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Margot Bailowitz April 9, 2021

Visual Communication in Native American COVID-19 Campaigns

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Science with Honors

Anthropology Department

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Abstract

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This study examines visual communication created by and for Native American individuals, official governments, and organizations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using a person-centered, ethnographic and humanistic anthropological approach, I, a white non-Native ally, highlight the voices of seven Native artists through dialogue from semi-structured interviews. The art considered by these individuals includes memes and cartoons, paintings and illustrations, murals, and handmade facemasks. With the framework of these artist insights, I provide a visual analysis of selected COVID-19 communications. Part one provides context regarding historical and contemporary Indigenous health and disparities as well as the importance of visual sovereignty and representation of Indigenous narratives. Part two focuses on the lived experiences of seven Indigenous artists who have created visual work related to COVID-19. Ethnographic interviews were conducted to investigate the following questions: How can Native artists contribute to larger public health communication campaigns through their own work? How do individual artist agency and visual sovereignty interact in the context of COVID-19 artwork? How do these artists build on Jolene Rickard's concept of visual sovereignty as "a kind of ongoing resistance to dispossession" in the context of COVID-19 (Rickard 2020)? What role does social media play in spreading visual COVID-19 communication? What elements make this visual material most compelling and effective? Thematic analyses of interviews and selected images reveal the importance of social media in visual public health communication to Native nations and peoples, the value in community-created visual Indigenous representation, and important elements for effectiveness of such communication. Future directions include location-based and community-specific systematic studies in which effectiveness of Tribal communication can be evaluated.

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the seven artists featured in this study who bring all of the depth to this project. To Dr. Vidali, I cannot thank you enough for your continued support, encouragement, guidance, and expertise that has brought me and this work to where it is today. Thank you to Dr. Grimshaw and Dr. Suhr-Sytsma for providing helpful insights and joining us in this process. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge that this study was conducted as an honors thesis for Emory University, which was founded in 1836 on Muscogee (Creek) land during the period of forced removals of Native nations from the Southeast.

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Chapter I – Introduction

“Even though there's still a lot of stigma and racism against Indigenous people it is still a good time to be Indigenous because we are coming out in such a different way and people are seeing us and people are hearing us more than they ever have before…”

- Blanche Isfeld-Chief, Oji-Cree, Interview Respondent, November 2020

Reason for the Study

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the continued cycles of oppression that Indigenous people and Native nations in North America constantly negotiate. Since the early months of 2020, the harrowing COVID-19 virus has swept across the world, wreaking havoc in its wake. From Wuhan, China to Italy to Native American Nations to the United States and beyond, the world has watched in heartbreak as millions have contracted the disease, spent days on end in isolated ICU units, and ultimately lost their battles. Here in the U.S., where we face simultaneous epidemics of racial injustice and political division, the COVID death toll has surpassed 500,000 as of March 2021. Yale history of medicine professor and author of *Epidemics and Society:*

From the Black Death to the Present non-Native Frank M. Snowden discusses in a recent *New Yorker* interview how diseases, while seemingly random, actually act in calculated attacks "along the fault lines created by poverty and inequality," (Chotiner 2020). He argues that diseases highlight the socially constructed ecological niches where microbes thrive (Chotiner 2020). In the Industrial Revolution, for example, did we actually care about the conditions of those disproportionately affected by disease – workers and the poor, that is? (Chotiner 2020). Extrapolating from Snowden's historical example, what can the coronavirus epidemic teach us about modern society's valuation of humanity?

A recent article by the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists American Indian/Alaska Native COVID-19 Mortality Workgroup in the CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report shows that incidence of COVID-19 cases is 3.5 times higher among American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) than whites in 14 selected states (Arrazola et al. 2020). This disparity follows a pattern of previous pandemics. The workgroup was specifically convened due to the high mortality rates among AI/AN groups during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic (Arrazola et al. 2020). During the current pandemic, the greatest discrepancy exists in younger generations, most notably ages 20-59 (Arrazola et al. 2020). Mortality rates among AI/AN are 10.5, 11.6, and 8.2 times higher than whites in those aged 20-29, 30-39, and 40-49, respectively (Arrazola et al., 2020) (See also Haring et al. 2021). While Indigenous peoples comprise only 0.7% of the U.S. population, they account for 1.3% of known-race cases reported to the CDC (Haring et al. 2021). As of September of 2020, the Navajo Nation had faced greater COVID death rates than the U.S. states of New York, Florida, and Texas (Walker 2020). These striking statistics highlight the modern fault lines of society, in the words of Snowden. And yet, these statistics only account for a small proportion of Indigenous deaths that aren't overlooked (Healy

2021). In regards to Native folks who are sent into larger off-reservation hospitals, Pawnee Urban Indian Health Institute Director Abigail Echo-Hawk says, “We don’t know what happens to them until we see a funeral announcement,” (Healy 2021). Her powerful words speak to the continued erasure of Native peoples in this country.

In addition to causing mass physical devastation to Indian Country, the coronavirus pandemic is also causing palpable cultural loss. Jodi Archambault, an Oglala Lakota and Hunkpapa former special assistant to the president for Native American affairs under the Obama Administration, writes for a January 2021 *New York Times* article, “We are losing more than friends and family members; we are losing the language spoken by our elders, the lifeblood of our people and the very essence of who we are,” (Archambault 2021). Archambault saliently notes that those with the greatest mastery of Indigenous languages, respected elders, are also those most at risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19. Jason Salsman, a Muscogee Creek spokesman, says, “It’s like we’re having a cultural book-burning. We’re losing a historical record, encyclopedias. One day soon, there won’t be anybody to pass this knowledge down,” (Healy 2021). Diné College professor and Diné Hataałii Association member Avery Denny says of the continued losses of the association’s Navajo medicine men and women, “When they pass on, all that knowledge is gone forever, never to be retained. It’s just lost,” (Healy 2021). Eric Henson, a Chickasaw Nation adjunct lecturer at Harvard University notes the additional economic burden placed on tribes by the pandemic, “Native American tribes are having a disproportionate health effect that is highly problematic, and they’re having a disproportionate impact to the revenues that can be used to take on the health crisis. A lot of tribes are having the worst of both worlds at the same time,” (Mineo 2020).

In response to this disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Native Nations, many Tribal governments, organizations, and individual artists have created visual health communication materials in order to spread awareness and keep their relatives safe. Examples of this messaging and imagery is shown surrounding this paragraph.[1] Due to a long history of misrepresentation of Indigenous concerns and narratives, community-created and culturally relevant communication is vital. Through insights from seven featured Native artists, this thesis aims to answer the following questions: How can Native artists contribute to larger public health communication campaigns through their own work? How do individual artist agency and visual sovereignty interact in the context of COVID-19 artwork? What role does social media play in spreading visual COVID-19 communication? What elements make this visual material most compelling and effective? To

[1] From left to right top to bottom these five images are from nonprofit organization IllumiNative, the Navajo Nation's Department of Health's Coronavirus website https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19/COVID-19-Resources, the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health, Seneca Media and Communications Center Facebook page, Oglala Sioux Tribe Facebook page.

answer these questions, and center this discussion through Native perspectives, Indigenous artists and public health officials were interviewed regarding their work and COVID-19 involvement. Before focusing specifically on these individuals' insights and their artistic public health communications, this thesis will expand further on the surrounding contextual dynamics of Tribal Health systems, Native health disparities, the social determinants of health, effective public health communication, social media use in Indian Country, and visual sovereignty. First, however, I wish to situate myself in this study, as a non-Native ally and researcher.

Researcher Positionality and Ethics

"Solidarity should be directed to decolonization; and the way solidarity is undertaken needs to be decolonized."

- Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles,* 2015, 4.

In my eyes, this study truly began back in 2012. While COVID-19 would not hit for another seven years, my seventh-grade eyes were first being opened to the grave injustices faced by the Indigenous nations and peoples of North America. I was tasked with reading Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* for my language arts class, and participated in associated class discussions on themes such as reservations and Native sports mascots. I was angry. Angry that I'd never heard anyone talk about these issues before, angry at this misrepresentation of Indigenous histories and narratives in U.S. education, angry that no one else in the class seemed to care very much, angry that no one seemed to be taking action. For my concluding project, I wrote a letter to Florida State University to present why I believed they should remove their Native sports mascot, the Seminoles. Little did I know at the time, I was being introduced to the concept of visual sovereignty versus the media's representation of Indigenous peoples.

Since that unit in one middle school course, I've continued to seek out opportunities to learn about Native concerns as well as the oft overlooked Indigenous contributions to contemporary society. For example, I conducted an independent study during my junior year of high school on Indigenous history and culture, volunteered with a non-profit on the Pine Ridge reservation called Re-member in 2016 assisting with various community-identified needs such as trailer skirting, took Dr. Vidali's course "Anthropological Perspectives: Indigenous Peoples of North America" in my first semester at Emory, and returned to Pine Ridge for a month-long position with Re-member in 2019.

Throughout this nine-year period, I've struggled with how to navigate my position as a white ally. In a 2020 lecture entitled "Indigenous Visual Sovereignty," renowned Tuscarora scholar and artist Jolene Rickard expressed the sentiment that it is "not possible to drop in on this

work without an understanding of treaty relationships, legal space of Indigenous peoples in relation to settler states, philosophical underpinnings of each Indigenous peoples whose artwork you're encountering, and what the symbolic language of that is," (Rickard 2020). In introducing my work, I want to acknowledge the fact that I, as a white outside researcher and ally, will never have a complete insider understanding of Indigenous knowledges, relations, symbols, concerns, and ways of life. Caneba (born to two immigrant parents) and Maitland (non-Native), authors of "Native American Cultural Identity through Imagery: An Active Theory Approach to Image-Power" write, "The translation of cultural portrayals of a group by an external observer cannot capture the entirety of their experiences, and so the risk of misrepresenting those experiences is significant" (Caneba and Maitland 2017). It is my full intention to be as informed as possible, yet to simultaneously recognize my outsider status and the limits of knowledge conferred by this status. For that reason, a central goal of this thesis is to center the voices of Indigenous scholars and artists under a decolonized framing that presents their lived experiences of creating art and visual communication for Native communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. I seek to gain insight into their Native COVID-19 portrayals through their own words, as opposed to relying on my incomplete and potentially erroneous outsider translation.

This decolonized framework is in the spirit of trusted scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai smith and Clare Land. Decolonized research, as outlined by Smith in her influential 1999 *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* "involves honoring Indigenous social norms and processes within their lived context, particularly their social, historical, and political context, and privileging Indigenous voices, lives, and experiences" (Walters et al. 2020). Recognizing this goal of privileging Indigenous voices when discussing Indigenous stories, I want to acknowledge that this is an ongoing learning experience that I'm undergoing as

a junior scholar. Throughout the writing of this thesis I have carefully considered the politics of citation and incorporation of literature from Indigenous scholars. I have worked, for example, to pull from journals that privilege Indigenous researchers. However, this was effort was not met with perfect success. In future projects, I hope to continue to develop this practice. When citing non-Native scholarship on particular areas of focus in this thesis I have worked to support these claims through Indigenous voices highlighted in periodicals such as *Indian Country Today.* My hope in seeking the voices and scholarship of Native individuals is not to be performative, but to align my work with Smith's decolonized research best practices. The ultimate goal of this work is to emphasize the importance of community-based and culturally relevant public health communication and reclamation[2] of Native stories and experiences. Central to this goal is the foregrounding of Indigenous artists, scholars, and thinkers in presenting such narratives. I have attempted to decolonize my practice of citations by not simply labelling Indigenous voices as "Native" but to include their identified citizenship and to also identify those who don't fall into this category as "non-Native." This challenges the notion that only those who don't fall into the category of colonizers need to be identified. I have included these tags for individuals whose names are introduced in the body of the text. This was not always feasible for papers with many authors. Again, this effort was not met with perfect success as ethnic and identifying information of authors was not always readily available. I am continuing to grapple with these challenging

[2] Since this thesis generally seeks to highlight the voices of featured Indigenous artists, I would like to make it clear that the specific use of the word "reclamation" was my own word choice. This is my personal interpretation of Native COVID-19 visual communication from my colonizer perspective, informed by my interviews and reading of relevant scholarly literature. Writer Ashlea Gillon, featured in chapter six, uses the phrase "re-presentation." With more time, I would pose the following follow-up questions to my interviewees: How would you characterize your COVID-19 works? For example, do you see them as a "reclamation" of Indigenous narratives during the time of COVID-19? What is your take on this word "reclamation?

issues of representation. Now that I have positioned myself in this study as a non-Native researcher, the next chapter provides historical and conceptual context for the study.

Chapter II - Background and Literature Review

Since early 2020, Native American Tribal governments as well as independent organizations have been working tirelessly to ensure the health and safety of Native Americans during the COVID-10 pandemic. Many Nations and organizations have conducted mass distribution of masks and hand sanitizer, held virtual informational town halls, restricted outsider access to reservations, and more. While the U.S. government has the treaty-bound responsibility of providing funding for Indigenous healthcare, "Native Nations or Indigenous governments do have the sovereign right to develop their own priorities and to implement health in all policies and arenas, including pandemic response initiative and community-based interventions for health promotion. Many Native Nations have done this successfully, and the programs have included access to pandemic response resources (e.g., hand-sanitizer, personal protective equipment, health food, stress reduction programs)," (Haring et al. 2020).

Among these efforts are many wide-scale visual public health communication campaigns. Examples include the #WarriorUp Campaign by the Indigenous-run nonprofit IllumiNative and the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health's COVID-19 Resource Library for Native American Communities, as well as official government communication through social media produced by nations such as the Navajo Nation, the Seneca Nation of Indians, and the Oglala Lakota Nation. Through their thematic analysis of 119 COVID-related Facebook posts by Tribal governments and organizations, Kuhn et al. conclude that

> Social media is an essential and effective strategy for providing culturally relevant risk communication and community-focused information…Targeted and culturally specific risk communication are important supports for Tribal members seeking to mitigate the health, educational, economic, and social challenges wrought by the pandemic. Recognizing the vital need to connect and share cultural experiences, Tribal organizations and communities rapidly adapted, creating new online spaces and events as an alternative to in-person gatherings. This appeared to encourage adherence to strict social distancing guidelines while reducing the negative effects of isolation (Kuhn et al. 2020).

While these largescale public health campaigns are vital and have the potential to reach large networks of Tribal citizens, an analysis of such wide-ranging communication is beyond the scope of this thesis due to both time and COVID restraints. Here, I take a person-centered ethnographic approach to studying the use of social media and visual communication by and for Native individuals in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This thesis aims to study the ways in which individual artists have the ability to add to larger public health campaigns through the dissemination of their own personal art, and how their individual agency interacts with the concept of visual sovereignty. This focused approach, centered on the dialogue of Indigenous artists and public health officials, provides insight into the profound impact of social media, the applications of visual sovereignty, and the reclamation of Native health narratives. In addition to interviews, this thesis takes a visual anthropological approach to understanding specific works created by the interviewed artists. I conducted a thematic analysis of each interview transcript to reveal common themes identified by the artists. I also conducted a close visual analysis of select artist images in order to reveal further insights about Native COVID-19 art and communication.

To provide context for this visual ethnographic study focused broadly on Indigenous art and health, this chapter details the historical and contemporary status of Native healthcare and disparities, the social determinants of health, effective public health communication, visual sovereignty, and social media use in Indian Country. The discussion of these facets of Native health shed light on the need for community-created health promotion materials that re-center Indigenous voices. The section on public health communication draws from the literature on past public health campaigns with Indigenous Nations, suggesting the effectiveness of visual and culturally relevant communication created by the interviewed artists. While these studies focus on largescale communication that will not be analyzed directly in this thesis, the section on Indigenous social media use underscores the ability of individuals to add to these campaigns via platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. In addition to the consideration of Native health disparities, the section on visual sovereignty discusses the importance of reclamation of Indigenous representations.

Tribal Health Systems

The federal Indian Health Services (IHS), established in 1955 and housed today under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for providing health services to the federally recognized tribes, of which there are currently 574 (U.S. Department of the Interior: Indian Affairs). IHS is composed of three divisions conferring varying levels of self-governance to tribes, and consists of a network of hospitals, care facilities, and more (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). IHS services span 35 states and reach 1.6 million

people (Jones 2006, 2131). Congress passed two successive acts in 1921 and 1976 called the Snyder Act and the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), respectively, which collectively form the basis for the function of IHS (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). The Snyder Act allowed funding for the health of federally recognized tribes, while the IHCIA outlines the structure of health service delivery (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). Throughout the path to the Department of Health and Human Services, Indian Health programs have been federally controlled by the Department of War, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (U.S. National Library of Medicine 1988). Figure 1 from Oglala Lakota Native American Rights Fund attorney Brett Lee Shelton's 2004 Issue Brief on the "Legal and Historical Roots of Health Care for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States" visualizes a detailed account of this history.

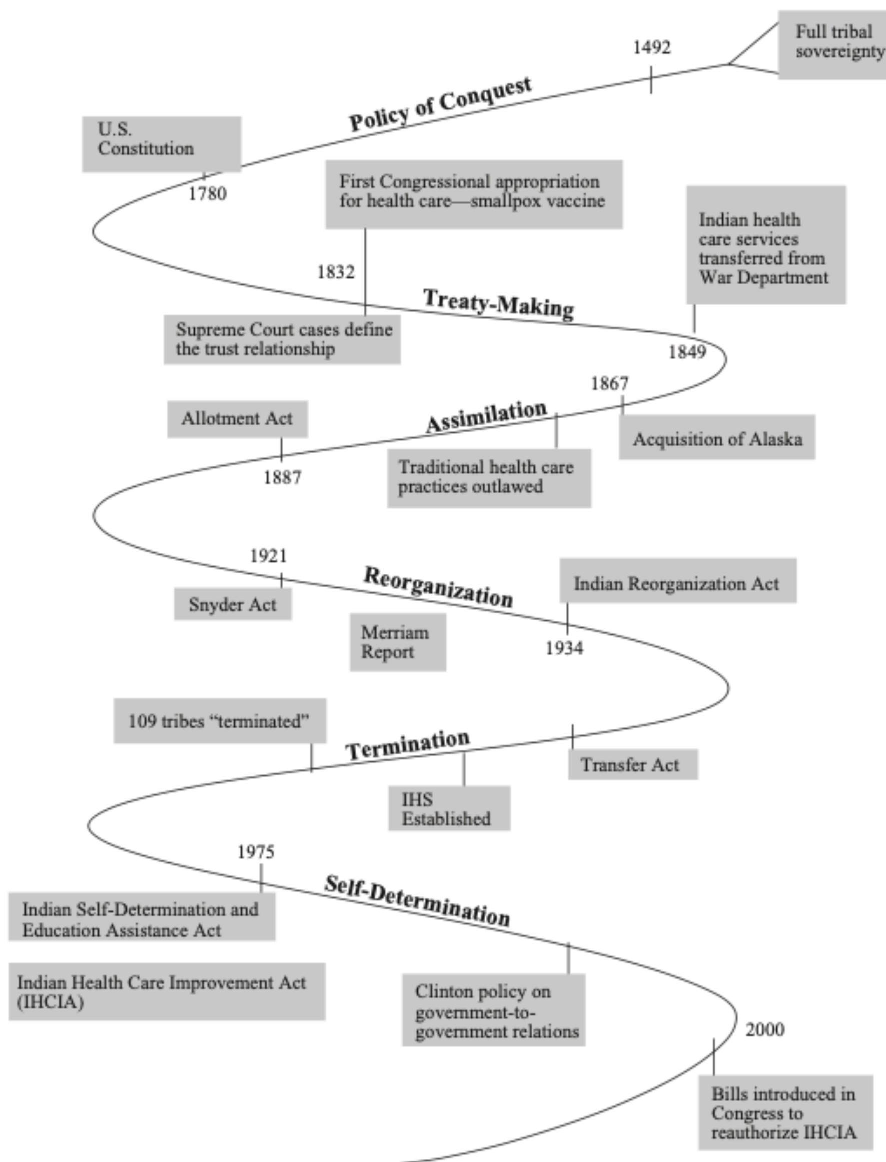


Figure 1: "Timeline of Major Legislative and Historical Events in Health Care for American Indians and Alaska Natives." *Legal and Historical Roots of Health Care for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States.* Shelton, 2004.

An important factor in understanding the history of Native American health programs is the unique relationship between Native nations and the U.S. federal government. This relation,

dating back to early conduct in the 18th century, is described as a "trust" relationship (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017; Haring et al. 2021). Article I, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution, which allows Congress "to regulate commerce … with the Indian tribes," is the basis for this trust relationship, requiring federal protection of tribal lands, assets, resources, treaty rights, and healthcare (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). Essentially, the U.S. federal government acquired land from Native tribes in exchange for the promise of protecting these populations from the states and citizens (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). IHS is one of multiple organizations, among the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), responsible for providing federal funding and regulations to Native Nations. In addition to federal support, Native Nations also receive state support and have the sovereign power to implement their own health policies, making Native individuals "tri-citizens" (Haring et al. 2021).

The inefficiencies and gaps in the federal IHS system comes as no surprise when considering the legacy of deceit and broken treaties at the hands of the U.S. government. For example, the vague language of the Snyder Act has been criticized for its inability to promote long-term structures and resources for the delivery of health services to Native populations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). Additionally, the prospect of full or partial self-governance of health via contracts or funding compacts provided by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 can be seen as a double-edged sword. While the ability to take control over one's own tribal health seems like a clear forward trajectory toward self-determination, Shelton notes that some tribal leaders worry excess reliance

on contracts and compacts may put the tribe at risk of "termination by appropriation," (Shelton 2004, 10). Further, while the Snyder Act mandates the annual appropriation of funds by Congress to fulfill the terms of the trust relationship, many agree that the actual amount of allocated funds is insufficient for effective providing of health services (Shelton 2004, 13). To conclude her NYT opinion piece entitled "How COVID-19 threatens Native Languages," Archambault condemns the quality of IHS services and pleads for increased Tribal funding, "President Biden now has an opportunity to help. That means providing the highest quality health care and preventive measures on reservations, and a top-down reform of the Indian Health Service, a long-neglected treaty right. Finally, the next federal budget must fully fund tribal language restoration programs; we are asking for $750 million a year – a pittance compared with the resources expended over the centuries to destroy our languages and cultures," (Archambault 2021). As per the National Congress of American Indians, the IHS per capita expenditures for patient health services in 2014 were $3107 compared to the national expenditure of $8097 per person (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017). Furthermore, a 2007 physician survey cites lack of IHS funding as a significant barrier to improvement in quality Native healthcare (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine 2017).

In June 2019 when I spent a month working on the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota, I had a conversation with a local Oglala Lakota man who had to travel six hours every three weeks to get treatment for his and his wife's stage IV cancer diagnoses due to a lack of adequate healthcare options on or around the reservation.

In addition to insufficient funding, lack of resources in IHS facilities causes major problems. As the authors of "Post-Pandemic Translational Research, and Indigenous Communities" note, "Unfortunately, many tribes live with challenging social circumstances and

poverty, and not every tribe has the resources to implement comprehensive pandemic response packages or programming. The federal government needs to continue to be held responsible for its role in underfunding their treaty obligations and to recognize its role in health disparities more broadly especially during pandemics," (Haring et al. 2021). Between the 14 IHS facilities serving the Navajo Nation there are 222 beds available for the 170,000+ reservation and nearby residents, which is roughly one third of the hospital bed to population ratio of the U.S. at large (Walker 2020). The systemic federal IHS underfunding and inadequate high-quality services rooted in centuries of racism and paternalistic treatment of Indigenous peoples contribute to the grave health disparities faced by tribal populations to be discussed in the following sections.

Native Health Disparities

Much like the high rates of COVID-19 among Native nations, countless other diseases and negative health outcomes plague these communities. In their review of Indigenous determinants and disease patterns, Gracey (non-Native) and King (Mississaugus of the Credit First Nation) identify the following as some of the "major health problems of Indigenous peoples:" high infant and child mortality, high maternal mortality, high infectious disease rates, malnutrition, shortened life expectancy, cigarette-related diseases, problems and deaths related to substance abuse, suicide, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease (Gracey and King 2009, 66). According to Gracey and King, Indigenous peoples face higher rates of infectious diseases than the mainstream population, and are more likely to suffer resulting death (Gracey and King 2009, 68). In fact, high rates of Indigenous infection are historically consistent, dating back to at least as early as the introduction of diseases such as smallpox,

measles, malaria, and influenza by European colonists in the 16th century and beyond (Jones 2006, 2123;) (see also Haring et al. 2021). Haring et al. write for a 2021 *Journal of Indigenous Research* article, "The current COVID-19 pandemic has caused many to reflect upon the nature of pandemics in the world. In summary, Indigenous Peoples were afflicted with many diseases brought to their ancestral homelands…These produced unspeakable destruction to Indigenous populations, in the form of disability, illness, and extensive deaths along with cultural loss," (Haring et al. 2021, 2). Indigenous population decrease by over 90% was common in the first century following contact (Jones 2006, 2123). While still fully condemning the atrocities and genocide committed by colonizers, it's important to note that paleoanthropological evidence suggests worsening malnutrition and disease left Indigenous populations susceptible to European disease (Jones 2006, 2123).

Since early colonization, Native health disparities have persisted. In 1917, after the increased appropriation of $350,000 for Indian health, more Native Americans were born than died for the first time in more than fifty years (Jones 2006, 2128). European-introduced tuberculosis remains in Indian country, and was exacerbated by combat in World War I (Jones 2006, 2128). In 1947, Navajo tuberculosis, pneumonia, and trachoma rates were 15.8, 101.6, and 1163 times the national average, respectively (Jones 2006, 1218). More recently, disparities continue to grow. According to IHS data from the 1990's, American Indians and Alaskan Natives face higher mortality rates for leading causes of death at the following frequencies:

Cause of Death	**AI/AN Increased Mortality Rate Compared to the General Public**
Heart Disease	1.2
Accidents	2.8
Diabetes	4.2

Alcohol	7.7
Suicide	1.9
Tuberculosis	7.5

Table 1: Increased American Indian/Alaskan Native mortality rate by leading cause of death using IHS 1990s data. Created using information from: *The Persistence of American Indian Health Disparities.* Jones. 2006. Page 2130.

In Canada, death rates are six times higher for Native populations than the general public (Marrone 2007, 189). Of all racial groups in the United States, American Indian/Alaska Native children experience the highest rates of obesity at 16.6%, which leads to an increased risk of developing chronic conditions such as Type 2 Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease (Jennings et al. 2018, 353). As such, between 2010 and 2012, American Indians and Alaska Natives faced Diabetes rates twice as high as those of non-Hispanic whites (Jennings et al. 2018, 353). Respiratory illnesses such as asthma, pneumonia,

> "And I got on the radio, and I and I brought the statistics up from IHS which is our hospital. I basically just said the biggest killers on the Pine Ridge reservation is not alcohol, drugs or suicide. That was another one too suicide was just like it was big. It was huge. So I just told them that its heart disease, obesity and diabetes are the major killers for the reservation. And I get it, you know, people are scared, they don't want to die, but our biggest fear should be diabetes, heart disease and obesity, so we should I mean that's that's always been my, my thing is is always try to share accurate information. So like what this whole COVID 19 thing they're like scaring people that they're sharing stuff like we like all these people died today. But I mean, on a on a on a level yeah, they shouldn't have to die for these premature reasons but on another level I mean, they were they were susceptible because they had underlying conditions and the underlying conditions are heart disease, diabetes and obesity, respiratory issues really so I really, you know, I'm, I'm always trying to share information like that and just letting people know that the it's understandable to be scared. It's also a choice to understand which information, you're going to get."
>
> -Arlo Iron Cloud, Oglala Lakota/Diné, November 2020 Interview

and bronchitis are some of the most common illnesses among Indigenous populations of Australia, the U.S., Canada, and New Zealand (Chang et al. 2014, 325).

Compared to other racial groups in the United States, accurate data and health information regarding Native Americans is hard to come by, making access to quality and community-specific healthcare services exceedingly difficult. Ultimately, the introduction of diseases by colonizers, unsanitary conditions and lack of tribal healing practice on reservations, paternalistic inaction through the federal trust relationship, and legacies of historical trauma contribute to the pervasive and persistent negative health outcomes in Indian Country. These increased rates of afflictions such as obesity, Cardiovascular Disease, Type 2 Diabetes, and Tuberculosis put many Native individuals in the high-risk category for COVID-19. The combination of underlying conditions with lack of access to local and quality healthcare for many Indigenous populations suggests that effective public health communication is especially important for these communities.

The Social Determinants of Health

The Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta, GA, an influential body of COVID information, messaging, and intervention since the start of the pandemic, lists five identifying factors which may contribute to increased risk of severe infection from COVID-19. Listed among these five factors is "racial and ethnic minority groups," noting that social determinants of health have continuously prevented these groups from experiencing equitable health outcomes (Centers for Disease Control 2020). According to Healthy People 2020, a decade-long scientific initiative toward improving the health of Americans, social determinants of health (SDOH) are

defined as, "conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks," (Healthy People 2020). Organizing social determinants into a "place-based" framework of settings such as work, school, church, and neighborhood, Healthy People 2020 identifies five key areas that together make up the social determinants of health (Healthy People 2020).

Figure 2: Healthy People 2020's five key elements of the social determinants of health. https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health

Due to centuries of cultural genocide, continuous broken promises, manipulation, and unethical medical treatment, Indigenous communities of North America face unparalleled obstacles that fall into this SDOH framework. In the **Economic Stability** category, Native populations face pervasive unemployment, food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty, all

of which are listed as key issues by Healthy People 2020. Using the Oglala Lakota Nation of the Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota as a specific example, each of these economic issues is represented. Overall, official statistical and public health information regarding Pine Ridge, and Native populations in general, is grossly lacking. However, a July 1st, 2019 United States Census Bureau report estimates that 40.1% of Oglala Lakota County, South Dakota, which is entirely contained on the Pine Ridge Reservation, are living in poverty (United States Census Bureau). This is approximately eleven times the national unemployment rate, which was 3.5% in 2019 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (United States Bureau of Labor Statistics). Socioeconomic status (SES), which is critically linked to race, is one of the strongest predictors of health variations

> "I talk a lot about quality of life and in our, on the Pine Ridge reservation, I mean, there's so many things that just make life just horrible."
>
> -Arlo Iron Cloud, Oglala Lakota/Diné November 2020 Interview

In addition to poverty, food insecurity in Pine Ridge is pervasive. From my experiences (June 11, 2016 – June 17, 2016; May 25, 2019 – June 21, 2019), as a volunteer and staff member of a nonprofit organization in Pine Ridge called Re-Member, a common comparison made is that Pine Ridge is roughly comparable to the size of Connecticut and only has two to three grocery stores with fresh produce. While this is certainly an exaggeration, and far from scientifically accurate, it provides a helpful visual of the food scene on the reservation. One can drive tens of miles in Pine Ridge before encountering a grocery store, and, when found, they're typically packed full of affordable processed foods.

While this poverty-linked lack of quality nutritious food in the Oglala Lakota community and many Native nations is striking on its own accord, it's more deeply tied to a history of oppression. Prior to contact, geographically dependent practices included buffalo hunting,

fishing, rain-capture irrigation, berry picking, wild rice farming, and more (Treuer 2016, 10). The implementation of reservation systems by the U.S. federal government in the late 19th to early 20th centuries stripped Native communities of these traditional nomadic farming lifestyles and rich connections to the land in favor of introducing a modern lifestyle, agriculture (Jones 2006). This largely resulted in complete reliance by Native communities on government rations, creating a cycle of dependence, poor nutrition, and disease that has persisted through modern society (Jones 2006). Traditional diets rich with complex carbohydrates and fiber were swapped out for modern commodity foods high in refined carbohydrates, fat, sodium, and low in produce, (Jennings et al. 2018, 360).

In the next key SDOH element identified by Healthy People, **Education**, Indigenous communities are similarly lacking in opportunities for maximizing health and wellbeing. According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute, a mere 19% of 18 to 24-year-old Native students are enrolled in college, compared to 41% of the general U.S. population (The Postsecondary National Policy Institute) In the seven states with the highest percentages of Native students – Alaska, Oklahoma, Montana, New Mexico, and South Dakota – less than half of these students graduate from high school annually, according to the National Congress of American Indians (National Congress of American Indians). Returning to the Oglala Lakota example, in the 2014-2015 school year, Oglala Lakota County had a 3.57% four-year cohort graduation rate as compared to the state average of 83.86% (Black Hills Knowledge Network).

Like food insecurity, inadequate educational experiences among Native communities are linked to the United States' shameful legacy of colonization, namely the residential boarding school system. In *Atlas of Indian Nations,* Anton Treuer powerfully captures this heinous period in American history, "The war on tribal cultures and languages was carried on long after the

physical genocide stopped. More than 20,000 Native American children were removed from their homes and sent to residential boarding schools every year. In those government run schools, children were beaten for speaking the only languages they knew, forced to pray in the Christian tradition, and torn from the social fabric of tribal communities. Today, as a result, many North American tribal languages are extinct. Most are threatened," (Treuer 2016, 16-17). (See also Kliemer at al. 2021, Bombay 2014, Gregg 2018, Huffman 2013, Mooradian 2007). On the same subject, Jodi Archambault writes, "That we still have Lakota speakers at all is a miracle. Earlier generations were removed from their land and families, to boarding schools that beat children for speaking their Native tongue, and more recently, to classrooms that nearly erased their Lakota culture," (Archambault 2021).

In addition to the annihilation of traditional languages, the boarding school era has had documented lasting effects on intergenerational psychological wellbeing and educational outcomes. Despite evidence from literature in the field of economics that reservations with a higher number of students sent to residential boarding schools have experienced downstream educational benefits, these studies fail to holistically evaluate the psychological and cultural impacts that contribute to negative health outcomes and subsequent struggles in school. One such narrative of intergenerational trauma comes from Anthony Galindo, the grandson of two Riverside Indian School (previously known as the Wichita-Caddo School until 1878) survivors named Joe and Ethil Wheeler (Kliewer et al. 2021). "The trauma from Riverside Indian School stayed with Joe Wheeler all his life, Galindo said. In fact, Joe's feelings about Riverside make up Galindo's first memory of being raised by his grandparents. Joe told him the government's purpose was to wipe the Wichita people off the face of the Earth through cultural assimilation," (Kliewer et al. 2021). Joe Wheeler's experience as a residential school student informed his

grand-parenting of Galindo, likely instilling anti-U.S. and anti-educational sentiments across generations. The documenters of Galindo's and the Wheeler's stories powerfully write the following in their *Indian Country Today* article, "The stories passed down from those who attended such schools as Riverside and Carlisle are reminders of the resilience of Native people across the nation, but the cemeteries that remain – and the names of children etched in marble – are emotional reminders of the stories that have never been told," (Kliewer et al. 2021). As is evident in this chilling sentence, residential boarding schools have profoundly contributed to Indigenous erasure.

Despite these accounts of psychological trauma and cultural loss, in his article for the *Journal of Development Economics*, Matthew T. Gregg uses reservation census data and school enrollment data from 1911 to 1932 to illustrate how reservations with high boarding school numbers have experienced higher high school graduation rates, higher per capita income, a greater proportion of exclusively English speakers, and smaller family sizes (Gregg 2018). Gregg argues that, for some students, the residential boarding schools were "the lesser of two evils," with the alternative being non-Indian neighboring public schools where racism was pervasive, leading to increased level of education (Gregg 2018, 20).

However, other academics from the social sciences have documented how residential schools created a legacy of negative educational experiences for Native students. Mooradian et al. illustrate through qualitative interviews with Indigenous grandparents that assimilation policies, including residential schools, correlate strongly for some participants to a distrust of the government and mainstream white organizations (Mooradian et al. 2007, as cited in Gregg 2018). Through a review of the literature, Bombay et al. demonstrates how Indian Residential School (IRS) attendance in Canada led to compounding trauma, psychological and physiological

distress, and that the experience is elevated when there is a greater number of IRS generations (Bombay et al. 2014, as cited in Gregg 2018). Bombay et al. cite data on Frist Nations youth that reported learning difficulties increases from 40.4% to 48.7% among those whose parents attended IRS, as well as grade repetition increasing from 35.2% to 47.3% (Bombay et al. 2014, as cited in Gregg 2018). Lastly, Huffman uses 21 qualitative interviews with reservation-located Native American educators to illustrate the need for building the cultural identity in Native students. Huffman presents the idea that some Native students reject schools as white institutions via a "reverse racism mentality," (Huffman 2013, as cited in Gregg 2018). One interviewed educator corroborates this mindset, "And I think a lot of that stems from the early education of Native people and the boarding school system and the loss of language and culture where it was a negative experience for our elders…and it taught them to not to value it because it wasn't important because there was a negative connection to education," (Huffman 2013, 35). Ultimately, school and the U.S. education system is not always viewed as a safe and prosperous place by Indigenous individuals and families.

The third SDOH key element identified by Healthy People 2020 is **Social and Community Context**, of which civic participation, discrimination, incarceration, and social cohesion are listed as pertinent issues (Healthy People 2020). A recent example from the 2020 Presidential election highlights the intersectionality between some of these key obstacles to Indigenous health and wellbeing. Uproar ensued across Indian Country back in November 2020 when CNN televised a poll with the following racial categories: White, Latino, Black, Something else, and Asian. Native voters were rightfully offended by CNN's contribution to Indigenous media erasure, especially considering the salient impact of the Native vote in this particular election (Zornosa 2020).

Figure 3: Tweet by @_IllumiNatives on 11/4/2020 - https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-11-05/it-looks-like-cnn-called-native-americans-something-else-theyre-not-happy

Additionally, the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA) adds, "Being Native American is a political classification – not merely a racial background. Native nations have had a government-to-government relationship with the United States since the country's earliest days. To refer to Indigenous voters as 'something else' fails to recognize the sovereignty and political classification of Native voters," (Zornosa 2020). As this example highlights, discrimination, even in the form of lacking and inaccurate representation, is widespread and historically rooted.

The next SDOH category is **Neighborhood and Built Environment**, including the following potential issues: access to foods that support healthy eating patterns, crime and violence, environmental conditions, and quality of housing (Healthy People 2020). Like the previous three categories, Indigenous groups are strongly affected by these barriers to healthy living. In her *Social Justice* journal article "Crime and Justice in American Indian Communities," Lisa Poupart (Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Anishinaabeg) argues that the high prevalence of crime and social issues among Native American communities such as alcoholism, family violence, incest, sexual assault, fetal alcohol syndrome, homicide, and suicide, is a direct result of historical and ongoing cultural genocide, evidenced by the lack of these phenomena in pre-contact Indian societies (Poupart 2002). Through forced removals, stolen land, violent residential school systems, attacks on spiritual freedom, and more, Poupart asserts, "Crime in American Indian communities can be understood both as a response to continued economic deprivation and dependency and as an expression of historical trauma, unresolved grief, and normalized violence," (Poupart 2002). Not only do these communities possess a historical burden of violence with the potential to manifest itself via similar mechanisms, the modern legal system is flooded with biases and lacks opportunity for traditional tribal justice proceedings, further disadvantaging this population within the criminal justice system (Poupart 2002).

In addition to experiencing uniquely historical crime, Native communities face continued environmental violence. Poupart notes that major companies and sectors of the U.S. government such as United Nuclear, Anaconda Minerals, and Peabody Coal knowingly polluted Indian land, air, and water through the use of Native laborers (Poupart 2002). This example highlights a pattern of environmental injustice against Native communities that remains today. A well-known

case is the Dakota Access Pipeline which pumps thousands of gallons of crude oil through the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, threatening the community's water supply and sovereignty. Environmental violence is particularly salient among Native nations due to a common tradition of valuing the earth. Poupart writes, "Traditionally, all Nations were socially, spiritually, and economically connected to their physical environments. For many Nations, loss of land meant the end of traditional economies and of spiritual beliefs and practices that were connected to the Earth," (Poupart 2002). As these examples illustrate, Native nations face barriers to living in healthy neighborhoods and environments.

The final key SDOH element identified by Healthy People is **Health and Health Care**, including access to health care, access to primary care, and health literacy. The Indian Health Services (IHS) defines health literacy as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand health information and services needed to make appropriate decisions about their health," (Indian Health Services Health Literacy Workgroup). The IHS Health Literacy White Pages recognizes that health literacy includes much more than the ability to read, however, general literacy is necessary in order to have health literacy skills. Literacy is statistically below average in Indian Country, contributing to an overall lack of health literacy. In fact, 80% of Native American high school seniors scored below average in reading skills compared to 58% of whites (Indian Health Services Health Literacy Workgroup).

Not only do Native American populations struggle with health literacy, they disproportionately lack access to quality health and primary care. The medical system's shameful past treatment of Indigenous populations contributes to mistrust of the health care system by many of these communities today. In the 1800s, Native American communities were given deliberately smallpox-infected blankets in an extermination attempt (Jennings et al. 2018, 359).

During the relocation era, the U.S. government intentionally withheld medical supplies from Native populations in order to force removal from sacred lands (Poupart 2002). By the 20th century, the violence remained. In the 1970s, thousands of Native women were sterilized by coercion or without their knowledge, often by the Indian Health Services. A General Accounting Office (GAO) investigation conducted in 1976 found that 3406 Indian women were sterilized between 1973 and 1976 (Carpio 2004). While the report did not find evidence of sterilizations without consent forms, it highlighted weaknesses within the informed consent process (Carpio 2004). The report also looked into other abuses at the hands of IHS, namely at residential schools. The report found lack of informed consent in studies on young Native children at boarding schools, including a prediabetics study on Pima Indians, a pneumonia vaccine trial in Navajos, and a study with White Mountain Apache children on trachoma and pulmonary disease, (Carpio 2004). Even today, incidents of racism and grave lack of adequate care for Indigenous patients remain pervasive. In the fall of 2020 a 37-year-old Atikamekw woman named Joyce Echaquan died in a hospital outside of Montreal after facing brutally racist remarks from hospital staff (BBC News 2020). Hospital workers told Echaquan, who was screaming for help, that she was "stupid as hell" and that she'd made poor life choices (BBC News 2020). On Canada's other

> "There needs to be Indigenous sensitivity training in the healthcare system. And if somebody has been brought up on something that they've done wrong in the healthcare system against First Nations people then they, like it needs to be taken seriously because people's lives are being lost because of it and people are being not cared for, because, like, oh, well maybe they're drunk, you know, as opposed to actually having an underlying medical issue. Right, and it's just not right and it's not right any race that should happen to anybody. No matter their race, right, judgments need to be lost at the door. Everybody, and I too am at fault for that, you know, I have my own personal bias against certain races, but you have to try to leave those at the door when you're working with, you know, so people that need your help."
>
> -Blanche Isfeld-Chief, Oji-Cree, November 2020 Interview

coast, British Columbia is investigating a reportedly widespread emergency room “game” known as “The Price is Right” in which workers guess the blood alcohol levels of Indigenous patients (Schmunk 2020). Ultimately, centuries of oppression, coercion, and racism have created unsurmountable barriers to adequate health care for Native nations and a rightful lack of trust in U.S. governmental and medical systems.

Through forced economic dependency, banned traditional practices, abuse in residential schools, environmental violence, constant erasure, unethical past medical treatment, and more, Native American populations face unmatched barriers to realizing healthy lives. This section has outlined the historical bodily-manifested attack on traditional lifestyles and land, which is coupled with pervasive erasure of Native American peoples – in both the media and public health records. Culturally sensitive and community-based public health promotion is thus paramount for Indigenous communities, and COVID-19 prevention is no exception.

Culturally Relevant Public Health Communication

Multiple scholars have documented the importance and effectiveness of community-based information and programming when it comes to promoting healthy living among Native communities. Among these studies, two themes have emerged: the need for both visual and culturally relevant health promotion. The following is an excerpt from the IHS Health Literacy White Paper section on cultural diversity, “Some believe that providing information in a culturally relevant context will make the message more persuasive, while others believe it will simply make the information more interesting for the patient. Either way, if the information is

not relevant to the patient, it is unlikely to be taken into consideration by the patient," (Indian Health Services Health Literacy Workgroup 2009).

Co-Director of the University of Washington's Indigenous Wellness Research Institute and enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Karina Walters and her fourteen colleagues present the following criteria for culturally based interventions:

1. Incorporating Original Instructions (e.g., via ancient stories/teachings) as much as possible
2. Nurturing relational restoration (via worldviews across body, place, self, family, community, past and future generations)
3. Advancing narrative and [em]bodied transformation (i.e., decolonizing the way we think and talk our [his]tories and express through our bodies)
4. Incorporating Indigenist community-based participatory research (ICPBR) approaches. (Walters et al. 2020).

Frances Robinson et al. provide a tangible example of this sentiment. In response to statistical data from the National Cancer Institute demonstrating the poor five-year breast cancer survival rate among Native American women in New Mexico as compared to other racial groups, Robinson et al. created two educational videos geared specifically towards Navajo women in the area (Robinson et al. 2005). The authors cite this discrepancy in breast cancer incidence and five-year survival to cultural differences that prevent early detection and prevention in Navajo women (Robinson et al. 2005). One of the article's co-authors, Nellie Sandoval, a Navajo breast cancer survivor herself, notes that among her community, mere mention of cancer is considered an invitation for the onset of disease (Robinson et al. 2005). In fact, the Navajo word for cancer is translated to "the sore that does not heal," (Robinson et al.

2005). Robinson et al. suggest that since these beliefs are not aligned with biomedical understandings of cancer, in order to be effective, health promotion efforts in Navajo communities must be culturally sensitive. Robinson and Sandoval thus constructed two audiovisual videos narrated by a traditional Navajo language speaker in order to be as direct as possible and foster a sense of ownership over one's own health outcomes (Robinson et al. 2005). The authors note, "The choice of a respected native speaker whose own family had experienced cancer was key because it communicated acceptance of a new tribal tradition: preventive health," (Robinson et al. 2005, 690). Of those surveyed after a screening of the preliminary video, 100% of respondents said that they got the information they needed and understood more about treatment, and 93% felt more in control of their own health care, (Robinson et al. 2005). Robinson and Sandoval's breast cancer prevention videos thus provide evidence for the importance of implementing both visual and culturally sensitive approaches to health promotion materials in Native communities.

In addition to varying understandings of cancer between cultures, the Western value in individualistic approaches to health is not held universally (Jennings et al. 2018). This is evident in a relational worldview common to many Native American communities, in which all beings and things in the environment are viewed as related to one another. Thus, health is conceptualized as a function of many interrelated forces (Jennings et al. 2018). (See also Walters et al. 2020). Native American and Chicana scholar Natalie Avalos Cisneros writes:

> Severed or compromised relationships to the land and others cause an imbalance that imperils one's wellbeing, resulting in illness. Thus, healing within Native communities must entail a restoration of a balanced self-identity, one the exists in proper relationship within spatial, human and ecological communities. In essence,

> Native healing is best facilitated by the restoration of appropriate inter-relationships that will sustain and nourish that person (Avalos Cisneros 2014).

Jennings et al. capture this discrepancy between Native American health beliefs and Western intervention practices using the Photovoice technique with twenty-two Native American students. Using a decolonizing approach, Indigenous students were asked to create their own data by photographing "health" (Jennings et al. 2018). Through the generated images, the authors identified the tribal students' health view as including exercise, nutrition, interpersonal relationships, environment, balance, cultural teachings, and relationship to food, while that of Western medical health includes only exercise and nutrition (Jennings et al. 2018, 356, Table 2). The authors thus argue for a Tribal Health Sovereignty (THS) model that prioritizes Tribal cultural influence over U.S. cultural influence when implementing healthcare intervention to validate this holistic understanding of health (Jennings et al. 2018). More specifically, they advise that such interventions take into account the relationship between health and the environment and acknowledge the lasting impact of historical trauma on modern Native American communities (Jennings et al. 2018).

Like Jennings et al., McShane et al. conclude that health information sources and dissemination strategies should be community-specific through their research and partnership with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre in Ottawa (McShane et al. 2006). Via five key informant interviews and two focus groups, McShane et al. identify five themes related to health information dissemination among Inuit communities: Inuit value direct visual and/or auditory communication, the elevated role of elders as information sources, community cohesion of all Inuit regardless of location, distinction between Inuit and non-Inuit First Nations groups, and enhanced reception when receiving information from other Inuit, (McShane et al. 2006).

Based on the transcripts the authors identify "a need for the direct link between the knowledge users (i.e. community members) and the knowledge products (i.e. publications). Typical knowledge products (i.e. pamphlets) may need to be replaced by information linked to Inuit oral, direct communication traditions (i.e. audiovisual recording). Furthermore, the knowledge users would need to be directly involved in the preparation of the knowledge," (McShane et al. 2006, 299). This example again highlights the importance of community-created health information.

Other scholars have advocated for the use of visual methods when specifically geared toward Native children. In their article, Isogai et al. evaluate the efficacy of an educational nutrition program administered to children of the Fort Albany First Nation in Canada with the goal of promoting healthy eating and eliminating the disproportionate effects of obesity in Aboriginal people (Isogai et al. 2011). The program operated under a framework created by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and implemented Social Cognitive Theory. The Vegetable and Fruit and Power4Bones programs implemented instruction on traditional Aboriginal foods and incorporated Aboriginal teaching styles such as the use of hands-on activities (Isogai et al. 2011). The teachers who witnessed the program voiced the need for additional visual aids when presenting the nutritional information, and Isogai et al. officially recommend the use of extensive visual materials for future environmental health programs in Fort Albany and similar communities (Isogai et al. 2011).

"I just haven't seen a lot of messaging to target you know our youth, you know our youth are the people that are actually contracting the virus and...they come into the home and they get the whole home infected, you know that's the major route of transmission. So, I haven't seen any messaging targeting our youth. I'm not saying that it doesn't exist."

-Dean Seneca, Seneca Nation of Indians, January 2021 Interview

In a study similarly focused on the health of children in a remote Indigenous community, Highet et al. analyze drawings made by

kids in the Fort McPherson community of Canada made for a contest in which they were asked to represent the bacteria *H. pylori*, the research program, and their community, (Highet et al. 2019). The authors highlight the significance of the fact that all students drew a representation of the bacteria within the physical environment of their community, as opposed to a biomedical understanding of the bacteria inside the body or in a laboratory setting (Highet et al. 2019). Through this use of visual methods, Highet et al. conclude that public health and primary care interventions in Indigenous communities must consider the social dimensions of health and illness (Highet et al. 2019).

Another study from the literature that employs the use of visual methodology is that of Kelley et al. In the study, the researchers listened to Native American participants' mental health concerns, presented them with visual vignettes of possible mental health-related reservation scenarios, and recorded community wishes for mental health system improvements (Kelley et al. 2016). The authors relate the particular relevance of visual culture in Native American communities to their prevalence in early societies, "For early American Indians, drawings served as visual depictions (stories) of events that happened in their lives, including battles, ceremonies, and everyday living. Among Indigenous groups, '…story and knowing cannot be traced back to any specific starting time within tribal societies, for they have been tightly bound since time immemorial as a legitimate form of understanding' (Kovack 2010, 95). Visualization and imagery remain an important part of Native American cultures and knowledge transmission in the present day," (Highet et al. 2016, 49). Similarly, Potawatomi-Lenapé Susan Dion and Colombian Angela Salamanca write for their 2014 *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* journal article, "Within Indigenous traditions visual art –like the art of storytelling—is recognized as something more than entertainment. Lenore Keeshig Tobias writes, "Stories are

power. They reflect the deepest, most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture thinks" (in Dion, 2009, p.16)" (Dion and Salamanca 2014). These cultural beliefs underscore the need for visual materials when creating culturally relevant public health messaging.

In the same way that scholars addressing breast cancer in Navajo Nation, health in Inuit communities, obesity in Fort Albany, *H. pylori* in Fort McPherson, and mental health in Native American communities have demonstrated a need for effective public health education and communication to be community-specific and internally created, COVID-19 information geared toward Native communities must also be culturally sensitive. As discussed, Native American communities face grave health disparities due to centuries of oppression and genocide. One year into the pandemic, Indigenous communities still face increased risk of death. In order to adequately and equitably protect these populations, public health related materials must take into account the social circumstances and traditional beliefs of Indigenous communities. Likewise, the history of visual practices in Native cultures outlined by Highet et al. remains relevant during these times. Independent Native artists have the unique opportunity to influence the behavior of their community members through culturally relevant and community specific visual media.

Besides cultural relevancy and visual communication, the level of trust in the body providing public health information contributes to the efficacy of the communication (Driedger et al. 2013). The shameful history of medical deception and mistreatment of Indigenous communities discussed previously suggests that some Indigenous populations are more likely to disregard risk reduction messaging provided by governmental entities such as the CDC. For example, Aboriginal Canadians who were high on the list for the H1N1 vaccine expressed fears of being used as 'human guinea pigs," (Driedger et al. 2013). An Aboriginal H1N1 response

focus group member even expressed belief in the conspiracy theory that the virus was man-made in order to exterminate Native peoples (Driedger et al. 2013, 6). This example points to the need for community-created COVID-19 prevention education from Tribal governments, organizations, and independent artists. ‘One-size-fits-all’ messaging and risk reduction strategies are not acceptable. Individual communities must be meaningfully involved in creating culturally sensitive public health information alongside healthcare and governmental professionals (Massey 2009).

Unfortunately, yet unsurprisingly based on the above discussion of the social determinants of health, COVID-19 is not the first pandemic to disproportionately harm Indigenous communities. One century ago, the 1919 influenza pandemic ravaged Australian Indigenous communities, killing close to 50% in some populations, compared to less than 0.4% in the overall Australian populace (Massey et al. 2009, 2). The H1N1 swine flu pandemic of 2009 was similarly harmful with Indigenous peoples being five times more likely to be hospitalized than non-Indigenous Australians, for example (Massey et a. 2009, 2). In Canada, Aboriginal people comprised 10% of H1N1 deaths and hospitalizations, though Aboriginal peoples account for only 4% of the overall population (Driedger et al. 2013, 2). In a highly publicized incident during the H1N1 pandemic, some of the most affected Canadian reserves requested medical and prevention supplies to no avail. Instead, body bags were sent to four of these Manitoba First Nation Reserves, in what felt like a clear symbol of disregard (Driedger 2013, 2-3). Considering the past outcomes for and treatment of Native nations during pandemics, the need for community-based and culturally specific risk reduction in the current COVID-19 pandemic is paramount.

Dissemination Through Social Media

While a review of the literature has established that effective public health communication to Native communities must be culturally specific and community-based, the question remains: what is the most effective strategy for dissemination of such information? As the world becomes increasingly globalized and technologically savvy, the use of social media to spread information and awareness has become commonplace, and Indian Country is no exception. A 2009 report from *Native Public Media* analyzing adults from over 120 Tribal Nations in 28 states indicates that American Indian / Alaska Native adults use media technologies at a higher rate than the national average (Craig Rushing and Stephens 2011, 136). Based on international trends of increased social media and technology use and proficiency among younger generations, it is likely that this high rate of media use is extended among Native youth. In their 2011 research, Craig Rushing and Stephens conducted a survey of 371 Native youth between 13 and 21 years of age from the Pacific Northwest. Consistent with this prediction, 87% of survey respondents indicated having a social media profile such as MySpace or Facebook (Craig Rushing and Stephens 2011, 139). Where Craig Rushing and Stephens' survey is particularly relevant to the study at hand, is their analysis of online health information-seeking behaviors of respondents. They found that 76% of survey respondents used the Internet to find information on at least one of the listed health topics (Craig Rushing and Stephens 2011, 141). Additionally, many survey respondents indicated the desire for online health information to

> "A lot of people don't read papers anymore and they tend to gravitate toward places like Facebook and Instagram, and Twitter. So, just to get more people exposed to my work I'll put it on these mediums."
>
> -Marty Two Bulls, Oglala Lakota
> December 2020 Interview

contain visual elements such as pictures (50%) and videos (46%) (Craig Rushing and Stephens 2011, 141). Lastly, the majority of those surveys were in favor of youth health websites containing information specifically for Native communities, indicating a desire for culturally relevant health messaging and education (Craig Rushing and Stephens 2011, 141).

While Craig Rushing and Stephens assert that their results are not generalizable beyond Native youth in the Pacific Northwest, they signify general trends that are relevant to our consideration of COVID-19 messaging in Native communities. Firstly, the survey indicates that Native populations are active Internet and social media users, especially Native youth. Second, the results suggest that social media and the Internet is a viable medium for promoting health information to Native communities. Lastly, these data suggest that this online messaging is considered especially effective when containing visual and culturally specific elements. All of these findings suggest the ability of the seven artists featured in this thesis to have significant reach by posting their visual COVID-19 works on the internet.

"I'm just an artist cranking out images and I and I share them on my channel on Instagram and I'm lucky that my channel continues to grow at this moment. And so I am consciously trying to make aware those folks who follow me and I have like a great deal of nonnative folks who follow me who told me that they have learned from my work. So, I think that that's my like, it's like, I don't, I'm not a teacher. I'm lucky that I get to go and visit classes and talk to them about Indigenous stuff but like I kind of feel like my Instagram is in that way like a class and if people are paying attention they can come and see the pretty art, but then through that engagement with me and learning about me as a person, they'll also learn about Indigenous issues as well."

-Steph Littlebird Fogel, Chinuk, Kalapuyan, Grande Ronde Confederation, December 2020 Interview

Beyond examples relating specifically to healthcare, social media has been a powerful force for organizing activists around myriad social justice issues facing Indian Country. For example, following the recent craze surrounding the Gen Z

favorite social media app TikTok, Indigenous youth of the Gwich'in Steering Community of Alaska and Canada have garnered the support of five million TikTok users in their fight against proposed disruptions to the area's sacred Porcupine caribou herd land (Press Pool 2021). The awareness spread on the social networking platform has rippled into action, where over five million letters opposing the oil drilling in this region of the Arctic will be delivered to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Press Pool 2021). Another Indigenous cause spanning millions of users on apps such as Twitter was the push to elect Laguna Pueblo U.S. Representative Deb Haaland as the Secretary of the Interior for the incoming Biden cabinet. The U.S. Department of the Interior, which houses the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has never previously had a Native individual in the head Secretary position (Chavez 2020). In mid-December 2020 celebrities, activists, government officials, and everyday citizens alike took to social media in what was deemed "Deb for Interior week," posting hashtags and visuals in support of Rep. Haaland (Chavez 2020). Examples can be seen in the following figures.

Figure 4: Tweet by @lakotalaw on 12/16/2020

Figure 5: Tweet by @Ben_Inskeep on 12/17/2020 following the nomination of Rep. Haaland.

Figure 6: Tweet by @thegoodcarmah on 12/10/2020. From Indian Country Today, Chavez, 2020 - https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/internet-declares-deb-for-interior-week-bnqbA7l50kCC-lMF0gOsPQ

Figure 7: Tweet by actor @MarkRuffalo on 12/10/2020.

Figures 4 – 6 provide examples of the humor and meme style common to the promotion of social issues on the Internet. Figure 7 speaks to the potential reach of social justice awareness on the Internet with the use of large celebrity and public figure platforms. Hollywood actor Mark Ruffalo's Tweet of a Hollywood Reporter article on celebrity female support for Rep. Haaland gained ninety retweets and over one thousand likes.

These examples, land rights protection in the Arctic Refuge and supporting Rep. Haaland for Interior Secretary, are just two of many cases that illustrate the potential reach and impact of using social media and the Internet to spread awareness surrounding Indigenous issues. This

suggests that the use of social media outlets for disseminating COVID-19 public health information to Native communities has immense promise and should be pursued. In this thesis, I highlight specific artists, organizations, and Tribal governments that have used social media and the Internet to circulate vital safety and empowerment messaging to their communities during the pandemic.

Visual Sovereignty

"Indigenous Communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is a fundamental right, that is, to represent ourselves." – Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* 1999.

Native peoples have long been misrepresented in the public American eye as cartoonish and savage sports mascots, bumbling "Tontos" in classic Westerns, angry drunks, and erroneous Pocahontas princesses.[3] In addition to inaccurate depictions, complete erasure of Native peoples and stories is just as pervasive in popular culture and beyond. In a recent example, ABC Network's hit show 'Big Sky' has been

[3] Images shown in this paragraph are of pro sports team Native American mascots, Disney's Pocahontas, and Tonto from the remade Disney and original "The Lone Ranger" TV show and film. Images from: https://archeroracle.org/32504/opinion/oped-nativeamericanmascotry/, https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1063452-pocahontas, and https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-lone-ranger-remake-thrusts-tonto-into-the-spotlight/ respectively.

criticized by Indigenous leaders and activists for portraying a storyline about two white girls who go missing in Montana, while the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women abounds in Montana, let alone the whole country (Elber 2020). A November 17, 2020 letter sent to ABC producers, signed by many including the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, labels this failure to represent an Indigenous trauma through an appropriate Indigenous lens as "at best, cultural insensitivity, and at worst, appropriation," (Elber 2020). Authors of the letter solely hoped ABC to include on-screen access to educational information regarding this grave phenomenon faced daily by Indigenous women (Elber 2020).

Dominant-culture control over Native images has been prevalent since the 1800s. Osage photographer, filmmaker, and co-founder of the 1491's comedy group Ryan Redcorn uses photography to combat these deep-rooted visual depictions and regain ownership over Native narratives. After the Osage Nation became one of the wealthiest worldwide communities due to the 'discovery' of oil on their land, non-Native photographers took portraits of Osage women, which were sold to white men who would subsequently marry the women to kill them and their families for money (Redcorn 2018). Redcorn describes this lasting legacy of settler photography in a 2018 article for the Washington Post:

> To this day, non-Native photographers are sent to Native communities to "document." The relationship between Indigenous people and non-Native photographers is at best strained, and at worst, gratuitous, invasive, repulsive and deceitful. America loves photos of Indians (usually old photos), but everyone loses when the country sees and hears only images and stories that reinforce disappearance, poverty, silencing and voyeuristic othering of our ways (Redcorn 2018).

In an effort to reclaim Indigenous community photos, Redcorn has traveled to 48 of 50 states, engaging in collaborative and reciprocal relationships with Native portrait subjects (Redcorn 2020). Of the portraits of women from his own Osage community Redcorn writes, "My collaborative approach for these portraits respects the person, the space, the voice and the time the photo is being taken. Through this lens, these women's voices and values emerge. These values have always been central to the Osage community. They carry with them respect, generosity, fairness, adaptation, prayer and humor," (Redcorn 2018).

For Redcorn, this process of image reclamation is an endeavor into visual sovereignty. In an interview for a 2020 *Indian Country Today* Newscast, Redcorn says on this topic:

> A lot of times as Indian people we're, we have to take a defensive stance against images that are made about us and not with us. And I think when you become an author of content, whether that's films or it's books, whether that's photography whether that's design, you're taking the things that your community has taught you and you're placing them into maybe a medium that wasn't around when those concepts were maybe brought forward and people who've decided to carry them forward. And I think when I talk about visual sovereignty I'm talking about being

> in control over our own image and uh images, the narrative that surrounds the lives that we lead, the way that people, you know a lot of times like I said they talk about us and not with us and so you know that really affects the way that our lives are when we're not, when we're subjected to the outside world. And any amount of authoring of images that we have that we take place, it really serves to create a perimeter of content that the rest of the country can absorb and that makes it easier on all of us…as more and more of our people join these fields and start to take up space. I think taking up space is really, really important for Native people in this arena, and in any arena really (Redcorn 2020).

In regards to taking up literal space, Redcorn created four 10-foot portraits of Indigenous individuals in 2019, which he views as having the power to fundamentally change the ways in which non-Natives perceive Indigenous peoples (Redcorn 2020).

Like for Redcorn, the journey of visual sovereignty for many other artists and scholars is about representing Natives how they wish to be seen, decolonizing visual art and photography practices, and reclaiming Indigenous narratives. For Tuscarora scholar and writer Jolene Rickard, visual sovereignty is all about direct action (Rickard 2017). Following in the active footsteps of her grandfather Chief Clinton Rickard who traveled to Geneva's League of Nations in 1923 to fight for the sovereignty of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as separate from Canada and the US, Rickard took action by joining the Native Indian Inuit Photographers Association (NIIPA) in 1985 (Rickard, 2017). Similar to Redcorn, Rickard and her fellow NIIPA members used photography in an act of "consciously deconstructing the colonizing gaze," (Rickard 2017).

In his 2018 lecture at Colorado College entitled "Indigenous Identity and Existence: Fighting Erasure and Racism," Gregg Deal -- one of the artists to be featured in depth in later

chapters of this thesis -- uses the example of headdress imagery to highlight the visual erasure of Native peoples in this country. Deal notes that although there are 567 federally recognized tribes, approximately 300 more non-federally recognized tribes, and over 300 traditional languages, only around twelve of these tribes traditionally wear headdresses (Deal 2018). He says, “And yet, that is quintessentially what we are,” in the eyes of mainstream Americans (Deal 2018). In one of his characteristic performance pieces called *The Last Indian on Earth,* Deal filmed people’s reactions as he walked around in stereotypical Indigenous visual presentation in his Rickard-esque *action* toward reclamation of Indigenous imagery. Through discussion of Native American sports mascots, Deal eloquently captures the phenomena in place that motivate counteracting acts of visual sovereignty:

> This is about erasure. This is about an image of a group of people that doesn’t actually represent that group of people. And by having these images exist in popular culture, they take away our very existence, the diversity of that existence, and the ability for us to even proclaim that this is not correct and that this is not right, that this is not who we are. Because ultimately, we don’t own our image. As we try to self-identify, as we try to connect to our homelands, our languages, our traditions, and our ceremonies, we are not being given quarter in this country to identify ourselves…because we, even though I’m standing right in front of you, don’t exist (Deal 2018).

These highlights of Indigenous voices on visual sovereignty, coupled with the earlier discussion of Native health disparities, speak to the need for Indigenous-created visual responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the statistics presented in the introductory chapter, it is clear that the federal government and healthcare systems are not appropriately protecting Native

nations. It is thus important, based on necessity, sovereignty, and empowerment that Indigenous Nations take action in protecting their own communities from this deadly pandemic. In an *Indian Country Today* interview with Patty Talahongva, Dean Seneca, a career public health professional who is a member of the Seneca Nation of Indians, said “That's the one thing that I've been promoting all along, is that our tribal governments protect our own people. And that is something I've been promoting. We can do this work for ourselves. I feel like many of our tribal nations don't give our own citizens and our own people credit,” (Seneca 2020). For the best success in spreading awareness of safety practices and maintaining a sense of community, this internal protection should include visual modes of communication. Creating and disseminating visual COVID-19 messaging, both by independent artists and Tribal governments, is a means of reclaiming ownership over Native narratives and shining a light on the existence of Indigenous Nations and people, and their concerns. Now that I have presented the historical, cultural, and political context in which this project is situated, the following chapter will discuss the methods of original research collection employed in this study.

Chapter III - Methods

Building on the work of those who have studied effective public health communication and visual sovereignty in Native nations discussed in the previous chapter, my intention for this project was to center Indigenous voices through their visual work and dialogue, in order to shed light on communication and art by and for Native communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following data tables present the various data collection techniques that were used in hopes of addressing the following questions introduced in Chapter 1:

- How can Native artists contribute to larger public health communication campaigns through their own work?
- What role does social media play in spreading visual COVID-19 communication?
- What elements make this visual material most compelling and effective?

Table 2: Number of interview hours conducted, categorized by interview type

Type of Interview	Number of Interviews	Number of Hours
Artist	7	3.0
Public Health Official	2	1.72
Total	9	4.72

Table 3: Interviewee information[4]

Type of Person	Name	Tribe	Time
Artist	Blanche Isfeld-Chief	Oji-Cree	15 minutes
Artist	Arlo Iron Cloud	Diné, Oglala Lakota	26 minutes
Artist	Chad Yellowjohn	Shoshone-Bannock, Spokane	20 minutes
Artist	Marty Two Bulls	Oglala Lakota	33 minutes
Artist	Steph Littlebird Fogel	Chinuk, Kalapuyan, Grande Ronde Confederation	35 minutes
Artist	Gregg Deal	Pyramid Lake Paiute	25 minutes
Artist	Danielle Seewalker	Hunkpapa Lakota	26 minutes
Public Health Professional	Did not wish to be named – responses not included		24 minutes, Informal, not recorded
Public Health Professional	Dr. Jane Halpern	N/A	37 minutes

[4] All artist names listed are the actual names of interviewees, for which consent was provided under Emory IRB Study #IRB00001321.

Public Health Professional	Dean Seneca	Seneca	42 minutes

Table 3: Distribution of Images

Artist or Organization or Tribe	**Name**	**# of Images**
Artist	Arlo Iron Cloud	6
Artist	Blanche Isfled	1
Artist	Chad Yellowjohn	14
Artist	Danielle SeeWalker	3
Artist	Gregg Deal	1
Artist	Marty Two Bulls	9
Artist	Steph Littlebird Fogel	1
Tribe	Navajo Nation	2
Tribe	Oglala Sioux Nation	1
Tribe	Seneca Nation	3
Organization	IllumiNative	5
Organization	Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health	3
Organization	Urban Indian Health Institute	2
Total		**51**

Table 4: Distribution of Images

Methodology

After receiving Emory IRB approval, I began searching for Indigenous artists creating visual work related to COVID-19. This search took place entirely on the web and through social media, predominantly through Instagram and Facebook. An initial internet search led me to an *Indian Country Today* article entitled "Native Artists Lend Skills to COVID-19 Campaigns." The article highlights four Native artists creating COVID-centered artwork. I searched for these artists on social media and sent those creating work relevant to my project a direct message (DM), asking if they'd be willing to speak with me about their art. Some artists were also contacted through email or "contact me" pages on artist websites if this contact information

could be found through their social media pages. From the initial artists' Instagram pages, I identified other artists that they followed creating relevant work and contacted them as well. Some artists were identified by their promotion on social media through Tribal twitter accounts, nonprofit websites, and Facebook marketplace pages. In total 29 individual artists were contacted. The following Instagram DM, written with Dr. Vidali, was modified slightly based on each artist:

> *Hi _____, I saw some of your powerful COVID-related artwork on your Instagram page. Would you be open to talking with me about it? I am talking to a range of Native artists about their approaches and influences, for my senior honors thesis at Emory University and I'm hoping that I can feature some of the artist's stories and artwork (with permission) in an article that I am writing. The conversation would take about 15 minutes. Thank you so much for considering this!*
> *Margot*

In addition to artists, Native organizations and nonprofits who had promoted/posted visual COVID-19 art or artwork were contacted via email, Instagram DM, and website "contact me" pages. Seven nongovernmental organizations were contacted in total.

Native public health officials, and public health workers who have experience with Native communities, were contacted via email through the personal networks of Dr. Vidali and me. Dr. Vidali kindly reached out to her relevant contacts via email, and introduced me to them with their permission and agreement to help with my project. Public Health officials were given the option to have a casual conversation or a more formal recorded interview based on their personal preference. They were also provided the option of using a pseudonym.

Interview Methodology

After connecting with artists and public health officials via social media, a mutual time was agreed upon for a semi-structured Zoom interview. Before conducting each recorded interview, research participants were read an IRB approved script for oral consent, gaining permission to use their recorded responses in the written findings. Zoom interviews were recorded to the cloud and thus stored in my password-protected Emory Zoom account. Interviews ranged from 15 to 37 minutes. Seven artist interviews and two public health professional interviews were conducted and recorded. One informal non-recorded zoom interview was conducted. One informal phone conversation was conducted with a public health professional. Another public health professional participated in both an informal Zoom chat and a recorded Zoom interview. Zoom audio transcripts were reformatted in Microsoft Word and cross-checked with video recordings to ensure accuracy. Interview transcripts were qualitatively annotated in Microsoft Word using font color and comments, and categorized under the following key words and themes:

- coping
- humor
- traditional elements
- community
- language
- sovereignty
- responsibility
- relations
- social media
- representation / empowerment / visibility

- healthcare
- environment / land
- visual
- communication
- biographical information

Each semi-structured interview contained a set of prepared questions in addition to specific follow-up questions and unique prepared questions relating to the specific works of the individual artists and experiences of the public health professionals. A full list of sample interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

While the use of Zoom was very convenient for conducting interviews in the difficult time of COVID-19 social distancing and travel restrictions, an essential element of interviewing was lost in this virtual space. The experience of shared physical space of in-person interviews levels the playing field between researcher and research participant that cannot be replicated when separated by a screen and hundreds of miles. Abbe McCarter, author of a 2019 Emory honors thesis entitled *Windows Into the Lived Experiences and Health Consequences of Food Insecurity on the Cattaraugus Reservation: Implications for Indigenous Peoples' Food Sovereignty,* speaks to the value in the physical aspects of conducting semi-structured research interviews:

> When the aforementioned respondent described binge eating and the addictive nature of foods, instead of making the narrative seem concerning, the respondent made an effort to get the interviewer to laugh, and to bond over the humor instead of more deeply addressing the issue. This was a common occurrence throughout the interviews, often paired, as it was in the previous case, with hand gestures

complementing the verbal humor in another way to divert serious attention (McCarter 2019, 71).

While some amount of rapport-building is preserved through Zoom, the small square that each interviewee occupies acts as a barrier to observing how they inhabit their environment and interact with the world through their gestures and physical presence. In addition to interviews, McCarter also conducted interactive plate map analyses with people on and around the Cattaraugus Reservation. On this experience McCarter notes, "Though the 'results' are not 'conclusive,' they allow for a better look into the subconscious conversations participants had with themselves regarding healthy eating habits. Other methods, such as interviews, tend to minimize these natural side conversations given the rigid and sometimes cold connection between strangers," (McCarter 2019, 65). Not only do virtual interviews add physical space to the already existing emotional space between researchers and respondents, they also prevent natural observations of subtle interactions with other individuals and the environment that are highly valued in ethnographic research.

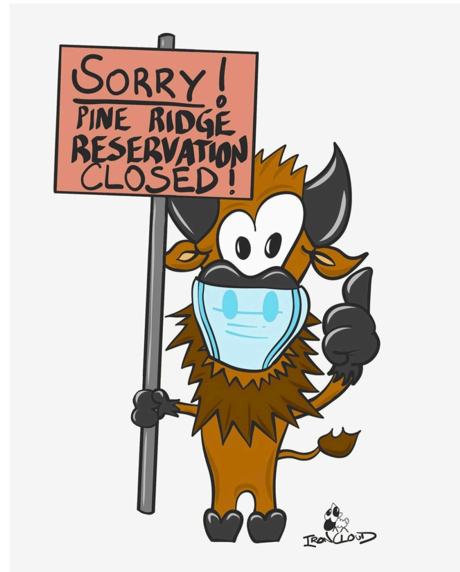
Chapter IV - Artist Biographies / Narratives

Many aspects of qualitative, ethnographic data collection have been affected and complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Without the ability to be physically within a community with word of mouth and face-to-face interactions, making connections with Indigenous artists – specifically those creating work related to the pandemic – was exponentially difficult. I scoured through Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, sent messages on many artist "contact me" website pages, posted in Indigenous artisan Facebook groups, asked for

names through personal networks, and more. After contacting close to thirty independent artists and countless Indigenous artist and activist organizations, I was met with limited enthusiasm. Many people were initially interested but stopped responding when I asked to schedule a time to chat and many more never responded at all. I can't fault any individual for this. People are facing unimaginable hardships and work demands in the face of the pandemic. Participating in research with a random stranger is understandably not comfortable, especially when contacted informally through a direct message on social media. Native nations and peoples have been historically taken advantage of by white researchers.

Thus, I am unimaginably grateful to the seven artists who took time from their busy schedules to participate in an interview with me. More so than that, I am truly appreciative of the candor, thoughtfulness, and vulnerability that each of these individuals brought to our conversations. Without them, my words would not hold meaning. I was greatly worried about the inability to build rapport and the awkwardness inherent to talking to someone for the first time over Zoom. However, all of these interviewees spoke with ease, shared personal stories, and answered each of my questions with care. I hope for this chapter to present a representative snapshot of the creative, insightful, and passionate artists from which I had the honor to learn. The seven people are Arlo Iron Cloud, Blanche Isfled, Chad Yellowjohn, Danielle SeeWalker, Gregg Deal, Marty Two Bulls, and Steph Littlebird Fogel

Arlo Iron Cloud[5]



A self-proclaimed family man, Arlo Iron Cloud is a devoted husband and father of four from Rapid City, South Dakota. Living 90 miles outside of the Pine Ridge Reservation, Iron Cloud identifies as half Oglala Lakota and half Diné. In his roles at the tenured KILI Radio Station and *Lakota Country Times* newspaper of Pine Ridge, Iron Cloud is influential in providing communication to the members of his community. As the "Voice of the Lakota Nation," KILI Radio has been serving over 30,000 listeners across the Pine Ridge, Rosebud, and Cheyenne reservations for over three decades and continuously "seeks to preserve Native American culture and instill pride in the peoples' unique heritage," (KILI Radio). At KILI, Iron Cloud's responsibilities include early morning programming, website maintenance, and social media support (KILI Radio). At Lakota Times, "the only official legal South Dakota Indian newspaper located on Tribal Land," Iron Cloud is one of three correspondents (Lakota Times). In

[5] Interview conducted via Zoom on 11/30/2020 for 26 minutes

addition to his own work, Iron Cloud assists with his wife's business endeavors, which center around Lakota culture.

In his work as an artist, Iron Cloud notes that he does a lot of multimedia work. Perusing through his Instagram page reveals Iron Cloud's consistent cartoon-style work, which often contains traditional imagery such as buffalo, tepees, and Lakota language. Through his art and posting on social media, Iron Cloud hopes to "plant the seed" and get people to think. In our conversation, Iron Cloud mentioned that his work with KILI for 20 years has led him to be known as an authority figure in his community. He says he's known as "the communication person on the reservation." Thus, for fear of being ostracized by his people, Iron Cloud is careful in choosing which of his drawings and writings he chooses to publicize on social media. In addition to his own personal work and image, Iron Cloud holds this same sentiment when it comes to his work at both KILI and *Lakota Times*:

> For example, like when you have the ability, like we do on the Pine Ridge reservation, it's real easy to take that power and utilize it for your own personal desires and, you know, you'll notice that with national media. That's why nobody trusts national like MSNBC, Fox, you know, all the same, they just don't trust them anymore. Because they've have connections with personal endeavors with the message that they're trying to share that's really put a dent in it. And so, like, that's why it's real personal for me whenever like with our radio I keep telling our, our DJs and our staff that everything that you put out reflects upon us. Everything even your own social media feeds will reflect upon the radio station or Lakota Country Times so I always like, I have this little spiel that I have with each one of our employees and our volunteers and I just keep letting them know

> that it's, it's real important for you guys to understand that everything that you share everything that you put out is going to be an image for KILI radio or for Lakota Times. So that's why it's dangerous.

Through his work in the media and with art, Iron Cloud is passionate about bringing wider awareness to the conditions on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Iron Cloud has worked with major podcasts as well as radio and TV. He specifically noted his work in bringing attention to buffalo. Accordingly, one of Iron Cloud's Instagram posts from October of 2020 reads "Support the Return of the Buffalo! Go check out TankaFund.org," which is a nonprofit based in Kyle, South Dakota "on a mission to bring buffalo back to Indian Country [and to] direct funds from people like you who are stewards of the Earth, proponents of regenerative agriculture, and defenders of social justice to Native buffalo ranchers to support and sustain ranch planning, financing, and operations," (Tanka Fund). On the subject of bringing awareness to Pine Ridge Iron Cloud says, "And so it's real important for the rest of America to understand that there is a population of people that exists in the United States of America that are in very inadequate conditions and a lot of it has to do with the treatment and history of America. As much as I know it's going to take us to get up out of that hole that we're in right now, it's also, it also needs to be understood that we're here because of these reasons, not because we want to be here."

Blanche Isfeld-Chief[6]

Blanche Isfeld-Chief is an Oji-Cree woman from Fish River Reserve in Manitoba, Canada. Coming from humble beginnings filled with familial drug addiction, sexual exploitation, and residential school trauma, Isfeld-Chief ended up in the foster care system. Here she presents her narrative:

> I was born in a family with drug addiction and sexual exploitation and my mother was a residential school survivor but later on did die because of her addiction, which was a result direct result of residential schools. So unfortunately because I grew up, you know, seeing my mother living that lifestyle and we lived in a in a more impoverished part of the city in Winnipeg. So it was like, you know, we didn't see anything different. So what we saw is what we thought you know, this was our life, you know, as a kid what you see is what you become unless you've been told anything different. And we were never told anything different that this was wrong, or this wasn't the way of life. So like I said, my mother was sexually

[6] Interview conducted via Zoom on 11/30/2020 for 15 minutes

> exploited and addicted to drugs. So as I became a teenager, because well because of that I ended up in the foster care system. So I'm a part of the sixties scoop and through that, you know, I had endured my own trauma through going through similar experiences of my mother. And because I saw my mom live that lifestyle and I wasn't told otherwise that that wasn't the lifestyle I was to live, that I automatically thought that that was my fate which it ended up being so I became addicted to drugs for 10 years of my life. I'm now eleven years sober and it was I was addicted to crack cocaine and heroin. And so through that I had a few children and I had lost my everything I've lost nothing but the clothes on my back towards the end of it. I managed to get out. I have, you know, I talked about a lot about how that happens. And it was a lot of strength that was really hard, but I managed to get out and got my children back home with me.

Our conversation clearly highlighted Isfeld-Chief's curious and intellectual mind. Since becoming sober, Isfeld-Chief has put herself through school, earning a degree in Child and Youth Care from Red River college (Lucky Girl). She's currently working toward an Indigenous Studies degree at the University of Winnipeg (Lucky Girl). As a Child and Youth Care worker, Isfeld-Chief works with children going through similar life experiences to her own. Through her college certificate course with Ndinawe, a Winnipeg nonprofit for vulnerable children, Isfeld-Chief has been able to learn from and teach others based on her past.

When Isfeld-Chief isn't dedicating her time to serving children in need, she has found art and culture as a personal medium for healing and positive thinking. She primarily makes jewelry, using beadwork with birchbark porcupine quill antler-bone, and has recently started making Indigenous-patterned facemasks (Lucky Girl).

> So through life experience we're then able to get the education to then in turn help kids like ourselves. So that's kind of where I where I began my journey to living a good life and through that I was able to find ceremony and the traditional teachings to keep myself on a good path. And then I got in touch with my culture, which is beadwork and jewelry making stuff like that, which led me to my art …so through addiction you need to find things to help you like pos- you need to fill your life with positive things. So that's what I did was my jewelry and my art. If I ever got bored I would you know that's what I would do instead of thinking of bad thinking, such as going back to drugs. So my art like literally saved my life and helped carry me to where I am today.

Isfeld-Chief is dedicated to uplifting those around her and empowering her fellow First Nations peoples.

Chad Yellowjohn[7]

Chad “Lil Coyote” Yellowjohn hails from Ione, Washington and identifies as both Shoshone-Bannock and Spokane. A graduate of Santa Fe’s Institute for American Indian Arts, Yellowjohn has his Associates degree in Cinematic Arts with a Minor in Studio Arts (Lil Coyote). Yellowjohn identifies as a digital artist, filmmaker, illustrator, and performer – specifically grass dancing and hoop dancing. Yellowjohn’s bio on his website called “Lil Coyote Art” accurately reflects the persona that I had the pleasure of speaking with during our Zoom interview. His bio reads, “He is motivated to discover the means to promote optimistic activism or “protecting” through his creative talents, … has the admiration to spread happiness through art, and hopes to give YOU laughter with his skills,” and that he plans to “spread inspiration and awareness of the issues Indigenous People face today,” (Lil Coyote). Through his Masked Dancer series created during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Yellowjohn intended to do just that. As a Northerner who spent time studying in New Mexico’s Pueblo territory,

[7] Interview conducted via Zoom on 12/1/2020 for 20 minutes

Littlejohn was exposed to new cultural traditions and ways of thinking. His Masked Dancer series, which consists of illustrations of mask-clad individuals from multiple different cultures, captures Yellowjohn's intertribal curiosity and desire to bring awareness to Indigenous issues such as the disproportionate effects of coronavirus in these communities. Yellowjohn insightfully noted the cultural awareness that his work has already spread, simply evidenced by our conversation about it. "But also just, you know, this is almost like we're facing another genocide, but it's not intention, really, you know, genocide. And, so yeah, I definitely believe that it spreaded awareness and also cultural awareness also as we wouldn't be having this conversation."

When creating art, Yellowjohn prefers hand drawn sketches over digital illustrations and has a keen attention for detail. When I asked how the Masked Dancer series fits into his larger body of work as an artist, Yellowjohn replied, "one of the things that stick in my head is like the smallest detail makes it can make the biggest difference though. I like to give people something to look at and to have them look at it for good minutes to notice small details and so with these dancers, I was able to put a lot of detail in it and also get people to some something to look at but also appreciate you know for Indigenous communities." His Instagram bio even reads "The smallest detail, makes the biggest difference." When asked whether the Masked Dancers were created digitally Yellowjohn said:

> I would choose hand drawn sketches over digital art any day just because it's more rich and also I can't undo it. You know, like I have to be very careful. And I like to just like like look at him like, wow, you did not mess up once. But even if I do like, there have been many times, like where I went over a line and then I have to, like, cover it and it's kind of it kind of gives me like I've made it makes me

> feel proud that I can like overcome certain mistakes, you know, and for digital art, anybody can mess up and they can just erase it, or go over it. So yeah. But digital art. It's there. And I don't I don't think I'd ever Choose digital art over over hand drawn sketches.

In addition to his passion for spreading intertribal Indigenous awareness, Yellowjohn's inherent creative and curious nature was also apparent to me during our conversation. I could tell that Yellowjohn's wheels were constantly turning as he thought about his next creation. In our discussion of digital versus hand drawn art from the previous paragraph, Yellowjohn began to wonder what a digital version of this series might look like and noted that he might try one out on his iPad. At another point in our conversation when I asked about his work bringing awareness to the difficult COVID-19 circumstances in many Native communities he responded, "Yeah, should definitely bring in awareness and yeah, that just clicked through my head because like when that guy came up came to my comments like talking about, you know, like he doesn't need to because he's too proud to wear a mask, and I think it'd be good to be illustrated for an elder and be next. Like I know like when we're wearing masks we're kind of like protectors for our elders and also our children."

Danielle Seewalker[8]

[9]

Danielle SeeWalker identifies as a Húnkpapha Lakhóta enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe in North Dakota, and currently resides in Denver, Colorado. Since joining Denver's vibrant art scene three years ago, SeeWalker has immersed herself in community projects such as with local museums. SeeWalker has a large repertoire of artistic skills ranging from multimedia painting and large-scale mural work to traditional leather and beading practices. In addition to her visual artwork and full-time job with a Fortune 500 Company, SeeWalker is also an activist and writer, and recently published her first book entitled "Still Here: A Past to Present Insight to Native American People and Culture," in 2020 (SeeWalker, Red Road Project).

Through her roles as the Denver American Indian Commission's commissioner and co-founder of the Red Road Project, SeeWalker is committed to promoting visibility and taking action for modern issues facing Native communities. The Red Road Project, created by SeeWalker and friend Carlotta Cardana in 2013, operates under the following mission:

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[8] Interview conducted via Zoom on 1/12/2021 for 26 minutes.
[9] Image from SeeWalker's Instagram account, @seewalker_art, posted on 12/3/2020

> To document, through words and visuals, the inspiring and resilient stories of Native America. These stories, not often told, highlight people that are doing positive things to help their communities prosper. More often than not, we hear a non-Native narrative reporting what indigenous American culture *is* or *represents* and this sometimes leads to misconceptions and fueling of negative connotation. With the vast and complicated historical trauma that tribal people have had to endure for centuries, our intention is to re-direct that conversation. It is important that *The Red Road Project* is a platform for Native American people to tell their stories of the past, present, and future through their own voice and words. We believe that Indigenous knowledge and teachings can also suggest solutions to the issues we are facing collectively as humans – now more so than ever (Red Road Project).

In this same spirit of the Red Road Project, I hope for this thesis, specifically in this and the following chapters, to center the voices of Indigenous individuals through their own dialogue and perspectives.

SeeWalker's varied works of art are united by her traditional Lakota influence and love of a bright color palette. She often finds inspiration for her visual works from handwritten letters, archive images of Lakota and other plainspeople, and the flora and sounds of the prairie (Cousins 2020). She mentioned to me that her own culture informs a lot of her work, including themes such as "nature, the way people dress, the symbols, the clothing." We focused our conversation specifically on SeeWalker's most recent mural, completed this past fall for the Denver American Indian Center. She painted her first mural project last summer as a collaboration with artist R0melle for the first annual installment of Babe Walls, a celebration of female artists, (Urzua

2020). She described how she was "itching" to do another mural after her Babe Walls project, and how she relished the opportunity to have full creative control over her solo project on the "fabulous blank empty walls" of the Denver American Indian Center. SeeWalker's newly found addiction to murals was apparent. Since completing the DAIC mural at the end of 2020, SeeWalker has been working on another mural at the Four Winds American Indian Council. In our interview, SeeWalker spoke to the power that she's found in the art of murals. "It's definitely got me wanting to do more murals, because I'm realizing just how impactful it can be when you have your art in a very public space like that, especially when it has targeted populations. It can be absolutely impactful. I think historically, I always thought, you know, murals are, you know beautiful, and it's just for everybody and anybody, but man when it comes to like being very specific on the location and what you're portraying it can definitely have a bigger impact than you think." Ultimately, creating art is a means of bringing attention to Indigenous voices and concerns, as well as a personal medicine for SeeWalker.

Gregg Deal[10]

[11]

Gregg Deal is a self-proclaimed "full time artist and also an indigenous person who sometimes gets called an activist too." Born in Tennessee and raised in Utah, Deal is a Pyramid Lake Paiute citizen. After 17 years in Washington, D.C., Deal has spent the past five years living in Colorado where he creates work in a variety of mediums including print work, murals, painting, performance art, and film. Deal's visual and activist work has been widely recognized and featured in the news and television such as the National Geographic Society Magazine, PBS, "The Daily Show", and Totally Biased with Kamau Bell," (Wikipedia 2020). Deal has served as the Artist-in-Residence at the Denver Art Museum and UC Berkeley, and has had speaking engagements at high-profile institutions such as Dartmouth College, Columbia University, Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, and the Denver Art Museum

[10] Interview conducted via Zoom on 12/15/2020 for 25 minutes.
[11] Commission for Amplifier Art posted on Deal's Instagram account, @greggdeal, posted on 10/12/2020

(Wikipedia 2020). Deal's activist work centers on combatting Indigenous stereotypes, notably the Native American mascot controversy through his work with the #changethename movement (Wikipedia 2020).

Visually, some of Deal's main influences, ranging from DC street artists to Indigenous artists, include James Luna, 181HKS, Ultra, Con, Maz Paz, GIANT, REVOK, TWIST, Shepard Fairey, Jaque Fraqua, Ernesto Yerena, Nani Chacon, Cheyenne Randall, and Jared Yazzie (Wikipedia 2020). In regards to his artistic style Deal says:

> A lot of this work along with much of my print work is sort of based on a graphical set of ideas that have just existed for a long time. One of the reasons why there's like a color separation or a limited color palette was back before digital printing when you're doing offset printing and printing presses, you had a limited set of colors. So you can see in old propaganda posters from Communist Russia or from Cuba or even Mexico or China, all of which almost all of which have some sort of communist undertone. But that sort of that sort of propagandist style is based on a limited color palette due to the limitations of machinery that are creating work of that timeframe. So it's not a new style at all. It's been popularized by Shepard Fairey but it is a style that every good designer has a grasp on a sort of color separation limited palette design that still can work in the pushing in the pulling of lights and darks and you know everything else like artistically conceptual. I did that because the nature of the Amplifier Foundation, who I was commissioned to do this for had uh they do a lot of that work sort of based upon those old principles of artists that they've worked with like Shepard Fairey and like Ernesto Yerena or Thomas Wimberley. These are people that are

> sort of mainstays within their sort of poster propaganda art process, and that's something that I've also participated in. So to me that's that's the most accessible style wise for me to create and not necessarily easy but something I'm certainly used to doing within my own work.

In our conversation, Deal was hesitant to identify with the "activist" label that he's received through his art and political work. When I asked him about this characterization of his work he said:

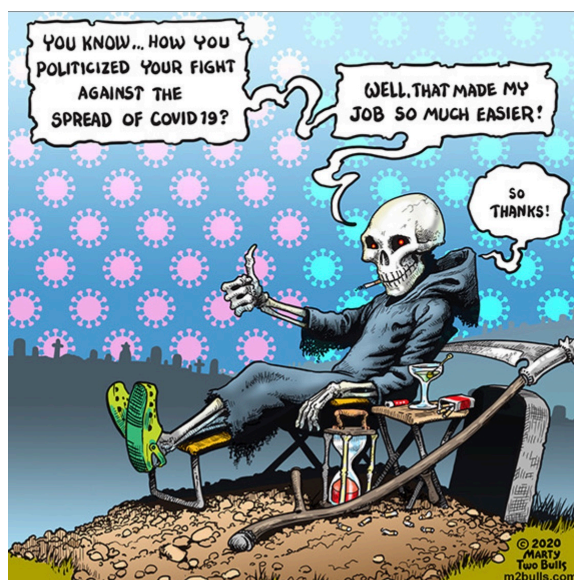
> It's a strange slippery slope of being a person of color or being a person from a marginalized group that's articulating something and that articulation is immediately assumed to be activism because of the shade of my skin because of the community I belong to, because whatever. And so it's it's a strange place. I say, you know, "activism." I'll use air quotes because honestly, what one person calls an activist another might call an adult with an opinion. And it just so happens that I have a medium and sort of a voice and a platform to be able to put that stuff out there. So I don't know that it's necessarily any different than than what anybody else thinks I think there's probably plenty of people that, you know, have the same message that that I have, but that maybe I'm able to articulate in a way that it's accessible to a larger amount of people.

Like other artists working in a similar style, Deal hopes that his work will boldly share information about the issues at hand. "Most of the work that I've been doing just makes a statement and then people can align that statement with whatever and I think you can see the same thing with Thomas Wimberley, Shepard Fairey, Ernesto Yerena like there's sort of broader statements that are sort of meant to fall in line with that sort of propagandist style. That can just

simply help to inform other issues that are already out there with other information that's already out there. "

Deal ultimately speaks to his well-intentioned motivations as an artist. "I think I don't know a big a big focus of mine is to create work that sort of falls in line with the integrity of my own thoughts, my own voice, and the work that I do is ultimately meant to provide for my family and you know keep a roof over our heads. So I don't create work to be famous. I don't create work you know, to, to be the guy, I'm creating work and it sort of falls within either feeding my family or fitting within the realm of the integrity of my work and voice since associated with it."

Marty Two Bulls[12]



Cartoonist Marty Two Bulls Sr. is an Oglala Lakota tribal member and landowner originally from the Rapid City and Pine Ridge areas of South Dakota, currently residing in Santa Fe, New Mexico. After graduating from the Colorado Institute of Art in Denver, Two Bulls got a

[12] Interview conducted via Zoom on 12/2/2020 for 33 minutes.

job at a local Rapid City TV station, thus beginning his extensive career in media and journalism. Next, Two Bulls worked in commercial printing as a graphic designer for the University of South Dakota and later graphics editor for the *Rapid City Journal* and then for the *Sioux Falls Argus Leader* (Herb Block Foundation). In commercial printing Two Bulls spent thirteen years in daily newspapers and between 10-20 in weeklies. After returning to school and earning his BFA, Two Bulls focused on fine arts and gallery work. Throughout his varied career, his production of political cartoons has remained a constant. Since 2001 Two Bulls has created cartoons for the *Indian Country Today* Media Network (Herb Block Foundation). Two Bulls' cartoons have appeared in *Lakota Country Times*, *Indian Country Today*, *Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Times*, *Cherokee One Feather*, and *News from Indian Country* (Herb Block Foundation).

Two Bulls' love for cartoons was born in his childhood from watching his uncles draw cartoons of each other:

> When, I was a kid, my uncles would draw cartoons of each other. I don't know if you know Two Bulls but we're artistic family so I have uncles and such who are artists who are professional artists and and I get nieces and nephews, who are artists and we tend to have a lot more members of our family as artists than most families, but any case when I was growing up, my uncles would draw each other and you know they'd draw them horseback riding or something, or something funny or, you know, and they laugh about it. I was a slow kid, you know these guys my uncles were, you know, they were in World War Two, big men, you know, they're cops are just see these guys that did things that we all looked up to so rodeo guys. So they're strong guys and you see them laughing and talking about these cartoons and it made me curious about that media. So I emulated that

> and did cartoons of my cousins and stuff kind of carried it forward but it seemed like I wanted to try to get, get my uncles to laugh try to impress them with my art you know and so growing up, I guess I always kept that in the back of my mind and studied cartoon. Cartooning is an art form on to its own has its own rules.

Just as Two Bulls was inspired by older artists in his youth, Marty has become a mentor to young artists in his community. In my interview with Arlo Iron Cloud, also Oglala Lakota, he suggested that I reach out to Two Bulls, one of his greatest mentors. Another of Two Bulls' mentees is his son, Marty Two Bulls Jr. In his bio, Two Bulls junior notes growing up in his first art instructor's studio, his father's (Marty Two Bulls Jr.). On the subject of his mentor status Two Bulls says "I mean you know I'm an older artist I just try to give advice to younger artists coming and try to help out wherever I can." Two Bulls developed and taught a graphic design curriculum to budding artists at Oglala Lakota College, which was taken over by his son and mentee when he left the area.

Two Bulls approaches his cartoon work, which often contains provocative political themes, with the intention of sharing his own perspective to native communities and beyond, as opposed to speaking for his people. "I learned a long time ago I'm not here to speak for all Indian people but I can speak *to* Native people as an artist, as Marty Two Bulls. And so what I try to do is see things through my point of view, you know, as a native artist, father, grandfather, you know, and then, then that's the only way I'm allowed to do it. And I'm not here to be a spokesman or to be a leader of any kind I just have a point of view that I think people share."

Steph Littlebird Fogel[13]

[14]

For Grande Ronde and Kalapuyan Oregon artist Steph Littlebird Fogel, art is all about bringing awareness to the contemporary Indigenous perspective and population. Fogel is a graduate of Portland's Pacific Northwest College of Art (Yehaw). Feeling privileged to have grown up in her tribe's homeland, Fogel creates work centered around her native culture, "I am an indigenous artist from Oregon my tribe is from Oregon as well. So I grew up sort of different than a lot of indigenous folks and I was lucky enough to sort of grow up in my traditional homelands. So a lot of my work revolves around native culture and native concerns."

In her characteristic spirit of positivity and kindness, Fogel participates in frequent collaborative work. Fogel recently served as the 2020 National Fellow for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), collaborating with California scientists to bring attention to the decline of Chinook salmon in California. Fogel has also participated in the yəhaw̓ Indigenous Creative Collective, whose mission "is to help improve Indigenous

[13] Interview conducted via Zoom on 12/4/2020 for 35 minutes.
[14] Image from Fogel's Instagram account, @artnerdforever, posted on 3/27/2020

mental and emotional health outcomes through art-making, community building, and equitable creative opportunities for personal and professional growth," (Yehaw). Fogel describes her work as "this intermediary between communities and trying to sort of share and collaborate." Other notable collaborations include work with the Oregon Bee Project, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the United States Postal Service (Five Oaks Museum). In addition to her visual work, Fogel is also a fulltime tech and marketing writer for Intel. She also writes freelance for the Oregon Arts Watch Magazine.

In many of her projects, past and presents, Fogel focuses on accurate contemporary representation of Native communities. For example, Fogel curated an exhibition for the Five Oaks Museum entitled *This is Kalapuyan Land,* in which she reclaimed the museum's often erroneous account of her tribe created more than 15 years ago. The following are excerpts from Fogel's article, *Decentering Whiteness in the Museum,* about *This is Kalapuyan Land,* demonstrating both her skill as a writer and her passion for decolonizing work:

> **This IS Kalapuyan Land** acts as both a museum exhibition title and land acknowledgement. It is also a declaration of perpetual stewardship by the Kalapuyan people. "We have always been here, we will always be here"…I used red sharpies to correct and strike language throughout the exhibition. Every red mark became an act of reclamation over our histories as Indigenous people," (Fogel 2020).

In a related endeavor, Fogel is writing about attempts to reclaim Indigenous objects from white institutions and museums in Oregon for one of her next projects. In the spirit of bringing awareness to contemporary Native concerns, a lot of Fogel's work contains themes of environmentalism and land stewardship. On this subject Fogel says:

> my motivation now is like I have to get people as an artist, that's my job, is to make people empathize with the land and to realize that if they empathize with the land they're empathizing with themselves and that if we can be tender with ourselves and with the land, man we could heal, we might be able to fix some of these things as opposed to, I think a lot of people see Indigenous folks as being like, oh, you guys are no fun, you know, you guys just want to conserve everything, you don't want to have any fun, you know, and it's like, here's the thing is that we can't have fun because it's all getting destroyed.

In the visual elements of her art, Fogel's color choices represent her consistent representation of modern Indigenous culture:

> So I think that people ask me a lot of time about my color uses like one of the first things just because I tend to be more bold with my palette choices. And so I always start by explaining that my palette choices are very much guided by contemporary indigenous culture. And if you go to if you go to a powwow today you will see what I mean. And that everybody is wearing bright neon signs and just like as much vibrancy as one I could ever process is at a powwow. It's just amazing the amount of colors there. And so for me, that's a way for me to give nod, and if you are familiar with indigenous beadwork in particular there are these gradients that are used, and there are always these specific pairings of color that happen in beadwork. And so my paintings use those pairings as well. And so if you're familiar with those visual codes and you're from the community, you will immediately be like, oh, I know, I know what you're doing. But, um, some people will be like, dang, you just use a lot of color.

Chapter V - Findings and Analysis

The goal of the findings chapter is to center voices of Native respondents in order to shed light on visual COVID communication and dissemination. This section will rely heavily on interview dialogue in order to amplify Indigenous voices on the subject of Indigenous practices and communities. This chapter will be organized into two sections. The first section will focus on insights from the interviews and the second will be a visual analysis of images. The first section will present the major themes identified by the qualitative annotation of artist and public health official interview data, primarily through interview quotes. In an effort to preserve the voices of the interview respondents, I have done little editing to their quotes. The dialogue thus reads in a conversational tone. The second section of the chapter will include my analysis of the interviewed artists selected works under the framework of the identified themes and presented artist insight, as well as analysis of visual materials posted by select Tribal organizations and governments to social media. Organizations/Tribes to be discussed include: Oglala Sioux Tribe Facebook page, Seneca Media and Communications Facebook page, Navajo Nation Department of Health's COVID website, IllumiNative, The Urban Indian Health Institute, and the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health. The analysis of these governments and organizations will be based off of selected visual infographics and posters that are publicly displayed on the web.

Themes from Artist Interviews

1. **Representation / Empowerment / Visibility**

One predominant theme across all of artist interviews was this concept of creating art in order to bring broad awareness to Indigenous issues, and further to empower Indigenous communities through this visual representation. This desire is deeply tied to the concept of visual sovereignty and reclaiming the presented narrative of Indigenous communities and issues discussed in chapter two. While the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a universal issue, the disproportionate rates of infection, hospitalization, death, and subsequent cultural loss in Indian Country make it a relevant Indigenous concern. By creating and publicizing art related to coronavirus in Native communities, artists are able to take ownership over the historically colonized and underserved processes of health and healing among Indigenous nations. For example, multiple artists noted that their COVID-related pieces were in response to the invisibility of Natives during and beyond the pandemic. In her *New York Times* opinion piece, Jodi Archambault writes of Tribal language loss, “I believe that if Americans knew what we’re facing, they would help us,” (Archambault 2021). In fact, Sietse Goffard, a public policy master’s student at Harvard’s Kennedy School taking a field research course on improving Native American living conditions said, “If I weren’t taking this class, perhaps because these issues are being under-covered by the media, I wouldn’t be aware of how much Native American populations are suffering because of the virus. Now I reflect about these issues a lot more, and I think how the federal government, state governments, and tribal governments can work together to address the crisis,” (Mineo 2020).

The production of COVID-19 art by Indigenous artists has the power to combat this invisibility. Here Littlebird Fogel talks about the gas-mask piece that she created while in an artist residency during the very beginning of the U.S. outbreak:

> So while I was there, I was very much making work in response to this this happening to me and to everyone around me, and then at that point, like the Navajo Nation was starting to see its infection rates going and then it was just like there's something about there's something about our community and it's invisibility that is like so difficult to articulate to people because it's invisible that, um, it takes so much to like get people to even come up to speed about who we are and our concerns.

Similarly, SeeWalker spoke to me about how her work in general serves to create awareness around the mere, often unseen, existence of contemporary Native peoples:

> Absolutely, um, a lot of my visual work as an artist is about taking the traditional forms and style of the Pacific Northwest tribes, which I belong, and bringing it into more of a contemporary form and a lot of that has to do with the conversation around indigenous people, which is that we've been erased in such a way that most people don't know we exist. And so I'm a lot of my work is about just saying, hey, we're still here. And we're facing all kinds of challenges and things of that nature, outside of just COVID, you know.

Here SeeWalker discusses some specific examples of works that she's does to bring awareness to contemporary Indigenous concerns:

> A lot of my work has a lot of messages or kind of is I use a lot of messaging. So a couple of my pieces recently had messaging geared toward and a theme geared toward some treaties that were broken so some to talk about that and kind of bring awareness to it. There was a piece I did last year that kind of focused around the Declaration of Independence and how even, you know, today it's still reads that

> natives, they call it natives as being savages, merciless Indian savages. So kind of bringing awareness to that, but it's still there's still a lot of injustices. And micro aggressions that occur within Indian country Native people that general Americans don't really realize or recognize or maybe even just don't know about. So a lot of my art is focused around around that.

Like SeeWalker, Littlebird Fogel uses her visual art to dispel the common myth that Native Americans are a historical concept confined to the past. Here she discusses her body of work overall as well as her gas mask piece featured in our conversation:

> I say oh yeah I mean every all the works that I make I'm very much focused on indigenous representation and so what I mean by that is that I grew up in a world that didn't depict indigenous people unless it was in a very particular way, and very much in the past. Right, so like Natives always exist in the past when we see them in movies. We never see natives as just like regular people next door and so for me representation is super important as an artist now because I'm like filling the gap that I had as a child really didn't have positive representation of indigenous women or indigenous people like I grew up my dad native he loved Western films. So I saw depictions of drunk Indians my entire life. So like I have to somehow as an artist like counterbalance all of this negative visibility. We have so little visibility that the visibility that we do have should be should be more intentional. And so in this representation to me is very much like more contemporary representation, right, because it's wearing a gas mask. So a gas mask is not something that you had in western era. And so it it very much brings

> indigeneity into culture today. And so that is an always a part of my work as well was that contemporariness.

Littlebird Fogel carries this awareness of Native invisibility into the grave circumstances facing her people during the pandemic:

> I think that um just awareness is a huge thing, right, like I mentioned before that that invisibility. People don't even know that a lot of people don't know that natives are a what would be considered like a at risk community for COVID they don't people don't understand that and they don't understand why, they don't understand why many people of color are at risk for COVID more so than people who have had historical access to healthcare their entire lives. I don't, I don't even have health care right now so as an indigenous person I am absolutely a part of that community that is at risk. And so I have had to quarantine myself militantly this year because I cannot afford to get sick. It would ruin me financially. So honestly like I am a living person who is affected by this in that way. And I also know people who have had it. I know indigenous folks who have died, you know, so like the, um, there is very much this idea that the purpose is just to be like, hey, we're still here. Again, it's like that message of like waving at people to like, hey, waving them down. I'm stuck on a side of the road, kind of thing. And that's how I feel about my work is that even just bringing us into the psyche is hugely important, because people aren't even aware. So yeah, it is it is intentional that the work is for Native people to feel represented but it's also a message to the people who empathize with me who follow my work. It's a message to them too, you know, and, and to like it's that thing again that I'm trying to make them connect

> themselves back to the land that they're, they're a part of it too. And so it's not just our responsibility.

SeeWalker's mural for the Denver Indian Center, which we discussed in our interview, is a powerful method of bringing wide-scale awareness to the effects of the pandemic on Indian Country that Littebird Fogel touched on above:

> I was specifically asked by the Denver Indian Center if we could do something around the COVID theme and as a way to bring more awareness to it. And they also wanted to tie it into doing press releases and having local news kind of focus on that with showing the mural. So it kind of brought awareness that way. Um, how it influenced folks, I'm not really sure directly, other than, you know, individuals reaching out to me personally, saying, wow, I saw that mural it's really, you know, touching it's so beautiful. I really appreciate it. But other than that, you know, just kind of bringing general awareness was how I measure it.

Yellowjohn was also able to spread awareness regarding the damage that COVID-19 has created in Native nations through his Masked Dancer illustration series:

> But also just, you know, this is almost like we're facing another genocide, but it's not intention, really, you know, genocide. And so yeah, I definitely believe that it spreaded awareness and also cultural, cultural awareness also as we wouldn't be having this conversation.

In addition to creating work to spread awareness, Littlebird Fogel views herself as a figure that represents this ongoing process of education and learning about Indigenous issues:

> Here's another thing that I think is always good to keep in mind about indigenous issues is that more than half the people in this country have never even met a

> native person. So if let alone have them as a best you know what I mean, like all of my besties, they know what's up because I've had to bring them up to speed, but they're lucky, they're lucky they have an Indian friend right. Whereas, not everybody does, half of this country doesn't even know an Indian let alone count one is a friend the fractional you know just keeps getting smaller. So, um, yeah. I think that's part of it too is like being someone that people can look to and identify and then and then learn from. I think that process takes time. And I can lure them in through the beauty of the art right.

As well as Littlebird Fogel and SeeWalker, Deal uses his art to create otherwise lacking visual dialogues that bring attention to Indigenous issues:

> I think that visual sovereignty that's really an interesting term and I guess I hadn't really thought about that. I mean these things sort of exist in space and and within that existence I also understand that once it leaves my hands I don't really have control over. And so if it blows up and turns into something else or if it doesn't go anywhere I mean, that's, that's something that I don't really have any control over. But I think that the thoughts that are put into works like this are really important drivers for helping to educate and helping to sort of create at least some sort of example of a visual dialogue that needs to happen in the middle of an issue that needs to be considered and educated and, you know, all that good stuff.

Through her homemade Indigenous-patterned masks, Isfeld-Chief is calling direct attention to the positive aspects of being a contemporary Indigenous individual:

> Even though there's still a lot of stigma and racism against indigenous people it is still a good time to be indigenous because we are coming out in such a different

> way and people are seeing us and people are hearing us more than they ever have before and to bring it out in as an indigenous made mask with indigenous pattern it's just it’s empowerment, really it's just like you know us come like rising from the ashes up you know like we can do anything everybody else can.

2. Visual Symbolism

“Indigenous work is so rich with the visual lexicon of symbols that are ancient yet have been contemporized.” – Jolene Rickard, 2020, “Indigenous Visual Sovereignty”

Another common theme discussed by many of the artists was the use of “traditional”[15] and tribal-specific symbolism and messaging in their work. One important point that I want to highlight here is the vast diversity of cultures, languages, customs, etc. practiced among the hundreds of Indigenous Nations of North America.[16] There is no one set of “traditional” symbols or references that will translate to effective messaging for all Indigenous Nations. In our interview, Dean Seneca noted that symbolism must be community-specific:

> But these things have to be developed from within, you know, a critical thing is the proper use of symbols, you know the dream catcher is not the universal

[15] The word “traditional” is used in quotation marks to signal that it is not being used to create a simple binary in which Native peoples are from the past and other are modern. Instead, it is meant to denote the deep culturally and ancestral ties of visual imagery employed by many of the artists. Representation of traditions and authenticity are at play within the presented artistic works. Tradition, a field of symbolic and cultural construction, is activated through the artist images.

[16] The U.S. Federal Government officially recognizes 574 Native Nations.

symbol for all Indians, the wampum is not the universal symbol for all Indians, you know the longhouse is not the universal symbol for all Indians. Public health messaging has to be more local. So those proper cultural appropriate symbols are what make public health messaging most effective.

As Seneca points out, cultural symbolism can be a very effective tool for visual health messaging, so long as it pertains to the specific community at hand. Many of the artists employed symbolism relating to their specific communities. Their discussion of these choices will be featured here. For example, Arlo Iron Cloud, an Oglala Lakota man, spoke to me about his choice to include buffalo imagery in his COVID-related cartoons:

I did that one because our people the connection with the buffalo is pinnacle to us. And so the reason why I did that was because if a buffalo could display an image or a message then I get I think that our people would be more understandable and maybe get the message, a little bit more clear. I think it was, it was important for me because I actually took that image and I did a variety of different variations of it. I did that just because I wanted. It's fun. You know, I mean, there's not a lot of buffalo cartoons out there and So, I just wanted to make that one.

For her Denver American Indian Center mural, Danielle SeeWalker employed a variety of traditional imagery based on her own identity as a Plains Indian as well as symbolism to resonate with other nations represented in the Denver area. Here SeeWalker discusses the Ledger style of art that she implemented in the mural.

> So I lately I've been experimenting kind of with this. This certain kind of style of art call it's based off ledger art which stems from the late, late 19th Century kind of became more popular where Native people would draw on old Ledgers so historically, they would, you know, draw and paint on hides animal hides but then during colonization they didn't have a lot of access to that because we were not able to hunt and things like that. So having access to hides kind of became more difficult and so they started getting trading and using paper and ledgers. And so you would you see if you research ledger art you'll see these really fantastic simple drawings that highlight certain events that go on in the time. So that's kind of the influence behind the mural that I did at the Denver Indian Center and kind of some other murals that I'm working on right now.

Some of SeeWalker's Plains influence can be seen in the Winter Count theme of the mural, discussed below, as well as her characteristic mixing of traditional and contemporary imagery:

> And they said, we would really love it to be sort of a winter count for the year 2020. And so what I mean by the way a winter count is every year, well, particularly in Plains tribes in the tribe that I belong to, there would be somebody called or somebody like a recorder or somebody that would record events of that year, very important events. And it would be called a Winter Count so you know whatever big event would happen, they would draw it to represent that particular

> event. And so you'd have this large, large kind of mural of all these different events that happened throughout the year. And so the Denver Indian Center said it would be really cool if we could do kind of a contemporary Winter Count of the year 2020. And so that's kind of what I did in with doing the masks and but kind of bringing it in contemporary way, you know, with Native people wearing today's clothes but still kind of keeping some traditional things intact. Like, there's one scene on there that has a man and a woman wrapped in a blanket and that's a courting scene. It's called a courting blanket and very traditional historical type thing that happened, but I love the idea of wanting to display that in in this particular mural, as well as, you know, having more contemporary scenes where it's a dad wearing his jeans and sweater with his son, that's you know more of today's time. So I kind of mixed, old and new.

Here SeeWalker discusses her intentional use of symbolism to connect with tribes in the Denver area:

> I a lot of my influence comes from being a Lakota woman and just, you know, my own tribal affiliation and what I know. But at the Denver Indian Center I wanted to also i didn't want it to every person, every person to look like they were Lakota I wanted it to I also incorporated a couple Diné or Navajo people in it. And the way you can tell is by their what their the shoes that they're wearing their moccasins are wearing and then their hair because we do have a pretty large population of Diné people here as well. So, but that was the first time I've ever done that I usually focus on like you know my own culture and what I know and symbolism that comes from me just because I feel like I don't necessarily have the

> rights to portray other tribes. I don't know. So Yeah. A lot of my influence comes from my own culture in terms of, you know, nature, the way people dress, the symbols, the clothing, things like that.

I specifically asked SeeWalker about a bold, jagged, white line that runs through each scene in her mural. Here she describes again how she combines contemporary representations of Colorado life and “traditional” Indigenous elements in her work:

> Like throughout the mural kind of connects everything but also you know Colorado is kind of mountainous, so I wanted to sort of lay out that mountainous feature without it being super obvious, but then sideways it's kind of a lightning bolt as well, which lightning or the lightning spirits and like thunder beings and stuff is kind of important in our culture and so I kind of wanted to also incorporate that so it's kind of a mixture of a bunch of things.

Like SeeWalker, Yellowjohn is another artist who takes intertribal-ness to heart in his visual work. Through our conversation it was very clear that Yellowjohn is deeply conscious of the impact that imagery has on members of different Nations and cultures. For his Masked Dancer series, in which multiple figures from different cultures are drawn dancing in masks, Yellowjohn was intentional in how he approached representing cultures to which he doesn’t belong.

> When I approach cultures that are out of, out of my traditions I reach out to somebody from that nation and ask them first, like is this appropriate to illustrate with a mask like the poly dancers like they have to, like, when they perform…they have to show their expression. I can't do that with a mask. And I was, I had to reach out to one of my poly friends like see if it's appropriate to have them with the mask on. So yeah, from each nation I'll have somebody, you know,

> give me advice of what's appropriate what's not appropriate. And so I'm very careful because I'd hate to you know, insult.

In addition to imagery and symbolism, multiple artists mentioned their use of color as a means of connecting with their communities and invoking authentic Indigenous elements, as Littlebird Fogel does below:

> So I think that people ask me a lot of time about my color uses like one of the first things just because I tend to be more bold with my palette choices. And so I always start by explaining that my palette choices are very much guided by contemporary indigenous culture. And if you go to if you go to a powwow today you will see what I mean. And that everybody is wearing bright neon signs and just like as much vibrancy as one I could ever process is at a powwow. It's just amazing the amount of colors there. And so for me, that's a way for me to give nod, and if you are familiar with indigenous beadwork in particular there are these gradients that are used, and there are always these specific pairings of color that happen in beadwork. And so my paintings use those pairings as well. And so if

> you're familiar with those visual codes and you're from the community, you will immediately be like, oh, I know, I know what you're doing. But, um, some people will be like, dang, you just use a lot color.

Similarly, SeeWalker discusses how her characteristic bold color choices mesh with the authentic Ledger art style employed in her mural:

> Yeah, so my particular personal kind of way in any type of art I do, is I love color. Color is a really important aspect to how I approach my art so I love big bold kind of color mixes and contrasts with each other. So in a lot of my art and in particular that mural it's very colorful and has all different patterns and things. So I like that. And then obviously I mentioned earlier, you know, the style of it is something that I've been experimenting, more so lately concerning that ledger type style where it's very simplistic bold lines and you leave out details specifically to so it focuses not only just on the details of the art but of like what's going on. And so that's kind of the style and the purpose behind ledger art. Is is more so instead of focusing on like what's happening or what the you know what it looks like visually it's more, so what is, what is it trying to tell you what's happening. So that was kind of the reason why I did that style.

A final theme related to Indigenous beliefs and imagery mentioned by many of the artists was the importance of respecting Tribal elders. Especially in relation to COVID, in which age confers risk of infection and complications, multiple artists intentionally included depictions and messaging regarding protecting elders in their artwork. Here Marty Two Bulls echoes the sentiment of cultural loss discussed in Chapter one: “And it is affecting older folks, you know, basically the mouse to a cultural genocide. Because taking our fluent speakers. It's taking all

these the rich oral histories that we have." Here Deal eloquently discusses why he chose to depict the subject of elders in his piece for the Amplifier Foundation:

> I landed on the topic of elders, because the nature of COVID grows exponentially in terms of in terms of its effect on the human body for people who have ailments and more specifically for people who are older. Within indigenous communities, our elders are incredibly important, they're oftentimes our story keepers our language keepers our tradition keepers. And to lose them is not unlike a library burning down. It's a wealth of information and we as Indigenous people, if not as a Nation as a whole should be doing our part to protect the most vulnerable amidst this pandemic. While that information was coming out it was also very clear and it was almost primarily coming from the political right that that those sacrifices were worth it. And from an Indigenous perspective, that's just simply not true. And I think really from a human perspective that should also not be true.

> So I created that piece sort of based on that grouping of information and a number of the art pieces and sort of memes that were created at the beginning of the pandemic were all pointing towards masks and social distancing and things like that. And so I wanted to create something that was more specific, not just to Indigenous peoples, but also specific to the most vulnerable within our communities.

Similarly, SeeWalker was intentional in her decision to include multiple generations in her mural:

> And I did want to do also be the have it be multi-generational because it's really important. We have a huge respect for our elders and we teach our children from a young age to always listen and learn from your elders and so I wanted also the people within that mural to be from different generations.

When I asked Yellowjohn about the response he'd received for his Masked Dancer series, he recounted the single negative comment he'd received, demonstrating the potential impact of his work in raising awareness regarding protection of elders:

> I had this one guy for the yuki dancer with the elk on his head and there was this one guy that was just like, like, I don't need to wear a mask our tribe's very

> strong, we don't need to wear it and my friend was hitting me up he was saying hey yeah man this guy was saying this, and this, like, kind of like dogging on like you know people wearing their masks. [He] said it very well, very well by saying like, you know, it's not for you it's for protecting our elders, because our elders are more at risk and so that was probably like the only negative one.

In our conversation Yellowjohn even pondered creating another piece depicting an elder. He said, “We’re kind of like protectors for our elders and also our children.”

3. Medicine, Healing, and Humor

One emergent theme from the artist interviews that surprised me was the degree to which many of the artists used their work to spread positivity in the midst of the pandemic. Mental health has been at an all-time low during the pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of people are dying, people’s lives are unimaginably interrupted and forever changed. Many have struggled to cope with and adapt to this new normal. Among Indigenous nations, where poor mental health outcomes are already pervasive and disproportionate rates of COVID persist, individuals are making an effort to spread medicine and healing to their communities. The use of humor and imagery of well-spirited individuals evoke these feelings. This framing of Indigenous narratives is consistent with that of Jolene Rickard’s 2002 curation for the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). She writes, “Rather than framing Indigenous experience as ongoing victimization, the direction of the museum was to demonstrate how Native people have prevailed or how they express “self-determination” (Rickard 2011). This can be witnessed through the following insights from artist interviews.

An artist who embodies this principle of positivity in her work beyond COVID is Littlebird Fogel. Throughout our interview she consistently returned to use of kindness in demeanor and art as a means of connecting with people:

> I have lots of indigenous friends who are far more militant and sometimes what I would consider to be incendiary but i think that I can reach more people by using more empathetic messages and trying to connect people back to their hearts we we like we're just constantly thinking in our minds about stuff. But like, ultimately what changes people is when they feel it in their heart and it doesn't matter how much you try to present them with facts. People don't give a shit about facts they they know what's in their heart. So if I can change people's hearts over time just by being a native person in their world that they never had before because social media enables us to connect in this beautiful way that man, that's a huge step right because like you know a lot of people just don't. It's like I said representation works in both ways, like I need it but also white people need it too so that they know that we're still here… for me positivity is is a better way to go if you can do it. You know, like, sometimes you just gotta be real serious and it is what it is, but generally speaking, it's like you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar. So it is what it is, you know, you just for me to be kind to people. I've learned throughout my life it doesn't matter what I'm telling them, if I'm kind of people, they're more apt to listen than if I'm like you're dumb, you know, doesn't connect to that face right whereas if I'm kind I can get you to listen to me a little bit, maybe over time.

In terms of spreading awareness and messaging through positivity and kindness, Iron Cloud hopes that future COVID-19 messaging can move away from fear-based tactics. Here he speaks of his opinions regarding the Oglala Sioux Tribe's COVID response:

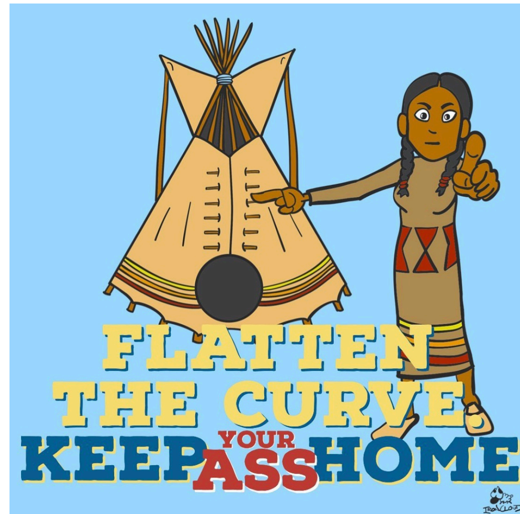
> I'll be honest, some of the stuff they're putting out is fear based a lot of it actually is. And they're not exactly I mean, yeah, I'm also part of the team that they call it the COVID taskforce team, and I have a lot of disagreements with a lot of people there because I know people are scared. I know they are, but for, for the most part they're, they're really putting out a lot of information that is just the scary points, you know, I've been talking about, you know, conditions, quality of life is what I'm trying to say is, like I talk a lot about quality of life and in our on the Pine Ridge reservation I mean, there's so many things that just make life just horrible. And I said something once on a radio and now and I and I explained to people that you know because at the time it was drunk driving. There's folks saying, oh, we need to quit, like it was just a big fiasco about drunk driving. And I got on the radio, and I and I brought the statistics up from IHS which is our hospital. I basically just said the biggest killers on the Pine Ridge reservation is not alcohol, drugs or suicide. That was another one too suicide was just like it was big. It was huge. So I just told them that its heart disease, obesity and diabetes are the major killers for the reservation. And I get it, you know, people are scared, they don't want to die, but our biggest fear should be diabetes, heart disease and obesity, so we should I mean that's that's always been my, my thing is is always try to share accurate information. So like what this whole COVID 19 thing they're like scaring people that they're sharing stuff like we like all these people died today. But I

mean, on a on a on a level yeah, they shouldn't have to die for these premature reasons but on another level I mean, they were they were susceptible because they had underlying conditions and the underlying conditions are heart disease, diabetes and obesity, respiratory issues really so I really, you know, I'm, I'm always trying to share information like that and just letting people know that the it's it's understandable to be scared. It's also a choice to understand which information, you're going to get. So yeah, so it's it's really hard…I think they oughtta share like recovery stories. That's the one thing I don't see I mean, I know a lot of people now that have gotten the virus and they were okay and one of the other things that I also notice is that our people are really taking this virus to say, look at me, and I really I have empathy for that because if they're using this to get attention then there's obviously some major issues going on with our people if that's really what it is. But for me it's really I mean, I'm not I'm not winning any battles but I'm also sticking to my guns. I'm not trying to scare people.

Iron Cloud's desire to see positive and hopeful recovery stories is reminiscent of Rickard's view that sovereignty is about "self-defined renewal and resistance" (Rickard 2011). Iron Cloud rightfully hopes to see this renewal and perseverance on display.

Iron Cloud himself is known for using humor in his visual works. Through his art, Iron Cloud hopes to unite people as opposed to isolating them through fear. He says, "because humor's the best connector. I mean, you want to make people laugh and in our neck of the woods it's, it's, I mean, there's so many social ills, humor has been our survivor instinct. And because of that, it's a lot there's a lot of humor that comes out of

the Pine Ridge Reservation, and so having that connection allows for more connection.” His classic comedic style can be seen here:



Scholars, such as Spirit Lake Nation enrolled member and Cankdeska Cikana Community College president Cynthia Lindquist, concur with Iron Cloud that humor has always been part of Indigenous discourse and healing. Lindquist asserts that Indigenous humor is “the heart of our resilience and survivability” (Lindquist 2016). Knowing this history informs the likelihood of reception to COVID-19 imagery that incorporates humor, as healing during this time is a key concern.

Mentor of Iron Cloud and fellow member of the Oglala Lakota Nation, Two Bulls consistently portrays his messages through humor. Two Bulls views humor as a human way to capture attention as opposed to the disengaging use of facts and intellect:

> The way to influence behavior is through humor I found it’s the best way you could look to somebody all day long and have a better a professor or whatever trying to tell people the coronavirus but you get more across with just a cartoon, just a fine picture. People retain that for some reason… Well, humor’s always

been there, I think. I think you'll find that in a lot of minority groups. Even the most stressful times we tend to have humor, maybe these are sorrow or exciting. All through our histories and even through the hardships.

For example, Two Bulls noted that, as long as his intention is to be funny and not mean, newspapers let him "get away" with using explicit language in his cartoons such as in the following COVID-19 cartoon:

One artist who successfully focuses messaging on healing and resilience in her COVID-centered work is SeeWalker. In addition to the Denver American Indian Center mural, which was the main focus of our conversation, SeeWalker mentioned her most recent project for the Four Winds American Indian Center, which can be seen below.

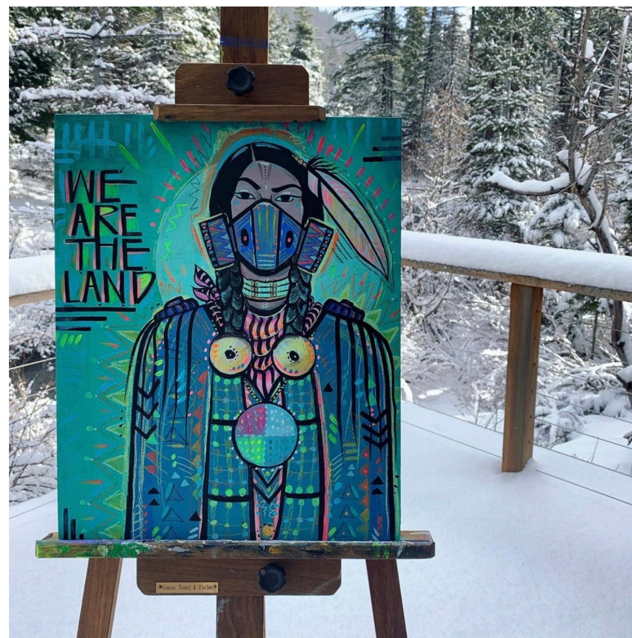
On the motivation behind this work SeeWalker says:

> There's a mural I'm working on right now at another Indian location. It's called Four Winds American Indian Council here in Denver and that one is again very centric to kind of COVID, but we decided not to put masks on any of the individuals. Because the, the folks there wanted it to be more centered around how this is not the first pandemic that natives have been through this is not, you know, we've been through all kinds of stuff since colonization. And we've always relied heavily on our plant medicines and our traditional knowledge to get us through it and we're still here. So, in that the mural that I'm working on now, like I mentioned zero masks and we have I'm using a lot of plant medicine so sage, sweetgrass, things like that in the mural to kind of represent that that's our medicine and our way of coping and getting through things like this, as well as bringing our winged relatives into it as COVID kind of is was brought to us through a bat I believe we wanted to reiterate that we need to be in harmony with like all of our relatives, including our winged relatives and so that's kind of the foundation and the process of the mural that I'm doing now, so not directly talking

> about how, you know, the government or health systems haven't helped in any way, but more so, on the contrary, of saying you know what we've gotten through pandemics and epidemics before using our traditional ways. And so that's kind of what the the mural I'm working on now is about

Instead of using fear and statistics to spread COVID-19 awareness, SeeWalker focuses on her peoples' resilience, sending messages of hope and healing.

In addition to creating work to spread positivity and hope to their communities during the pandemic, many of the artists also expressed how the practice of creating has been a source of personal medicine and healing during such a trying time. For example, Littlebird Fogel discusses how she uses her art, such as the piece we primarily discussed in our conversation, to process what's going on around her:



> It's also a way that I process when things are happening to me, just like the piece that you're you brought up, it's like that's what was happening to me. And so I had to express that. And this is like the snapshot of that moment and so for me, the

> only way to really maintain mental health and have like consistency across my days is to maintain a creative practice and so you know that has been true since high school. And I think that's why it has served me in such a way throughout my life is to like continue to evolve as a human being because art makes you do that it makes you think it makes you be a critical thinker and so I've been very lucky that other people have paid me to do that and are encouraging me to do that many ways. And so, yeah. Honestly, I've just tried to hunker down and focus as much as I can on what I can do during this time.

SeeWalker expressed similar sentiments of coping and healing through her creations:

> Man, I don't know how I would have coped as well as I did without doing art this year or in 2020 specifically being home. I mean, I have a fulltime job outside of creating art and so I've been stuck at home remotely working and I you know, you can only do that so much before you start to go crazy and art is definitely a medicine for me. It's my medicine. It's how I meditated how I kind of cope and get you know escape some, you know, other types of not so good feelings, so it's definitely been something that a crutch for me. And had I not been able to do these murals and, kind of I've done a lot of commission work where I've been part of other group shows and things like that, throughout this pandemic, I can't say that I would have like had such an uplifting spirit as I have, but I've been able to do a lot of focusing a lot of time on art during this pandemic and it's been a lifesaver for me.

4. Social Media

A central goal of this thesis is to evaluate the ways in which individuals are able to contribute to largescale public health communication campaigns through their own social media networks. In this section, we will hear some of the interviewed artists and public health professionals discuss their social media practices and opinions regarding its efficacy as a method of communication. To begin this discussion, Dean Seneca discusses his perspective on the value of communication through social media in Indian Country:

> Well, I am shocked actually at how well natives have gravitated to Facebook, you know you know people that I never thought would go to school, never thought would get a computer or. You know, be involved with this kind of technology are everybody's on Facebook. So you know I got on Facebook just go I could find out what everybody else is doing. Right, so I do think that that this Facebook platform is a key medium for public health message. I don't I'm not so familiar with the others linkedin is very, very good, we have some a lot of groups on linkedin that are native Twitter. Very few but Facebook oh my God, there are so many native groups there are so many native. Organizations now that aren't on Facebook. But you know between the groups organizations and these different committees and different groups that are forming up over every issue you can imagine, impacting native so yeah I think this is a very positive platform. I do think, though. We need to also hold on to our traditional ways of life and that. We are very or oratory right we're very oral in our communication, so the ability to assemble the ability to counsel and bring together a bunch of people in a forum to have discussions. You know, we could even call them talking circle. You know just big forums where people come together, where everyone can talk and discuss issues are also

> critically important, so I don't want to get away from that but yeah, I do think the media is, are, these these platforms are also very, very effective, especially Facebook, in my opinion.

Two Bulls is another interviewee who mentioned the popularity of Facebook in the age of the 2020's. He noted in our conversation that many simply "don't read papers anymore." He posts his work on social media platforms to reach a wider audience.

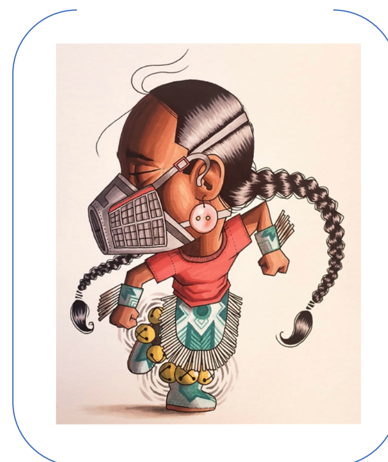
In addition to increasing the viewership of her work, Littlebird Fogel uses the interactive qualities of social media outlets like Instagram to bring wide awareness to Indigenous issues:

> I'm just an artist cranking out images and I and I share them on my channel on Instagram and I'm lucky that my channel continues to grow at this moment. And so I am consciously trying to make aware those folks who follow me and I have like a great deal of nonnative folks who follow me. Who told me that they have learned from my work. So, I think that that's my, like, it's like, I don't, I'm not a teacher. I'm lucky that I get to go and visit classes and talk to them about indigenous stuff but like I kind of feel like my Instagram is in that way is like a class and if people are paying attention. They can come and see the pretty art, but then through that engagement with me and learning about me as a person, they'll also learn about indigenous issues as well. And so that's that's really cool. I felt honored that I have that ability, you know.

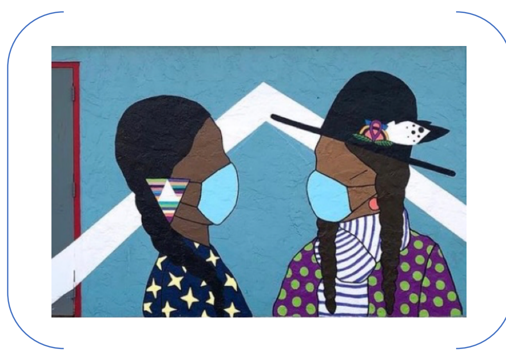
Image Analysis {All images from this section can be seen in Appendices A and B}

In addition to presenting central themes identified by the artists about their works, a close analysis of the visual elements of their artwork is important in understanding how this communication is made effective in educating, unifying, and protecting. As discussed previously through artist insights, many of the interviewed individuals used "traditional' symbolism in their COVID-19 works. For example, Arlo Iron Cloud employs buffalo imagery in some of his cartoons, as seen to the right. For the Oglala Lakota people, the Tatanka or buffalo represents self-sacrifice as it traditionally provided food, hides, needles, and more for the people (Akta Lakota Museum and Cultural Center). This careful use of imagery has the potential to evoke similar feelings of responsibility and self-sacrifice among those who hold these Lakota beliefs, urging people to protect others from COVID-19 by staying home, masking up, washing their hands, and staying socially distant.

Another powerful image used by many of the artists in their COVID-19 works is that of braids. Barbie Stensgar, Arrow Lakes Band Member of the Colville Confederated Tribes and Office Manager for Native American-owned beauty brand Sister Sky writes for a 2019 blog post, "It is said that single strands of hair are weak when tugged on, however, when you pull all of the hair together in a braid the



hair is strong. This reinforces the value of the family and tribe along with our connection to all of creation" (Stensgar 2019). When included in COVID-19 visual art and communication, the image of the braid elicits feelings of community connectedness and responsibility for others needed more than ever during this devastating global pandemic. Iron Cloud, Yellowjohn, Two Bulls, SeeWalker, and Littlebird Fogel all incorporate braids in their COVID-19 works as shown above and below.

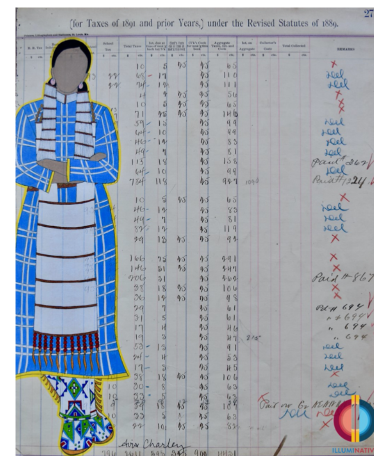


In addition to the featured artists, many Tribal governments and independent Native organizations have also used braid imagery in their COVID-19 messaging and communication. Some

TALKING WITH CHILDREN ABOUT CORONAVIRUS

Here are ways to have a conversation with children about coronavirus (COVID-19).

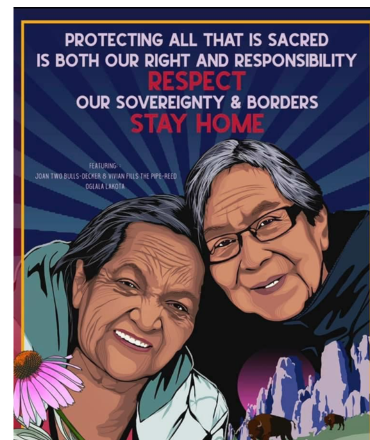
examples, as shown below, are IllumiNative, Urban Indian Health Institute, and Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health:



A third traditional type of imagery used by some of the artists and organizations is that of Ledger style art. While some are more subtle like SeeWalker's modern take in her mural, others are more traditional such as the posters created by Urban Indian Health Institute and IllumiNative. As SeeWalker noted in the previous section, ledger art is an authentic style of Native American art from the late 19th century which was popularized when access to animal hides became less common. SeeWalker's inspiration comes from a form of Ledger art called the Winter Count. This particular form is a history book that uses images to recount the most important event of each year (Weeks 2014). In COVID-19 art, the incorporation of ledger symbolism brings forth a rich connection to the rich cultural practice of Ledger art and thus may summon feelings of connectedness and communal responsibility. The Urban Indian Health Institute's (UIHI) ledger piece reads "What if

our ancestors had a choice?" By using an authentic art form coupled with this message, UIHI is encouraging its viewers to act safely and responsibly. Additionally, in authentic ledger art, warriors would come home from battle and draw their combat experiences (Guardipee 2015). Employing ledger style art in COVID-19 communication and art thus sends a powerful message that fighting the coronavirus is a modern form of warfare.

Similar to forming feelings of connectedness to ancestors and tradition, multiple artists and Tribal governments have disseminated imagery relating to elders and generations. These communications in particular have a strong focus on communal protection of the most vulnerable as well as the most sacred age groups. Deal and the Oglala Lakota Nation present images urging viewers to respect and protect their elders. SeeWalker (shown in previous paragraph) and the Seneca Nation of Indians have a focus on the future and those generations who have not yet had the time to reach their fullest potential.



Another "traditional" symbol incorporated into some of the artists' works is that of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel, which varies in its specific interpretations across Native nations, is united by its use in ceremonies for health and healing (National Library of Medicine). The typically black, red, yellow, and white quadrants of the medicine wheel represent the four directions and can also stand for the human races, stages and aspects of life, seasons of the year, elements of nature, animals, and ceremonial plants (National Library of Medicine). Images of the Medicine Wheel may summon feelings of relatedness between all peoples, beings, and parts of the Earth. In the context of COVID-19, this symbolism presents a hopeful reminder that healing is possible, especially when we come together and support one another. Detail shots of Medicine Wheel imagery from SeeWalker and Littlebird Fogel's pieces are shown above and to the left.

In addition to authentic imagery, Native languages are incorporated into multiple artworks and public health communications, including those by Iron Cloud, the Navajo Nation, and The Seneca Nation of Indians. This type of communication has the potential ability to reach elders, the typical language holders for many Native nations and a high-risk group for COVID-19. Additionally, the use of tribal language may serve to create unity in Native communities since the presented narrative is one created from Indigenous communities, as opposed to generic and/or adapted materials created originally for white communities.

While this image analysis has focused on culturally-based Native imagery employed by artists, governments, and organizations in their COVID-19 works and communications, it is important to also acknowledge that not all visual COVID-19 pieces created by Native peoples contain such symbols and imagery. There is no one Native COVID-19 experience, and therefore there is no one way to represent such history visually. For example, in his cartoons, Two Bulls frequently uses symbols that are not considered culturally Native, such as skulls. His focus in COVID-19

cartoons is often on the political landscape surrounding the pandemic. Thus, we see representations of figures such as Donald Trump, Mike Pence, and South Dakota governor Kristi Noem.

This chapter has taken an in depth look at the common emergent themes from the artist interviews through a presentation of salient quotes. The first subsection used direct interview dialogue in order to center the voices, opinions, and lived experiences of the featured Indigenous artists. The historic misrepresentation of Indigenous concerns and narratives, as well as the lacking data surrounding Native nations and COVID-19 underscore the importance of hearing directly from members of these communities. This thematic analysis revealed the shared belief that COVID-19 related artwork has the power to bring much needed awareness to the grave and disproportionate rates of disease and death among Native nations during this global pandemic. Additionally, many of the artists hope to unite and empower their Native audiences through their works. Many expressed the desire to spread medicine and healing during this trying time as opposed to the constant negative communications in the news and beyond. These patterns around representation and positive storytelling speak to the concept of visual sovereignty discussed in chapter two, which is expanded upon in the following chapter. The next theme discussed was the frequent use of authentic symbolism in Native COVID-19 art and communication, which is consistent with the literature presented in chapter two that effective public health communication must be community-based and culturally specific. Authentic symbolism was further considered in this chapter's image analysis. The last theme discussed was the use of social media to disseminate visual COVID-19 works. Multiple artists discussed the benefits of these platforms, which speaks to the ability of individual artists to valuably contribute to larger public health campaigns of tribal governments and organizations. The next chapter discusses the implications

of the presented findings, specifically relating to visual sovereignty and the role of the Native artist.

Chapter VI – Discussion and Conclusion

Thus far this thesis has taken a person-centered ethnographic approach featuring seven independent Indigenous artists through original data collection, presenting insights about their motivations and lived experiences as artists during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this concluding chapter, I return to the original questions regarding visual sovereignty and individual agency within this concept of sovereignty. The original research questions presented in the introductory chapter are as follows:

- How can Native artists contribute to larger public health communication campaigns through their own work?
- How do individual artist agency and visual sovereignty interact in the context of COVID-19 artwork?
- What role does social media play in spreading visual COVID-19 communication?
- What elements make this visual material most compelling and effective?

In this chapter I consider the role of the Native artist as compared to that of the typical Western artist, and discuss how this role is tied to visual sovereignty. I also discuss how my work builds on the existing concept of visual sovereignty as presented by scholar Jolene Rickard. Additionally, I return to the previous discussion of the continued colonization of Indigenous peoples of North American as it relates to coronavirus and thus why reclamation of such narratives is paramount. The chapter concludes with a discussion of study limitations and suggestions for future directions and research.

Visual Sovereignty and the Role of the Native Artist

"Sovereignty is a kind of ongoing resistance to dispossession,"

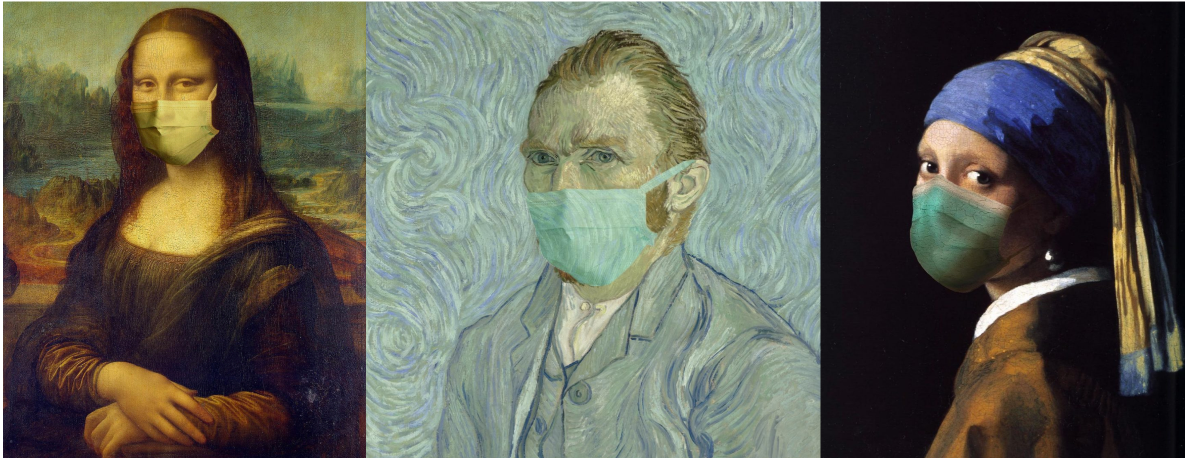
- Jolene Rickard, 2020, "Indigenous Visual Sovereignty"

In order to evaluate the possible influence of Native artist-created COVID-19 work, it is important to understand the status of artists within the context of Native Nations. In the context of contemporary Western art, for example, the "artist" figure is seen as a mystical, divine-like genius that embodies personal expression through the performance of creation. The artist is thus largely free from criticism and holds tremendous influence over his or her audience. Consider figures such as Pablo Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo to name just a few. These are men who each left a distinct stylistic mark in their wake. *Guernica,* the *Mona Lisa,* and Michelangelo's *David* are some of the most iconic Western artworks of all time.

[17]

[17] Images from respective Wikipedia pages.

Imagine *Mona Lisa* or the *Girl with the Pearl Earring* wearing a mask. If created by their original authors, I'm sure we'd be all but obliged to mask up.



[18]

In our interview, Littlebird Fogel astutely spoke to this mainstream conception of artists:

> Artists don't realize how much power they have, we don't really, like we as artists have this sort of like mystical appearance to people, but really we're just weirdos who like to hang out and make you know make art. Basically we're just weirdos like everybody else, but for some reason people perceive us as being these, like, and I don't know what it is that they perceive us as but it's like magical or something. But it's not real.

While Littlebird Fogel didn't specify whether she was speaking about artists of any particular identifiers or cultures, her comment begs the following questions: what is the status of the Indigenous artist within Native nations? Do Native artists also hold this influential and magical role within their communities as is characteristic of artists like Picasso and da Vinci?

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[18] Images created by Genevieve Blais, featured in this Open Culture article: https://www.openculture.com/2020/07/icons-of-art-wearing-masks.html, as well as on her Instagram account @plaguehistory.

As mentioned previously, each Nation, community, and population of Indigenous peoples is culturally unique. I urge readers to keep this in mind when considering the following generalizations regarding Indigenous artists as a whole. However, Rickard notes how the "transportable" experience of the settler state and the colonial period across Indigenous populations allows for broad applications of terms and concepts such as visual sovereignty:

> Therefore, I think the term visual sovereignty can be applied broadly across expressions that are coming from Indigenous artists that are specifically trying to in some way maintain their relationship to the knowledge that they inherit from their ancestors while strategically continuing to locate them in a contemporary place (Rickard 2020).

Thus, based on the shared experiences of colonization and sovereignty struggles, the broad discussion of the "Native" artist holds merit. Additionally, this quote from Rickard blurs the distinction between initially contrasting appearances of the "Western" versus the "Native" artist. While the Native artist figure is unique in the social responsibility of reclaiming representation, they are situated in this "contemporary place" of the mystical and influential appearance noted by Littlebird Fogel.[19]

To continue this discussion of the Native artist, Seneca noted their prominence and known quality in our interview:

> You know we're very picturesque. Native people you know, we have the best artists. You know, we have so many people are the best artists, painters, drawers,

[19] While beyond the scope of this study due to time constraints, an analysis of Hopi filmmaker and photographer Victor Masayesva Jr. would add dimension to this discussion of the role of the artist. Masayesva has made films intended for both Native and non-Native audiences with a pattern of focus on Native, frequently Hopi-specific, representations.

> sculptors, creators, you know, making you know, making jewelry you know. So, we're very picturesque, you know, and if we're able to tell a story over pictures than words go for it, though I'm always in my presentations trying to be more picturesque and less wordy.

Beyond their apparent skilled craftsmanship, scholars recognize the importance of Native artists in being a force against colonization and reclaiming Native narratives and images. Rickard notes the arts as "one of the most empowered spaces within Indian Country" and describes Indigenous artists as "being the most dynamic resistors in Indian Country from the 1980's onward" (Rickard 2020). She states,

> So, it's a combination of things that are taking place in our communities that artists, I believe, have kind of been out in front of, and so we've been performing our resistance to being categorized as citizens of settler states or being categorized as quasi-sovereign and we embed these ideas in visual and material expressions (Rickard 2020).

Expanding on this view, Dion and Salamanca write, "It is through the practices of self-representation that we tell of our presence, our resistance and our survivance" (Dion and Salamanca 2014). Non-native scholar Karen Ohnesorge writes for an *American Indian Quarterly* article that many contemporary Indigenous artists in the U.S. "seek to clarify existing relationships among race, place, and economics as well as to create new relationships" (Ohnesorge 2008). She also discusses the activist focus of many Native artists, using particular case studies of those who use landscape and fusion of images and text to refute racism and decolonize perceptions of place and land (Ohnesorge 2008). Similarly, Non-native academic Bill Anthes sees the contemporary

Native artists as a figure that has grown from focusing solely on settler colonialism to now promoting global visibility (Anthes 2009). He writes,

> Formerly focused on issues specific to the history of settler colonialism in the United States and Canada -- land, treaty rights, and sovereignty; citizenship and the legal fictions of identity and blood quantum—the work of Native artists in the 21st century has come to share much with the work of a current generation of "itinerant artists" active in the international art world (Anthes 2009).

This conception of Native artists as resistors and champions of visibility is consistent with the seven Indigenous artists interviewed for this thesis.

Through their art, Arlo Iron Cloud, Blanche Isfeld-Chief, Chad Yellowjohn, Danielle SeeWalker, Gregg Deal, Marty Two Bulls, and Steph Littelbird Fogel reclaim their stories of what it means to be Native in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic while calling attention and bringing visibility to the disproportionate effects of this virus on Native nations. While these individuals come from drastically different backgrounds and levels of artistic training, they are united in their roles as truthful storytellers and resistors. Ranging from high profile activists and University-trained professionals to self-taught creators, these seven artists have the ability to protect and unify their communities, bring much needed medicine and healing, and tell the world about Native narratives during one of the most harrowing collective experiences of our lifetime. Whether coming across Deal's COVID poster added to the Library of Congress, one of Two Bull's or Iron Cloud's comics in *Lakota Country Times,* SeeWalker's mural on the streets of Denver, one of Yellowjohn's or Littelebird Fogel's pieces on Instagram, or an Isfeld-Chief mask on a passerby, these visual creations serve as "a kind of ongoing resistance to dispossession" in the words of Rickard (Rickard 2020).

No matter the original location and/or publication of each of these visual works, they are all visible on the artists' social media accounts, as this is how I encountered each of them. Through an analysis of independent Native American advocate posts on social media, Caneba and Maitland identify the roles of such advocates as: Informing, Rallying, Identifying, and Interacting (Caneba and Maitland 2017). They define advocates as "individual actors who display lobbying behaviors on behalf of an identified community or social group, from outside the auspices or guidance of an established organization" (Caneba and Maitland 2017). Through posting their work, the featured artists are lobbying their audiences to see and care about Native nations facing tragic COVID-19 cases and deaths, to mask up and protect their elders, and to remain culturally connected. Once again, the role of the Native artist is to inform and create excitement around Indigenous issues.

In addition to supporting existing conceptions of visual sovereignty, the seven featured artists and the original data collection presented in this thesis also add to this scholarly discussion and understanding. In the context of COVID-19, visual sovereignty takes on an added meaning related to embodied, physical survivance. On sovereignty Rickard writes:

> Haudenosaunee assert a nation-to-nation relationship with the colonial-settler governments of the United States and Canada. Sovereignty within our communities has always been more than a manifestation of Western law; instead, it is a concept that embodies our philosophical, political, and renewal strategies (Rickard 2011).

She adds that it has "been instrumental in our ongoing struggles to maintain our communities, land, and traditions" (Rickard). What my research brings to this discussion is the understanding of sovereignty as not only related to maintenance of place and

community, but to that of the body during this unique moment. While other scholars such as Ashlea Gillon (Ngati Awa), Sarah Deer (Muscogee Creek) and Mary Kathryn Nagle (Cherokee) have produced work and spoken about personal sovereignty as it relates to the body, my research uniquely situates the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on Native individuals in this space. For example, Gillon notes that there are varied accepted definitions of body sovereignty relating to control over bodily decisions and adds that in an Indigenous context, "I propose to extend this definition to include having your body accurately re-presented within society, as these re-presentations can perpetuate oppressions and colonial dominance further (Kupu Taea, 2014; Nairn et al., 2017)" (Gillon 2020). The seven featured artists have shown through their words and works that their 're-presentations' spread medicine, healing, and awareness of what it means to means to be experiencing COVID-19 through a Native lens.

This issue of accurate representation and narrative reclamation is gravely important in the context of the continued bodily attacks on Indigenous peoples highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In February of 2021 the Urban Indian Health Institute (UIHI) published a report entitled *Data Genocide of American Indians and Alaska Native in COVID-19 Data* in which they gave the U.S. as a whole a D+ rating for race/ethnicity reporting in COVID-19 data (Urban Indian Health Institute 2021). The UIHI, whose mission is to "decolonize data, for Indigenous people, by Indigenous people" underscores the continued colonization at play in the U.S.'s public health surveillance practices during the COVID-19 era. Pawnee UIHI Director Abigail Echo-Hawk powerfully says in the report "As our relatives continue to die at disproportionate rates from COVID-19, they are not given the dignity of telling their final story as they are eliminated in the data," (Urban Indian Health Institute 2021). The report notes that the U.S.

government knowingly used drastically under-representative U.S. Census Bureau Data when allocating COVID-19 resources to Native nations (Urban Indian Health Institute 2021).

Indigenous artists have the power to stand at the front of this misrepresentation and visually decolonize the Native COVID-19 experience by sharing their stories and calling for awareness and unity. Through their art, these individuals are fighting the pervasive erasure and racism faced by Indigenous communities highlighted by the coronavirus pandemic. By adding their work to the dissemination of tribal and organizational public health messaging, Native artists are helping to seize control over decolonized communication. Through their individual agency, they are contributing to larger movements by visualizing and highlighting continued sovereignty issues and struggles for those who come across their artwork.

Limitations and Future Directions

A major limitation of this study was the inability to systematically track audience reception to the artists' visual COVID-19 art and communication in response to both social media posts and original locations of the works. Dean Seneca, who has expertise in evidence-based public health research conduction, spoke to me about the way in which image reception should be appropriately evaluated:

> How would we measure those things, well you really need to get a group of people together. You know of all different ages, all different backgrounds and maybe people that value different things within the tribal community. For example, our medicine people are traditional people. As well as you know, our more progressive business community, you know and our women's groups and

> our men's groups right, you know. Our clan mothers and our warriors. You know, really be, in my opinion, you need a kind of a cross section of those folks to actually see if it's a survey them to actually see if this symbol or these images are appropriate for you know conveying a message.

As Seneca discusses, a systematic survey of a representative sample of a population would need to be conducted in order to understand how a community at large is responding to artistic and public health visual messaging. The Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health (JHCAIH) provides a helpful model for this type of evaluation. On their website, JCHAIH provides a survey in order to "evaluate and improve our health communications and support Native people during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health 2021). In order to do so they ask respondents the following questions:

- How relevant are JHCAIH's materials for your tribal community?
- How understandable are JHCAIH's materials for your community members?
- How understandable are JHCAIH's materials for your tribal leaders?
- How culturally appropriate are the graphics and language in JHCAIH's materials for Native communities?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with JHCAIH's COVID-19 materials?

I believe that the use of questions such as these within a single community would provide a deep understanding of image reception that is beyond the scope of this study.

On a similar note, the lack of a narrow focus on a single nation leads to broad generalizations across all Indigenous nations of North America, limiting a nuanced understanding of visual symbolism and deep ties to location that come with each individual nation. Rickard says, "There's a kind of richness of detail that when you understand our

histories, you understand the materials, the relationship to place, that begins to make this work come alive" (Rickard 2020). She says that sovereignty expresses itself differently in different communities. It's about:

> Wanting to continue to have a deep relationship to a territory that we believe our people have been located in from the beginning of time or as long as memory serves, and that based on observational practices we've developed a storied landscape that helps us to understand our place in the world through this place (Rickard 2020).

Walters et al. write, "Embedded in Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and enacted through Original Instructions (OI) are *place-based* teachings, relational worldviews, and ways of being, knowing, and talking in the world," (Walters et al. 2020). Additionally, when it comes to visual sovereignty and correct usage of traditional symbols, we've heard previously from Seneca that not all Indigenous symbolism is universal. Thus, a place-based ethnographic study would provide the opportunity to track image reception and build a deep understanding of sovereignty implications.

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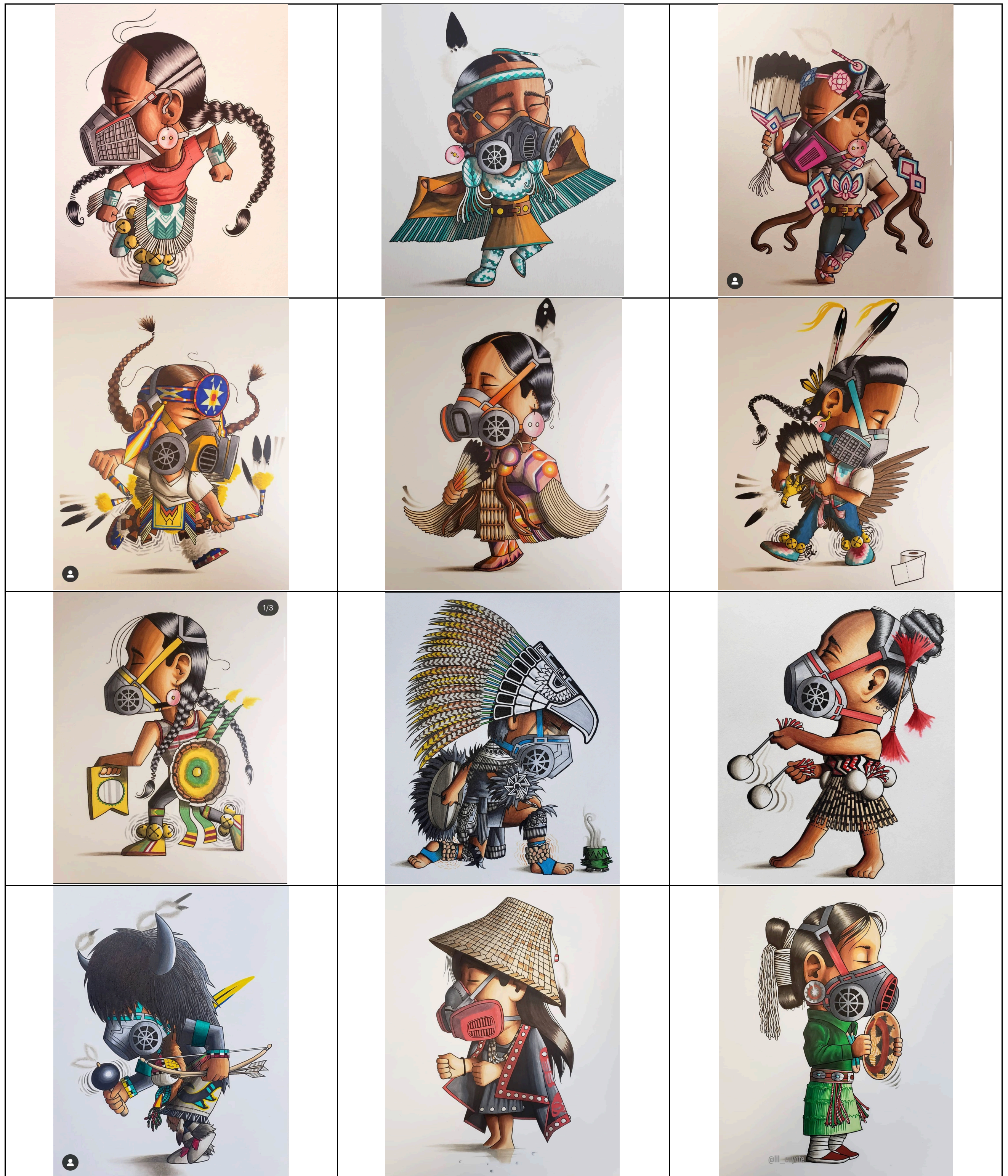
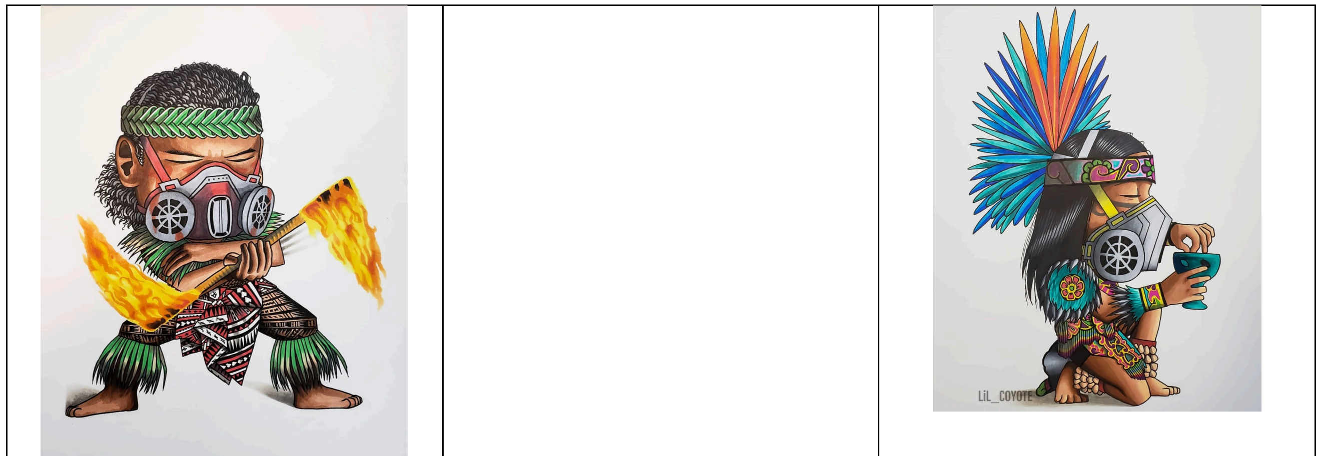
Appendix A: Artist Images

Arlo Iron Cloud, Oglala Lakota, @arlorioncloud on Instagram. Various COVID-19 cartoons. From left to right top to bottom images were posted on Instagram on 3/19/20, 4/3/20, 4/3/20, 4/3/20, 7/15/20, 1/7/20

Blanche Isfeld-Chief, Oji-Cree, @nimiscreations on Instagram. Example of her COVID-19 masks. Posted on 11/18/20

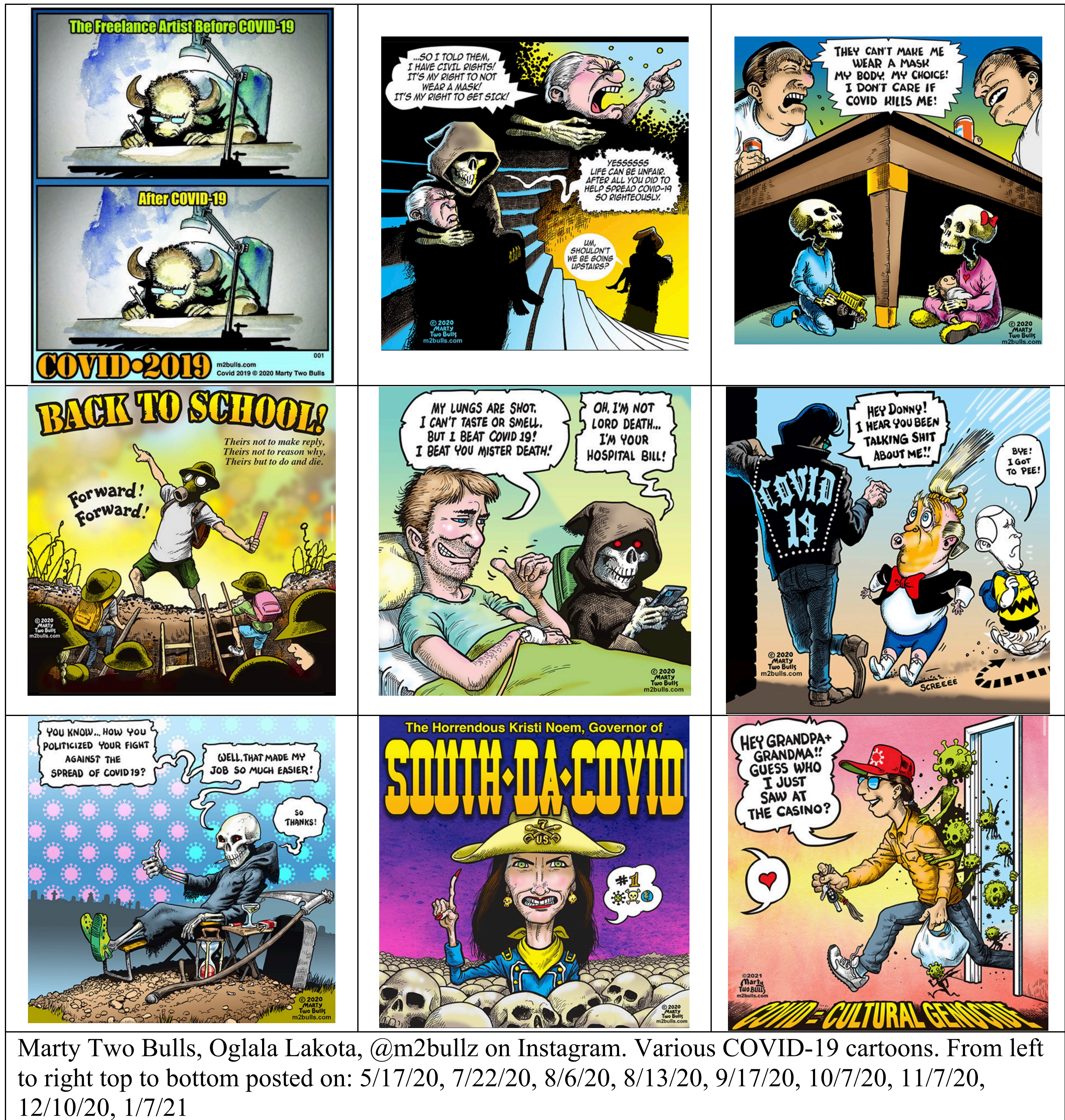

1/3



Chad Yellowjohn, Shoshone-Bannock/Spokane, @lil_coyote on Instagram. Masked Dancer Series. From left to right top to bottom posted on: 3/24/20, 3/25/20, 3/26/20, 3/27/20, 3/29/20, 3/30/20, 4/2/20, 4/3/20, 4/4/20, 4/6/20, 4/11/20, 4/15/20, 4/18/20, 4/25/20

Danielle SeeWalker, Hunkpapa Lakota, @seewalker_art on Instagram. Various angles of Denver American Indian Center mural. All posted on 12/3/20

Gregg Deal, Pyramid Lake Paiute, @greggdeal on Instagram. Art piece commissioned by the Amplifier Art as seen on the streets of Seattle and Boulder. Print added to the Library of Congress. Posted by Deal on 10/12/20

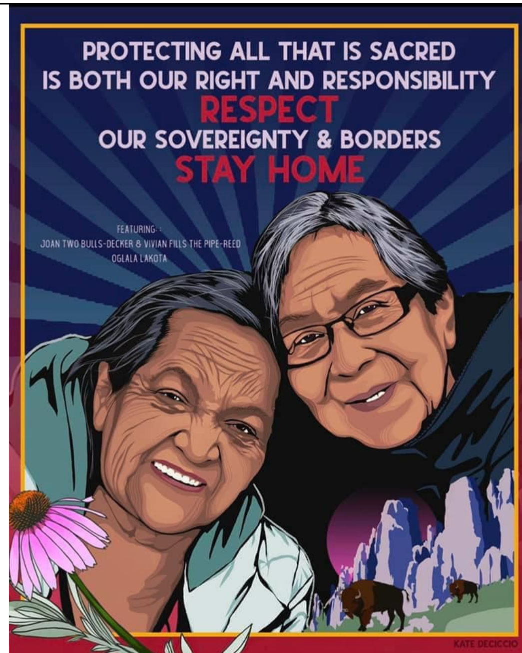


Marty Two Bulls, Oglala Lakota, @m2bullz on Instagram. Various COVID-19 cartoons. From left to right top to bottom posted on: 5/17/20, 7/22/20, 8/6/20, 8/13/20, 9/17/20, 10/7/20, 11/7/20, 12/10/20, 1/7/21

Steph Littelbird Fogel, Chinuk/Kalapuyan/Grande Ronde Confederation, @artnerdforever on Instagram. Piece created in march 2020 at an artist residency. Posted on 3/27/20

Appendix B – Tribal Government / Organization Images

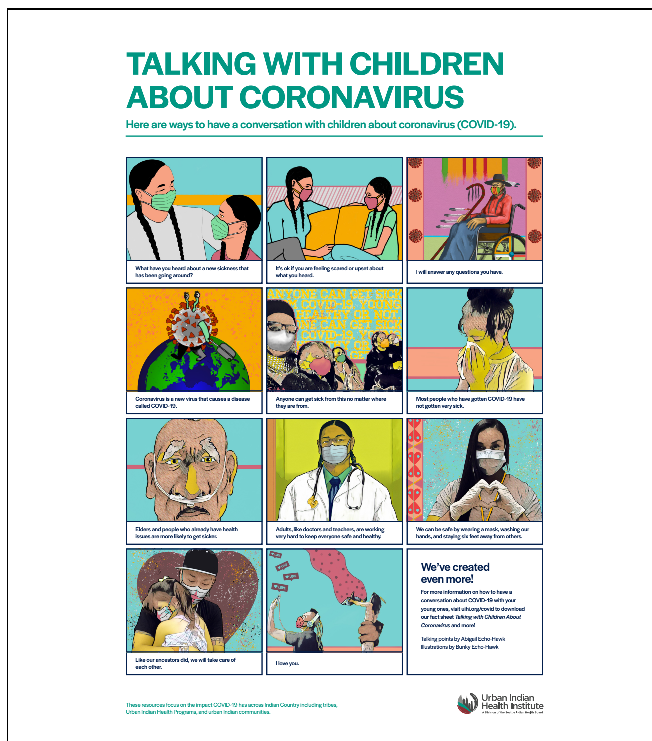
IllumiNative: #WarriorUp Campaign. Images created by the organization as well as in partnerships with prominent Native artists. Website https://illuminatives.org/warriorup/

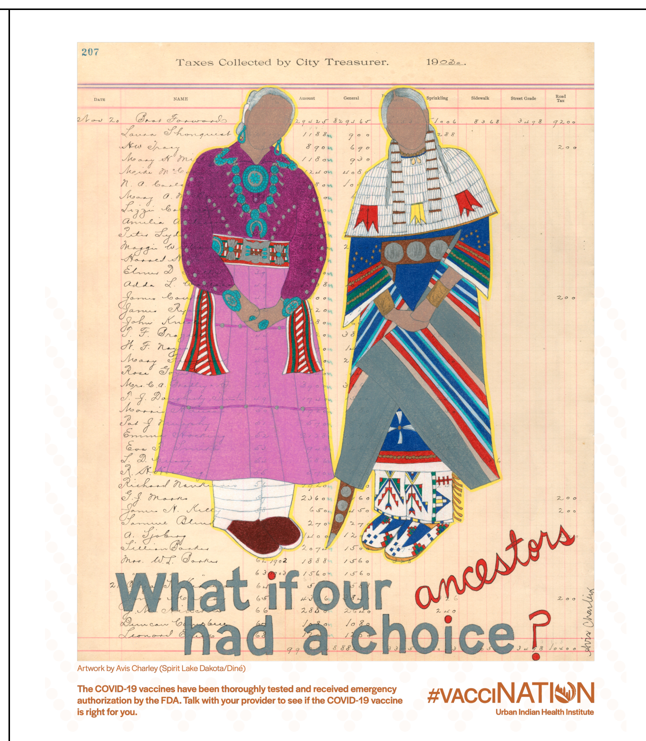

Oglala Sioux Tribe – OST Facebook page: Image posted on 5/14/20. Many other COVID-19 related visual communications can be found on the page: https://www.facebook.com/THEOGLALANATION

Navajo Nation: These images were posted on the Navajo Department of Health's Coronavirus Resource website on 4/4/20 along with others https://www.ndoh.navajo-nsn.gov/COVID-19/COVID-19-Resources

Seneca Nation of Indians: Images posted on the Seneca Nation Media and Communication Center Facebook page from left to right on 11/7/20, 10/31/20, 6/6/20. Other COVID-19 visual communications can be found on the page: https://www.facebook.com/senecamedia

Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health: Their COVID-19 Materials page on their website has many visual communications organized into the following categories: Tribal Leaders, Community Members, Healthcare Workers. They have fact sheets, social media graphics, and children's book, and more. All materials found here: https://caih.jhu.edu/resource-library. From left to right images found in: Stop the Spread Social Media Toolkit, Influenza Vaccine Social Media Toolkit, Social Distancing with Animals Social Media Graphics





Urban Indian Health Institute: left: "Talking with Children about COVID-19" published 4/17/20. Right: "#vacciNATION artwork by Avis Charley, published 1/27/21, part of larger campaign of images found on resource page. Resources found here: https://www.uihi.org/resources/ and here: https://www.uihi.org/projects/covid/

Appendix C – Sample Semi-Structured Interview Questions

- To start out I would love to hear a little bit about yourself, your background, your history as an artist, whatever you feel comfortable sharing.
- How did you decide what themes to include in your work?
- What is the intended audience of the piece?
- In what ways do you hope to influence the behavior of Native and non-Native communities during the pandemic through your art?
- Is your work intended to influence perceptions of Tribal, state, and or federal response to the pandemic?
- What is the intended message/impact of the work?
- What has the response been? Do you believe the piece has created the intended impact?
- What is the rationale behind the stylistic elements of your work such as colors, sizing, etc.?
- Do you consider this to be a work of visual activism?
- What culturally specific elements or messaging does the work contain, if any?
- How would you describe the importance of culturally relevant public health imaging and messaging?
- How does this piece fit into your larger body of work as an artist?
- What are your goals in publicizing your work on social media?
- What has it been like to create art in general throughout the pandemic?