  
Everywhere.

 Megan Goodwin 13:36

There is no place in the world where Native people are being treated well. Let's start there. We have a world religions model that assumed that these folks would disappear, that they should disappear, literally and functionally, will just like drop out of history. That we, as a species, humans, would just stop ever being Native. And I guess we're both saying that centering indigenous religions-- and this time, specifically Native religions from the Americas-- is a purposeful reading against that declination, imperial, racist model.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 14:11

Yeah, you bet! That's what we're trying to do here. \*transition sound\* Megan, so what ARE Indigenous religions in the Americas? I assume we mean North, Central, and South America, not just like, Amurrrrca?

 Megan Goodwin 14:32

We all know that I am here for what's now the United States, but yes, we are talking about THE Americas. Because THE Americas is much, much bigger and means much, much more than just the United States of America. There are indigenous populations across North, Central, and South America and landmasses-- and look, I am NOT at all going to pretend that I can talk about all of these many, many groups and people equally. I am on my firmest footing when I focus on what's now the US itself, but we'll make sure that we talk about the contours of Native practices elsewhere, too, also. I promise. Outside 'murica. \*laughs\* I'm here for it. I can't even do that- that like, Southern, Midwestern white bro because I want it to be like, Umrika? Like, I don't know. \*cackles\*

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:16

I want it to go in a toootally different way.



Megan Goodwin 15:19

There's no vowel at the end, it's just 'murca,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:21

I-- Alright, alright. Well, I'm just gonna sit in my Yiddisher and ability to like, frame my brain in that way. So let's- let's move from that! Can we define and redefine some terms before we sort of jump back into some specifics?



Megan Goodwin 15:34

Amer-I-can!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:36

Never...



Megan Goodwin 15:37

It's a recycled joke! Never tired of it. \*Secret Word of the Day\* Native or Indigenous religions share a few features, including ties to place, which is to say they are rooted in geography and location-specific practices. Most are not portable. The land is not replaceable, or swappable. A sacred mountain is sacred to a specific people. You can't just, I don't know, pick up everybody from North Carolina and tell them they live in Oklahoma now! Oh, wait-- we did. Anyway. There is a sacred force rooted in the land, people, objects, seasons, all of which are rooted! Quite literally. But having a relationship with the land isn't just like how I feel about my catmit-- although I do, I'm very fond of my catmint-- or like, how I tend my basil-- \*cackles\*-- when the neighbors aren't stealing it. You wrote in my basil burglary! That's a whole... that's a whole saga for another time. \*sighs\* But there are protocols, there are proper ways to be in relationship to the land, for starters, but also a relationship to people, and other-than people, or bigger-than people/forces/actors/ancestors/spirits.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:50

Okay, so what I... let me see if I get this. What I hear you saying is that for Indigenous folks, land matters, location matters, the elements, I guess? Like humans/not humans/ancestors/animals, maybe life forces, that exist in those places that feed and hold and care for and are cared for by communities. MATTER! Historically and contemporarily.



Megan Goodwin 17:14

Absolutely. Which is why issues like water protection are religious and not like just about issues of environmentalism. So, I'm going to mention the Skano Center a little bit later, but that was the first-- MY first connection with Indigenous activists trying to protect water because, while I was at Syracuse University briefly, I learned that the waterways near Syracuse University are among the most-- I think it is THE most-- chemically polluted waterway in

what's now the United States. And certainly, the activists in the Haudenosaunee nation are doing a ton of work to try to remediate some of that damage. But most folks, I think, don't know about that activism? I think where people have seen this play out on a national stage is the Mni Wiconi movement-- \*Secret Word of the Day\*-- which in Lakota means "water is life," and was both an inspiration, and a commitment, and a slogan for attempts to protect water against the Dakota Access Pipeline in what's now the United States. So super quick, perhaps especially for our non-American listeners (though we can't assume anything at all)-- so, the Dakota Access pipeline is a 1,772 mile-long oil pipeline that cuts through the states of North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Illinois. The top middle, basically.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:48

\*chuckles\* Yeah, top middle.



Megan Goodwin 18:50

Eh, people don't know!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:50

That's for you, folks in the UK. Top middle.



Megan Goodwin 18:54

Yeah! Crucially, and why folks know about this pipeline, is because of MAJOR attempts to protect the waterways and lands of Native folks in these regions that made headline news in 2016. \*sighs\* So, these protection efforts were necessary all along the pipeline, but they happened in a major, major way at the Standing Rock Indian reservation, in large part because of concerns about the pipeline's impact on the environment and to sites sacred to Native folks! Like, they have relatives that are buried in this land! Indigenous nations around the country opposed the pipeline, along with Sioux tribal nations. At its height, Standing Rock was the scene of a sit-in/camp-in pan-Native gathering where nearly 15,000 people came together to try to protect the water and protect the land. Sioux leadership and Sioux allies-- including in front of the UN-- cited broken treaties about sovereignty and protesting and blocking the construction of the pipeline. I'm not going to get into all the details, but the headline news here is that Native people, and especially Lakota, felt ignored-- WERE ignored-- through the process of constructing a pipeline, again, where their relatives are buried, where they have lived in relationship with this land for generations, and they very much see its existence as a threat, both to religious freedom and to tribal sovereignty. Okay, so that's a lot of walking us through. I want to come back to what you started with at the top, though. Can you take us through Mni Wiconi, or Water Is Life, as a religious concept or practice or worldview? Because when I did a little bit of research for this podcast episode, that was really the framing of quite a lot of the especially Native authored, and like speeches, right? Like, this is a religious concept and a religious/cultural worldview. So-- So first, how does it work in that way? And then like, how did that phrase operate? Was it specific? It's a Lakota phrase, but it seems to be taken up by this pan-Indigenous gathering. Yes.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:24

So how can we talk about specificity and-- like the specificity of Native folk-- and also this pan-Native kind of movement, where we've got specific and broad all happening at the same time?





Megan Goodwin 21:36

Yeah! Yeah! I mean, oof. There's just... it was such-- it IS such an amazing movement, and I will try not to get lost in details, but, okay. There is an incredible documentary, (and I will link to it) called Mni Wiconi, and it starts with an elder woman talking about how the earth is alive, the earth is our grandmother, the water is her blood which sustains us. So right off the bat, we're being told that the relationship between land and water is not about-- or, it's not JUST about "humans need water to live--" we do. But it's about relationship and responsibility and this HUGE mythic telling of the ancestors, the progenitors, their offspring, a grandmother to her grandchildren. The expectation here is that the care is reciprocal. The land is a sacred body and its waters are their blood. Yes, they nourish us, but also, we take care of them, we learn from them, we cherish them! We care for our beloved family, which here, includes the earth. So then, in this like phrase, water is lit-- like, literally life. Literally life. Yes, absolutely. It is the life of us, we rely on water-- please stay hydrated, people-- but it's the life of his grandmother! The land is alive and we are to care for it as it has cared for and taught us. So, "water is life" is a rallying cry precisely because it works! Like, randos who are into Peloton can comprehend hydration, kids into climate crisis activism can understand why we need water to live, but also Native peoples can understand the specific, sacred relationship between people and land, and people and water. Okay, that makes a lot of sense to me. So can we-- that sounds like this other question I had at the top of this whole segment. So, Mni Wiconi is this Lakota phrase-- Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 23:28

--and yet, this is a phrase that became... I don't want to say a rallying cry cause that feels really dismissive. But it became a place through which, and a phrase through which people were galvanized.



Megan Goodwin 23:41

Absolutely. So, and it's... Yeah. It's important-- the specificity, but also the broad appeal is one of the things that made this- this coming together remarkable. Because it wasn't just Lakota folks and their relatives that showed up-- folks from tribes and nations, and a number of non-Native folks who were standing in solidarity with them, came together around this "Water Is Life" mov- movement, moment-- we're resisting the language of protest here because they did not call themselves protesters, they called themselves water protectors. It was a protection effort-- and it was... there's amazing video of folks from a bunch-- Native folks from a bunch of different tribes and nations having ceremony together in a way that has never happened in the history of-- in the recorded history of what's now the United States. It was a place where-- I don't want to make broad statements about like, all Indigenous people care about X, Y or Z. But there is a-a- recurrence of relationality to place, and to care for the places that- that made us, that care for us, that teach us, that sustain us, that ARE the reasons that we're, that we're alive. And this was a time, and a place, and a gathering where that commitment was expressed, not just by the Lakota, but- but by so many Native folks and folks who wanted to aid and abet and protect along with them. So what I hear you saying is that Mni-- Mni Wiconi is a very specific, like, linguistic, cultural articulation of "Water Is Life" within a very specific, mythic worldview. And yet, because of commonalities both in maybe religious practice, but- but certainly within concept, right? So, it might not be the same KIND of imagination of water, or definitely not the same MYTH, but certainly a kind of commonality of like, we have relationships to land, on top of a history of this fucking government persecuting us, prosecuting us, barring us from our land and our commitment. So there's, there's commonality religiously, yes. And then there's, like-- which we could debate till the cows come home, because we don't want to be generalists-- but at the same time, like, there is an absolute commonality, and it's how the laws of the United States have brutalized-- Keep fucking over Native people.



.. . . . - . . . . .



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 26:23

-- Yes, brutalized Native populations. And so, when it becomes-- to use the language of the oppressor here-- when it becomes a "land dispute," I think that there's a way that, at least in my reading of this, there's a way that specific groups like the Lakota, as well as other Indigenous groups, can see through the bullshit, because it's a shared experience, even if the specific sacrality is, is NOT general. It's specific!



Megan Goodwin 26:55

Yeah. Well, it's also a place where we see... I will go ahead and say the hypocrisy of language around religious freedom in what's now the United States. Because our founding documents talk a really good game about valuing religion (and as we learned on episode 104, Native folks in what's now the US have used that rhetoric successfully in the early 20th century to continue important practices). But what we're seeing increasingly in the late 20th and (currently) early 21st century, is that... practices, places that Native folks hold sacred are not valued by the institutions and the violent enforcement arms of the US government in the same way that like, white Christian practices are. Like, the most famous image of the Mni Wiconi movement is everyone standing on that big highway with the banner that says "Protect the Sacred."



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:05

Right.



Megan Goodwin 28:06

It is-- it is a religious movement, and I feel like if that many white Christians showed up to protect a space, it would have been treated very differently by the US government.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:20

Yeah, yeah.



Megan Goodwin 28:21

And certainly, certainly by local and federal law enforcement. Yes-- AND, as a historian who wants you not to do hypothetical history, that hypothetical doesn't even make sense because there would be-- there is no circumstance in the history of this country where that would have needed to happen. Right, right! Right.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:38

Anyway! Okay. Thank you for walking me through that. I think... You know what? I just think this is a great place to queue up our guest expert.



Megan Goodwin 28:47

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 28:47

Dr. Abel Gomez. So let's hear from him!



Megan Goodwin 28:50

Yes, please.



Dr. Abel Gomez 28:52

My name is Abel Gomez, and I'm an expert on Indigenous religious traditions. I care about the broader public of non-Indigenous peoples, understanding Indigenous religions, ultimately, so that we can develop healthy relationships of respect, and support, and solidarity with Indigenous nations. Indigenous religions are not frozen in time. They're central to many Indigenous cultural practices and political movements today. We see this, for example, in coming of age ceremonies among diverse tribal nations, and various kinds of political resistance against oil pipelines through Indigenous territories. Indigenous religious traditions, like Indigenous cultures broadly, come directly from the land. This means that ceremonies of people from coastal California look very different from those in the American Southwest. Indigenous religions have also been shaped by specific histories of colonization and resistance, which means variations in access to sacred places and cultural continuity. Indigeneity is often about relationship to homeland, a relationship that is also rooted in responsibilities. Ceremonies are one way that Indigenous peoples enact those relationships and responsibilities. On the most basic level, ceremonies are moments of exchange between humans, lands, waters, plants, animals, and/or spiritual beings. For many Indigenous peoples, the aim of such ceremonies are often about the well-being of the entire community, and ultimately, for the perpetuation of life. Among the Coast Salish of the Pacific Northwest, for example, the first Salmon Ceremony includes the catch and ritual preparation of the first salmon of the season. This salmon is celebrated as an honored guest with songs and dances, before the remains are ritually returned to the water, a gesture of respect to the salmon who is understood to come back to life and encourage the other salmon to give their lives to sustain the Coast Salish people. The ceremony is built on a covenant, or a sacred relationship between the human people and the salmon people. Through this ceremony of exchange, through enacting their responsibilities to one another, the human and the salmon people, together, ensure the continuity of life. Indigenous religions are often invisibilized in conversations about religion in the Americas, except when discussed in the past tense. But Indigenous religions were practiced long before the United States, Canada, or Mexico ever even existed. Despite the many attempts by colonial governments, Indigenous peoples and their religious practices are very much alive and important in the ways Indigenous peoples are envisioning vibrant, indigenous futures. Indigenous religions are often described by religious studies scholars, at least historically, as quote unquote, "minor" religions, at best, or sometimes even, quote unquote, "primitive" religions. This reinforces a hierarchy, but also a colonial narrative, that these traditions will somehow inevitably decline. Also, there are distinct Indigenous religions practiced all over the world-- in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia, Aotearoa, or New Zealand, and elsewhere-- which are a continuation, or a revitalization, of deeply rooted traditions. We have to understand Indigenous religions because Indigenous peoples reference religion all the time. It is not just an academic term. In my own research on efforts to protect a place called Juristac by the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band in California, religion comes up all the time by tribal members as a way to describe the significance of that place. If we can understand the ways that religion is often tied to both land and identity for Indigenous peoples, we can understand what is at stake when Indigenous lands are polluted or destroyed, and then work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples to protect land and water for future generations.





Megan Goodwin 34:04

I am so glad to hear from Dr. Gomez-- I am always glad to hear from Dr. Gomez. And it's good to know that he agrees with a lot of what we said! So, I feel like we're maybe on the right track. I did not know about the Salmon Ceremony, so that was a new one for me. I think one of the most important things Dr. Gomez said-- that I want to really underline and highlight and shout from the rooftops-- is that even while we complain about "religion is not a Native category" and that it's an imperial framework made up by like some Oxbridge old dudes, the fact is, we also can't just throw religion away because Indigenous peoples reference religion all the damn time! They talk about religion, they push back on how religion gets used, on how religious freedom ought to function in the US. Indigenous people are doing this labor and talking about religion and describing significance. So even as we problematize and criticize the category (as we damn well should), it's not just as easy as throwing it away. People do religion and use religion.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:09

I think that brings us to... A Little Bit Leave It!



A Little Bit Leave It 35:13

\*Little Bit Leave It music\*



Megan Goodwin 35:19

Hooray!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 35:19

-- where we're letting you know what we think the most important, most interesting, or challenging part of the topic is. It's a little bit to leave you with!



Megan Goodwin 35:27

I think for me, my "A Little Bit Leave It" this time is to just... \*sighs\* I want to highlight how fucking remarkable it is that Native folks in what's now the US-- and a number of other places-- can find the time and energy and wherewithal to do so much work to protect things that are in all of our best interests, right? Because it's... we shouldn't just care about Mni Wiconi or any other attempt to protect natural resources because they're good for all of us. But like, I was really struck when I was in Syracuse by the Haudenosaunee efforts to make sure that all of the signs along the river-- which is, again, the most chemically polluted riv-- or, waterway in the US-- we're in all of the languages of the folks who live around there, because they're people from all over the world who have come to Syracuse and surrounding towns who don't speak English, or don't read English, many of whom fish out of the river as a food source! And they don't know that the river is polluted. So, the Haudenosaunee folks in the area spent their own, like their own Nations' funds to put up signs along the river so that they could help their neighbors and make sure that they didn't get sick. It's just... \*sighs\* a centuries and centuries of oppression and resistance have yielded so much tragedy, but also so much resilience, and I just, I hope that our listeners will take this as an opportunity to go learn more about the work being done by native activists, and scholars, and experts, and people to truly make all of our lives better.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:27

Yes, I... yeah.



Megan Goodwin 37:30

Stone cold bummer. Sorry.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:31

No, that-- I mean... you know, like, that's who we are.



Megan Goodwin 37:37

Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 37:37

So I guess, I guess my little bit to leave everyone with is like a little bit of a history lesson, which is like, we started History of the World Religions Part One with African Diasporic Religions, and then we spent the last two on Indigenous religions, but I want to leave our listeners with like a hot second on how these categories are, themselves, sometimes tied up together. So, I'm thinking about South America, and I'm especially thinking about Brasil here-- the lines between African Diasporic religions and Native religions are, as I understand it, harder to see-- for ALL sorts of historical reasons. And that doesn't mean, actual Brasil experts, that these definitions don't hold. They do. Just that because of Brasil's history of enslavement tied to its history of colonization alongside the incredibly diverse Indigenous peoples of what is now Brasil, as well as the physical landscape, that there are some, like, genuinely interesting places of (and I can't believe I'm going to say this) hybridity. I mean, in some ways, I'm saying it because of the callback, but I'm also saying that because, like, ugh! We don't have a better word. But obviously, these hybridities exist everywhere-- don't AT me, please, I know, wherever it is that you're an expert, this exists there too-- but I want our nerds to hear how these histories and presents of imperialism, and nation-state, and culture, and race are still tied up together and still influence each other. The African Diaspora might actually include Native peoples in the Americas, and in fact often does. It might mean, for lack of a better word, a blending of land-centered ancestral practices that also reflects variations of Catholicism, for example. And I'm gonna assign in the homework of a particular book that I've found useful around this. But anyway, the "Little Bit Leave It" here is that these categories-- African Diasporic and Native traditions-- also have overlaps, and frankly, meaningful, important living ones. I would hate for our listeners to fall into a racist trap, that some of these religions are Black, and some of these are NOT, right? And that there's a really strong line that we could draw between Black and brown, or, if we're going to be historical, Black and red, right? I want you to resist that eugenics thinking and instead think very much more in, like, nebulous and Venn diagram and nodes.



Megan Goodwin 38:39

\*cackles\* Yeah! Well, and now, it's time for If You Don't Know, Now You Know!

I If You Don't Know, Now You Know 40:09

\*If You Don't Know, Now You Know music\*

M Megan Goodwin 40:11

The segment where we get one factoid each. What a treat!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:16

Alright, Goodwin, what's your favorite fun fact we couldn't squeeze in about Native traditions, I'm going to say in the US, but, Native traditions in the Americas?

M Megan Goodwin 40:23

Okay, you can say in the Americas, I'm going to focus, again, on Syracuse because this was my opportunity-- the first and really only opportunity I've had to learn from Native community firsthand. So I did not know this when I moved there briefly, but central New York is, is a space where Native people are thriving and really active! And so the Syracuse University Department of Religion has a close relationship with the Skanooh Great Law of Peace Center, and I got to go to some programming there, and meet some local folks, and see the river, and see the center, and I learned that the Haudenosaunee, which are one of these seven or eight (depending on how you count them) nations of the-- I think it's still called the Iroquois Confederacy. They have their own passports! Because they are their own nation. They're these beautiful, purple, little books-- they're gorgeous! And, they are accepted as valid passports in a number of places in Europe. Guess where they're not accepted as valid passports?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 41:37

... In the US?

M Megan Goodwin 41:38

Correct. That is correct. The United States of America does NOT accept them as valid passports because, of course we fucking don't! So, yeah! Haudenosaunee-- the Haudenosaunee Nation, responsible for the first documented democracy in what's now the United States, has their own passports, they are beautiful and purple, and the US doesn't accept them because we are dicks to Native people at every single given opportunity that we have. The end.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:11

\*blows raspberry\*

M Megan Goodwin 42:11

You want to take it?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:12

Yeah. Sure. I guess, I guess I'm going to be basic, as usual, and say, like, Native people are still here.



Megan Goodwin 42:20

Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:20

Right? And I'm gonna say this in a few ways. First, like historically, right? Like, I have a colleague who does Latin American history, and she always starts her Latin American history by listing all the people that-- the PEOPLES that her students were taught, are historical and not-- like, and aren't extinct, right? So she does like a whole unit on Mayan culture, and she's-- like, on purpose! Because all of her, you know, predominately white institution students are like, "Wait, what? That was... I thought that was 400 years ago?" And she's like, "Nah."



Megan Goodwin 42:51

\*sighs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:51

Right? So they're still here. And I want to bring this a little bit personal. I love my dad, we know he listens--



Megan Goodwin 42:58

Hi Llyod!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:58

-- I-I... and he loves, like, that whole genre of Native survival stories. So not cowboys and Indians, or cowboys killing Indians stuff, but the equally effed up-- frankly, like, noble savage/last of their kind/white guilt/literary stuff, like Mohicans, Hiawatha, like all of that. Fun fact, my dad did work for the Museum of the American Indian in the 1990s in New York City, when he owned a photo lab, and I'm pretty sure it's one of the best experiences he ever had, because he's this well meaning white man who genuinely, genuinely, in the core of his soul, knows that the treatment of Natives in this country is a terrible, disgusting history. Because he's not dumb, but he's also a boomer who was raised in the cowboys and Indians, Lone Ranger universe where Hiawatha and Last of the Mohicans was, like, progressive?



Megan Goodwin 43:17

Oh noooo.....



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 43:32

So truly, my, like, like, Native peoples are still here. They are often subject to brutal systemic racism, but they are NOT gone. They are NOT dead. They are NOT past tense. And I'm assigning literature that you can read, listen to, and watch without feeling cringe. Um, unlike my dad's choices in Manhattan.



Megan Goodwin 44:09

\*laughs\* Yeah, yeah. I also just really like it when Native people make fun of white people for assuming that they are past tense, or that they're like mythical and live outside the world-- I know that I already told my thing, but I will just share one more small space. So I went to the New York State Fair, again, when I was at Syracuse, which will never happen again because it's massive. Like, it's a million people. It was terrifying. But! There's a Haudenosaunee illage installation, where local Native folks come in and, frankly, do some very generous educational work. And the dude that was, like, emceeing while I was there was just kind of doing patter between dance performances. He's like, "I will now check the time. I will consult!" And he gestures toward the sun in this grand way: "My magical iPhone!" And it made me laugh.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 44:59

Oh no. That's so obnoxious, and everyone deserves it.



Megan Goodwin 45:02

\*giggles\* Yep! Please, drag us. We deserve it. \*If You Don't Know, Now You Know music\* Well then, don't pack up yet nerds! It is time for homework!



Simpsons 45:11

\*Homework, What Homework?\*



Megan Goodwin 45:13

As always, we've got citations, references and other goodies (and transcripts) stashed at [KeepingIt101.com](http://KeepingIt101.com) for every single episode. Check it out!





Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:24


Alright! Uh, I'll go first. So, do check out Dr. Gomez's-- Abel Gomez's work. Good news! The pieces he recommended are publicly accessible, which we just love! So the first one is called "Postapocalyptic Communities: Tribal and Religious Organizations Respond to COVID-19." So, this is really recent and very relevant. And he's got a second piece that he said that we should assign, which is "Indigenous Peoples Day comes amid a reckoning over colonialism and calls for return of Native land," which is also really recent just from 2020. Okay, so this is my-- moving from Dr.




Gomez's work-- it's a little further afield, but I really just, I just read this fantastic book and it kind of fits here?? So it's called "Pollution is Colonialism" by Max-- I'm gonna, I'm gonna mess this up but-- Liboiron's tracing of waste to colonization. And there's a lot of really deep thinking here about land, and it's part of a Native studies imprint at Duke University Press. So it fits with what we're talking about, it's a really provocative read, highly recommend. Anyway. As promised, on African Diasporic religions and Indigenous religions, Yuko Miki's book called "Frontiers of Citizenship: A Black and Indigenous History of Postcolonial Brazil" is awesome. It's super historically oriented, folks, so there's some religion thrown in (because you can't ignore religion IF you are doing smart history) but it, you know, it's more chronological than theoretical. One more tying African Diasporic religions to Indigenous religions is this brand new book by Nitasha Tama Sharma called "Hawai'i i Is My Haven: Race and Indigeneity in the Black Pacific,"--


 M Megan Goodwin 45:33  
Huzzah! Oooo... Man!


 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:59  
-- which I just read the first chapter of and it definitely needs the rest-- I feel like in the homework, I always tell myself, I'm always like, "Yo, I read the first two chapters, you should read this book," but... it's a good way for me to bone up.

 M Megan Goodwin 47:23  
Well, I didn't even think about Hawaii! Is it too late to do a Hawaii episode? There's so much-- oh...

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:26  
I know, we have so much! But, this is where we're at.

 M Megan Goodwin 47:29  
Okay.

 Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:29  
I also would recommend "Reservation Dogs." I literally just started, I'm like, two episodes in. I'm so late to this party, but holy moly, it's excellent television!

 M Megan Goodwin 47:38  
Okay, I just, I want to echo that, because I do think it's really important storytelling by Native folks. And I ALSO want to acknowledge that there's been some very, very valid criticism of anti-black racism, in particular, the first couple episodes. So, both of those things are true. Ahh, life is complicated.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 47:56

Yes. And then for podcasts, I listen to "All My Relations" podcast, which I know I've recommended on this podcast before, by Matika Wilbur and Adrienne Keene. It's a Native centered podcast that talks about all manners of things, and frankly, it teaches beautifully if you're someone who teaches about this stuff. And then I'll also recommend "This Land," which is a podcast that's heavy, by Rebecca Nagel. It's ultimately about custody battles, and how custody battles are threats to Native sovereignty. And it, as you might imagine, comes with all the trigger warnings of custody battles.



Megan Goodwin 48:30

Oof. Yeah.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 48:31

And then, my forever assignment is Kim Tallbear's book, "Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science," because it is just good science, and bias thinking, and eugenics, and imperialism, and it's beautifully written. I mean, it's... everyone should own a copy of that book.



Megan Goodwin 48:51

I should own a copy of that book! Telling on myself, okay! I want to re-recommend the work of Tisa Wegner and friend of the pod Brandi Denison. We make a bunch more recommendations around Native religions on episode 104, so you can check out the show notes for that episode as well for more links. Sarah Dees's work (she's now at Iowa State) and she has some great public-facing scholarship on Native religions in what's now the United States. We'll link you to probably a couple pieces, but the one that I have paid attention to most recently is looking at how US landmarks, that have very racist and colonialist names, are being renamed at the strong urging of Indigenous peoples. There's been some movement on that in the last, truly, just the last year and it's been interesting to see. I want to absolutely recommend Denise La Ji Mo Di Errs "Stringing Rosaries," which is a book. She is a Native scholar who has written this very challenging but very important book about how the violence done to Native children who were stolen from their families and forced to go to these residential schools. Again, some of them were religious schools. Some of them-- she focuses on religious schools. She says specifically because the survivors and their relatives who came to her with their stories were mostly from largely Catholic but overwhelmingly religious schools. So, we'll link to her book, but also, she's done a lot of public scholarship around this and she did a great episode of the Red Nation Podcast, where she gets into this research. And so very many of the content warnings around child death, sexual violence, violence toward children, it's just... it is hard listening but also really important listening. I have been so inspired by Winona Laduke's decades of activism. You'll see her in the Mni Wiconi documentary that will like you do, but she is-- she's on Twitter, and any place, truly, Native folks are trying to make the world a better place, she tends to be in that crowd. Yeah! I think I just, I want to share a bunch of media that I've really appreciated. So, there's a novel called "There There," by Cheyenne and Arapaho author Tommy Orange who really underlines this, like, a.) Native people, still happening, and b.) not only do folks live out on a rez, this is set in Oakland, outside San Francisco, and really kind of gets into a bunch of interesting portrayals of urban Native identity. I really like, they used to be a tribe called Red. They are now called the Halluci Nation. Love that! I really appreciate the writing of Vincent and Delores Schilling, especially around raising awareness of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit people. Vincent Schilling does a lot of writing for Indian Country Today, which is a fantastic resource for Native voices across the board. And Delora Schilling is a co-host of the show, Native Trailblazers. We'll link you to that too. I

am really appreciative of the work of Nick Estes, who hosts the Red Nation Podcast. And, Twitter introduced me to the work of Frank Waln, who is a Lakota rapper, and did a hiphop reclaiming of a very racist song from Disney's Peter Pan, as well as a bunch of other stuff.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:34

Alright, well, big thanks to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Spotify, Amazon, and Google. It really helps! So, our Nerds of the Week--



Megan Goodwin 52:41

Huzzah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:45

-- \*drumroll\* are: MCressl...



Megan Goodwin 52:48

Hmmm. \*giggles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:48

Thstyle, and SikhProf! Yaaaaay.



Megan Goodwin 52:53

\*giggles\* I think I know some of those folks!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 52:55

We do! We do know them.



Megan Goodwin 52:56

Appreciate them. Join us next time for more HISTORY OF THE WORLD RELIGIONS, PART ONE, when we chat about Sikhi, and are helped out by our first-ever returning guest, Dr. Simran Jeet Singh.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:07

Shout out, as always, to our research assistant, Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible and therefore awesome. If you need more reliaion nerderie, you know where to find us: it's on Twitter. nerds.

and there's awesome! If you need more religion nerds, you know where to find us! on Twitter, Insta.



Megan Goodwin 53:17

Twitter. Always Twitter. You can find Megan, that's me, on twitter @mpgPhD, and Ilyse @ProfIRMF, or the show @KeepingIt\_101! Find the website at keepingit101.com. Peep the Insta. Drop us a rating or review in your podcatcher of choice and become nerd royalty! And, get introduced by Ilyse's truly stellar foley work! And with that...



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 53:44

Peace out, nerds!



Megan Goodwin 53:46

Do your homework! It's on the syllabus.



Bonus Ending 54:10

Frank Waln's Rewrite of "What Makes the Red Man Red"