

ANTI-INDIGENOUS BIGOTRY

Judy A. Dow¹

Bigotry has been a part of Indigenous People's lives since the arrival of Europeans. Here in Northern Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine the story is slightly different than much of Northeastern America because our first interaction was with the people trying to establish New France (Canada). First meetings began with the Norse about 900 BP (some say even earlier).² In America for the most part, we are talking about contacts being a little over 400 years ago. The tactics used to steal the land were not necessarily the same as those used in America, but the purpose and results were the same: theft of land, and slow elimination of Indigenous People by assimilation or marriage. As Olive Patricia Dickason explains in *A Concise History of Canada's First Nations*, these first meetings happened in three ways: "Collisions, Relationships and Contact." Collisions included transmission of disease, slave trade, trade, and evangelization. The second "first meeting" was building relationships which included intermarriage. The first 100 men to leave France and establish New France (Canada) signed a contract with France to marry Indigenous women living in the "new world." These marriages were strategic: to create financial and other alliances with persons that may have been considered hostile by the settlers. The third "first meeting" was through contact, in which Europeans arrived with their flag in hand following the Doctrine of Discovery to claim the land as belonging to some king and queen from some distant shore regardless of who already lived there. All of these systems to me were tools of genocide, used to eliminate Indigenous people and take their land. To this very day, many of these tools still work to eliminate us and to continue to maintain control of our land.

Tools/Systems of Genocide and Anti-Indigenous Bigotry

During the 19th and 20th centuries alone, the tools used, under the guise of "civilization," resulted in the institutionalization of Indigenous people, the death of many, the loss of language and homelands, the sterilization of tens of thousands, the breakup of families, history and continuity, and a mentality to survive by hiding in plain sight while being socially reserved. At times our voices appeared to be lost by the weight of time and history. Survival has been difficult.

This section outlines four techniques of anti-Indigenous genocide and bigotry: land theft, erasure of language, eugenics including institutionalization and sterilization, and environmental degradation.

Our relationship with the land is one of recognition of kin, our Mother who provides us with food. If we care for our Mother she will care for us, we are taught. In the Abenaki language, the word for dish is *wlogan*. *Wlogan* is our common pot³ the place where the land and river form a natural bowl (a floodplain). Nutrients build in this bowl every time the river overflows her bank allowing things to grow well there. This is the place the animals came for food and the place where the community also came for their food, gathering and hunting within these floodplains (*wlogan*) allowed the people to have all their needs met.

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²Olive Patricia Dickason, *A Concise History of Canada's First Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 21.

³Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

These lands, these special bowls of food never once were traded or sold throughout New England. This was quickly noticed by European settlers, who simply stole them, blocking off the food source for the Indigenous people so that they might starve and then using the land to supply food for themselves. This event of taking the wlogan clearly shows the importance colonizers gave to stealing the land and eliminating the Native people. Hatred and elimination towards Indigenous people were the driving force in America in those early years. Additional tools of genocide and bigotry during contact time included deception, paper warfare (treaties), laws, slavery, introduction and use of alcohol as a weapon, the doctrine of discovery, spreading disease (smallpox) and murder.

The European unbending and unreasonable beliefs that this land was theirs for the taking has controlled our lives since their arrival. During the 19th and 20th centuries another genocidal tool and form of bigotry was the elimination of many languages. “Native languages have been in decline for decades; currently Ethnologue lists 245 [I]ndigenous languages in the United States, with 65 already extinct and 75 near extinction with only a few elder speakers left.”⁴ Our language is our connection with our Mother, the land; it is our life. To take away our language became the next tool of genocide and bigotry, used in boarding schools as a “civilized tool,” to eliminate our culture, our language was beaten out of us and we were forced to learn the colonizer’s language to survive. This was followed by more lies, relocations, termination, Christianization, miscegenation and more laws, and finally, eugenics and sterilization. These were all tools of genocide based on bigotry and used to take us from our Mother, the land, and place us on the tiny piece of land called a reservation or leave us without any land, while continuing to control our way of life and indoctrinate us into the Catholic Church. Roadblocks involving the land and language were placed at every direction for us not to succeed.

Eugenics in the early 1900s drove Indigenous people underground, led them to self-identify as something other than Indigenous, and thus hiding in plain sight became a way of life.⁵ In *Rural Vermont* written by the Vermont Commission on Country Life and published in 1931, it is explained this way: “There is no wonder that concern has been expressed for the future of the state [Vermont] and its hardy pioneer stock. This concern led to the organization in 1925 of the Eugenics Survey of Vermont under the auspices of the University of Vermont. . . . Its purpose was to gather information, as full and accurate as possible, that can be used for social betterment in the state.”⁶

Social betterment for the “pioneer stock” alone that is. This social betterment led to the tracking of 82 French/Indian families, over 6,000 people over at least six generations, many of whom were later sterilized and/or institutionalized. All this because the “pioneer stock” felt threatened of losing land and power. This fear led to constant bigotry.

⁴Lillian Sparks, “Preserving Native Languages: No Time to Waste,” *Administration for Native Americans*, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ana/preserving-native-languages-article>; David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Twenty Fifth Edition (Dallas: SIL International, 2022).

⁵Judy A. Dow, “Understanding the Vermont Eugenics Survey and Its Impact Today,” in *Global Indigenous Health: Reconciling the Past, Engaging the Present, Animating the Future*, eds. Robert Henry et al. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 76.

⁶*Vermont Commission on Country Life, Rural Vermont: A Program for the Future* (Burlington: Free Press, 1931), 10.

Nancy Gallagher, author of *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State*,⁷ says it best when she quotes Helen M. Judd's "To the Daughters of Vermont in Boston:"

The land where we were born is wondrous fair,
 An emerald jewel in the iron crown
 Of the rugged North, fit for a storied place
 Within the whole earth's royal treasury;
 Won from the wilderness by our fathers' toil,
 Sealed ours by their blood and loyalty.

Many early European settlers believed birth right, toil, blood, and loyalty made this land theirs. It's that pull up your boot straps and work hard mentality that will get you everything. When looking at reality, theft of land and bigotry has made this country what it is today!

In *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck*, Adam Cohen states that in 2002, "the governor of Virginia offered a 'sincere apology' for his state's 'participation in eugenics.'"⁸ Cohen notes that Virginia's history of eugenics included efforts to supposedly "improve the genetic quality of its population" by "forcibly steriliz[ing] at least 7,450 'unfit' people between 1927 and 1979, more than any other state but California."⁹ In California it is estimated that over 20,000 people were sterilized. This tool of genocide became the "civilized way" or the leading scientific way of controlling the Indians and stealing their land. Bigotry was present at every step of the way. Who was determined to be institutionalized and/or sterilized was a subjective decision made by White Anglo-Saxon people. Many decades later this subjectivity and bigotry was what led to Eugenics being labeled a pseudoscience. After this declaration of Eugenics being labeled a Pseudoscience, President Johnson instituted a program to be followed in the late 1960's and early 1970's to continue to sterilize Indigenous women through Indian Health Services any Indian woman that looked to be of full blood. This executive order resulted in thousands of women being sterilized. Can you imagine that if they looked to be a full blood they were sterilized? This is not even conscionable to me.

In 1823, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its decision in *Johnson v. M'Intosh*, which applied the principle of discovery to uphold European settlers' theft of land. In an opinion authored by Chief Justice John Marshall, the Court unanimously held that the principle of discovery gave European settlers "[t]he absolute ultimate title" to land while Indigenous peoples had only a right of "occupancy" which could be taken away.¹⁰ So, in the twenty-first century we now see domination over our lands, the continuation to dominate every part of our land. Because of this, environmental degradation of our lands is everywhere including lands once called Indian Territory, Wyoming, Oklahoma and on reservations. Strip mining, desecration of sacred land, water and air pollution, dams, oil pipelines through reservation land, GMO seeds and depletion of natural resources are all around us. Our ex-president Donald Trump used his executive powers and Trumpery¹¹ to deplete the land even further, while continuing to limit the

⁷Nancy Gallagher, *Breeding Better Vermonters: The Eugenics Project in the Green Mountain State* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1999), 9.

⁸Adam Cohen, *Imbeciles: The Supreme Court, American Eugenics, and the Sterilization of Carrie Buck* (London: Penguin Press, 2016), 1.

⁹Cohen, *Imbeciles*.

¹⁰*Johnson v. M'Intosh*, 21 U.S. 543, 592 (1823); see also Gilder Lehrman, "The Doctrine of Discovery, 1493," Institute of American History, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/doctrine-discovery-1493>.

¹¹To me Trumpery is lies, cheating, and deceit in the 21st century.

sovereignty of Native Americans and to gain full dominion over the land, our Mother. Like-thinking people are gathering and growing in this rude and backward way of thinking. Once again fear of losing control is creating bigots in a new generation.

Just days ago, on the day before Thanksgiving, I went to the grocery store. An elderly man approached me and asked to buy ten inches of my hair for \$500.00. After I got over the shock I noticed he was as bald as a cucumber and I promptly told him my hair was not for sale and I walked away quickly. My thoughts have been drawn to this all day, along with the proclamation of 1755 in which Spencer Phips, Lieutenant-Governor and Commander in Chief, in and over His Majesty's Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England. In part of this proclamation it states: "For every Scalp of such Female Indian or Male Indian under the Age of Twelve Years, that shall be killed and brought in as Evidence of their being killed as aforesaid, *Twenty Pounds*."¹²

Over the last couple of days, I couldn't get this out of my mind. I thought about my hair as I groomed it each morning and night placing it tightly into an eighteen-inch braid. My hair is my connection to the land; it is my sense of identity, culture, story, history and self-esteem. One strand of hair is weak and fragile but when my hair is in a braid, I have strength and energy to understand who I am and how I am connected to aki (the land) and Gedakina (the world) around me. The three strands of my braid represent body, mind and spirit, when braided together I'm in balance. What was this man thinking to take my hair? It would be to me the same thing the children placed in boarding schools went through. Immediately after arriving at a boarding school, their hair was cut. Children were bewildered and upset; in some communities to cut your hair meant that you were in mourning over the death of a loved one. In others it meant you had a strong connection with culture, health and success. Cutting the hair of these children meant they had none of these things—they were all gone. Which of course we now know was true. They lost connection with their communities and believed them to be dead, they lost connection with culture, health and success within and for their communities. I was not about to lose control, like these children, by having my hair cut.

Resisting Anti-Indigenous Bigotry

Education seems to be the answer to helping people understand that their words and actions hurt. So, what would be the next steps? We are all related, and relationships have always been critical to survival. We all have different work to do in the area of anti-bigotry and the work covers a large field of studies, not just one silo of academia. This is why I've included (below) a diverse set of books that I recommend by a diverse set of authors: Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

How do Indigenous people fight this bigotry, hatred and total control of our land, our world and our way of life, along with the historical traumas that have been imposed on us along the way? For the Wabanaki people it has been prophesied that we would lose our land, our way of life, our music and language. And that there would be a period of time when we must try to reclaim it all. Here are some thoughts that I see as a way of bringing back our way of life and beliefs. The time of reclaiming

¹²Spencer Phips, "A Proclamation," (Boston: John Draper, 1755), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/54f8b4cfe4b0b230c7abfe97/t/5af5c14070a6adc5dcdcc1f4/1526055232289/Shirley+and+Phips+Bounty+Proclamations.pdf>.

our Traditional Ecological Knowledge is now and Indigenous people must work hard to reclaim their culture and heritage if we are to win over bigotry.

1. Bring back our languages and our connection with the land as kin and our Mother—this reclamation is beginning to surge within Indigenous communities. The Abenaki language in the 1990's had twelve elderly fluent speakers. Now, we have programs in many schools for folks to learn the language. Day by day you see newly discovered and relearned words spoken and appear in public writings. With our help, dictionaries, children's books and coloring books for kids with Indigenous words are popping up everywhere. Zoom classes meet regularly and are widely available. Our words are now appearing in Land Acknowledgements and on signs in our ancient spaces. We must strive to continue this difficult work.
2. Younger people are asking older people about histories and stories. In some cases, elders remember them; in other cases, they are now being printed in books. Our stories are metaphors for events in history that need to be learned from and retold during these uncertain times of climate crisis. Our children need to ask and our elders need to remember. These stories need to be reclaimed and retold to help us grow stronger and fight things like the colonizers' hold on us through drug and alcohol use. For example, the traditional way of handling pandemics of the past was to isolate. As we have rediscovered today, it is still about isolation.
3. Our connection with the land needs to grow at all ages. Reading the land and understanding the story she has to tell can only strengthen our relationship with the land. This relationship will better help us to understand climate changes and the impacts they will have on us in the future. And to understand in a clearer way what our role is to fight the causes of this climate crisis and to survive. We need to provide opportunities for our children to foster good connections with the land and reclaim Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
4. In reestablishing our connection with the land, we will better understand her sacredness, and her respect for us by providing everything we need. And we will develop a sense of respect and reverence for the land. A reciprocal response must be given in return.
5. We must learn once again how to reciprocate for all we take. Finding a balance with what we use from the land is critical for the survival of the land and her people. Understanding the difference between a want and a need is important to a relationship with the land. Our children must be taught the difference.
6. We need to strive to acquire funding to educate our children and protect those that are frail so they will become strong and independent citizens.
7. We need to make sure our children understand the past injustices as explained from their communities' perspectives, so that they can understand today and move forward into the future in a good way.

If Indigenous peoples work on the above suggestions and educate others in a respectful way maybe we—Indigenous and Non-Indigenous—can find balance to make it through this journey we are on together. We got into this mess together; it is going to take everyone working together to get out of it. So, what is the role of the colonizers and those that came to settle this land? What role should they play to help reduce bigotry? Remember we have to do it together.

1. Learn how to give a proper land acknowledgement and embrace it—one that is part of a Truth and Reconciliation process, one that develops a relationship with the land and her Indigenous people, and one where the colonizer understands their place in the story of colonization. This land was stolen and many benefited from that theft. Make a journey connecting with the land and journey with this connection through time and space.
2. We need to dig deep to fight colonization. Our laws, policies and procedures have all been built with a philosophy and language where one culture dominates over another. There needs to be balance and folks need to understand the role that language plays on our life ways and our self-esteem. There is “danger in a single story”¹³ and colonizers/settlers need to understand this. Our laws need to be changed to find balance. This would be true democracy. You can help make this happen.
3. The very root of colonization and land theft lies in the belly of bigotry. There needs to be education around this. People need to know that the Pilgrims came seeking freedom of religion, but only for themselves. If you look at the issue from an Indigenous perspective, we already had freedom of religion and the colonizers took it away. Our freedoms were never even considered. That must be recognized, change must happen and you can help. In addition, “Expansion” and “Westward Movement” continued to colonize this land in the name of economy, this too must be acknowledged. Economy does not make the land sustainable.
4. An open dialogue around different perspectives and points of view needs to occur with our combined histories. We cannot continue to teach our children history from one perspective only—that of the colonizer/settlers. Together we can make this happen, divided bigotry will continue.
5. Colonizers/settlers need to play a role in this education and reclamation of language and Indigenous life ways. They need to work with us to help find balance and behaviors that allow us to walk in one-mind gently on this land.
6. Colonizers/settlers need to stop making this a binary story. Many cultural groups have been offended, impacted and hurt by bigotry. They need to acknowledge this exists and not make bigotry a black and white issue or simply ignore it thinking it will go away. To continue to do this makes other groups invisible and the cycle of pain continues. Their offenses (theft of Land) need to be acknowledged.

¹³Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, *The Danger of a Single Story*, filmed 2009, TED video, 18:33, https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

7. In addition, the colonizers need to work on the above goals listed for Indigenous people. Helping us in any way they can to accomplish our goals.
8. Child welfare laws need to change to better protect our children from losing their life ways, heritage and culture. Reasonable financial support from the Government needs to be there to help us keep our children within the community they now belong to.
9. We need continued research to find and relocate the remains of our children that were murdered and buried in secrecy at boarding schools and orphanages throughout this country.
10. We need to help those children separated from their families during the Sixties Scoop¹⁴ and beyond, reconnect with their Indigenous family and community. We need to do this in order to put this history behind us, heal and move forward. The cycle of historical trauma must be stopped and you can help.
11. Good, trustworthy, health care needs to be available through Indian Health Services. Our treaties need to be abided by and honored to provide both good health and education for the people. As it is now, treaties are broken daily.
12. The U.S. government laws need to be changed so that we can prosecute those persons who cause harm and death to people living on Reservations. As it stands now, nothing or very little is being done with our nearly 6,000 missing and murdered women in areas where man camps are built to provide movement forward with oil pipes. Economy cannot always come first.
13. Cultural humility must exist within the law and court systems and businesses.
14. We need adequate funding to help our people that are in crisis including dealing with addiction, rape, abuse, high suicide rates, and poverty.
15. We need to support our youth; their suicide rates are too high. We need funding to educate them in ways that we know are best practices. We need to make them healthy in mind, body and spirit once again so they can take pride in their heritage and stand up to bigotry. You can help turn this around.
16. We don't need mascots or other derogatory stereotypes hitting us in the face every time we try to relax at a sports event or attend school. These signs of bigotry must be stopped now.
17. We need equality within our schools, businesses and governmental positions that impact our daily lives.

¹⁴The "Sixties Scoop" is a term used to refer to Canadian child welfare policies enacted from the mid-1950s through the early 1980s that removed thousands of Indigenous children from their families and placed them in foster homes, to be adopted out to white families in Canada and the United States. The Sixties Scoop had a substantial impact on Indigenous peoples in the United States. I have heard stories of people who fled to the United States' side of the Canadian border to avoid the Sixties Scoop, and some children brought to the United States during the Sixties Scoop are still searching for their identities. For further information see Christopher Dart, "The Sixties Scoop Explained," *CBC Docs POV, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, accessed March 9, 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/cbcdocs/pov/features/the-sixties-scoop-explained>; Donna Carreiro, "The Time They Took Us Away: Faces of the Sixties Scoop," *CBC News*, Oct. 9, 2016, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/the-time-they-took-us-away-faces-of-the-sixties-scoop-1.3787709>.

Recommended Sources in Solidarity and With Gratitude

The books I've recommended below are not all Indigenous books because it will take many voices talking about many different areas of study to solve the issues of bigotry in this country. With that said I recommend every book Kyle Mays has suggested, and I offer a few more.

Shervin Venet, Alex. *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2021.

Policies need changing around the world today. They need clarification, understanding and many voices. Some of the best questions I've found to guide us in looking at policy change come from this book. Venet suggests changing systems not kids. Our most precious gift in life are our children. We must care and protect them. Ask yourself these questions that Alex presents in her book about looking at a policy. Even though her questions are about policies on trauma-informed education they are clearly relevant for anti-bigotry policies.

1. "What are the philosophical assumptions behind this policy?"
2. "Does this policy run the risk of being inequitably enforced based on the implicit or explicit bias of individual teachers or administrators?"
3. "What cultural values or norms are expressed in this policy? Are there assumptions of what is good, bad, appropriate or inappropriate in this policy?" [I personally would add, are there assumptions about history— is it a one-sided story?]
4. "As we currently enforce it, does this policy impact groups of students differently? Does this policy disproportionately affect students of color, students with IEPs, or English-language-learner students?" [Many times, students with IEPs and English language learners are people of color.]
5. "Does this policy unfairly hold students accountable for factors outside of their control (e.g. access to money, resources, time outside of school)?"
6. "How does this policy connect to our current understanding of trauma, safety and mental health?"
7. "What unspoken lessons does this policy teach students, staff and caregivers?"¹⁵

Wilkerson, Isabel. *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. New York: Random House, 2020.

We must understand that this country called America was built on a Caste system from the beginning. Indigenous people were at the bottom of this system enslaved from the minute their land was stolen. Knowing the past can help you to understand today and direct the future in a good way. I recommend reading, because it helps me to know the past so that I can better understand today and direct the future in a good way. As Wilkerson states:

¹⁵Alex Shervin Venet, *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*, eds. Cheryl E. Matias and Paul C. Gorski (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2021), 149-50.

When we go to the doctor, he or she will not begin to treat us without taking our history—and not just our history but that of our parents and grandparents before us. The doctor will not see us until we have filled out many pages on a clipboard that is handed to us upon arrival. The doctor will not hazard a diagnosis until he or she knows the history going back generations . . . Few problems have ever been solved by ignoring them.

Looking beneath the history of one’s country is like learning that alcoholism or depression runs in one’s family or that suicide has occurred more often than might be usual or, with the advances in medical genetics, discovering that one has inherited the markers of a BRCA mutation for breast cancer. You don’t ball up in a corner with guilt or shame at these discoveries. You don’t, if you are wise, forbid any mention of them. In fact, you do the opposite. You educate yourself. You talk to people who have been through it and to specialists who have researched it. You learn the consequences and obstacles, the options and treatment. You may pray over it and meditate over it. Then you take precautions to protect yourself and succeeding generations and work to ensure that these things, whatever they are, don’t happen again.¹⁶

Dow, Judy. “Going Through the Narrows.” Potash Hill (Spring 2019).

<https://potash.emerson.edu/2019/spring/narrows>.

We are in a climate crisis. We are going through the narrows from a world we know intimately into a world that will be unfamiliar and where all systems that we know today will be broken. Into a world where bigotry is the rule of law. This has been prophesized in most Native American communities. Crossing the narrows between the two worlds will be difficult. Many will not make it, those with money will be able to buy their way into the new world. Of course, this is problematic for those that have not, they will struggle. “Going Through the Narrows” by Judy Dow explains the difficult struggle that the people and the land will experience, the world of those that have and those that have not.

Edited by Johnson, Ayana Elizabeth and Wilkinson, Kathrine K. *Save: Truth and Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2020.

The chapter titled “Calling In,” written by Xiye Bastida, explains

Our local representatives should pay attention to every opportunity to reverse the policy and economic conditions that put your communities and ecosystems in peril. That’s why we, as youth, lobby at the local level. You can do it too. Go to your state capitol and tell your representatives: “The climate crisis is an issue that we care about, and you need to represent that in your policy.”

It’s time to change our mindset toward implementing solutions. A vibrant, fair, and regenerative future is possible—not when thousands of people do climate justice activism perfectly but when millions of people do the best they can.¹⁷

¹⁶Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 13.

¹⁷Xiye Bastida, “Calling In,” in *Save: Truth and Courage, and Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, eds. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Kathrine K. Wilkinson (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020), 7.

Today, this is the most current threat to our land theft and way of life. We must work as one-minded people to make changes in our carbon footprint. Climate crisis is a survival issue for everyone. Embracing bigotry will delay this work.

Oluo, Ijeoma, *So you want to talk about race*. New York: Seal Press, 2018.

Here Oluo explains that when it comes things in life for people of color, “[r]arely is there only one factor or viewpoint in a serious issue. Things are never cut-and-dry.” She goes on to explain nothing is simple when talking about race, and then proceeds to give us three basic rules, stressing that these are about as basic as you can get. Here are Oluo’s basic rules. These rules stand out for me because bigotry has so many hidden sides to it, and they sometimes hide under the guise of “race.”

1. It is about race if a person of color thinks it is about race.
2. It is about race if it disproportionately or differently affects people of color.
3. It is about race if it fits into a broader pattern of events that disproportionately or differently affect people of color.¹⁸

¹⁸Ijeoma Oluo, *So You Want to Talk about Race* (New York: Seal Press, 2019), 14-15.