

## **Transcripts of audio clips and speaker bios in the *Stories from the Circle* app**

Each of the following people participated in an interview about their thoughts on the Syracuse Columbus statue and the histories it evokes. The interviews took place in 2020-2021.

Participants were asked open-ended questions about their views on the statue, the histories it represents, the histories and stories they wanted people to know about, and the future of the site. In each case, a short interview clip was selected by the app project team and integrated into the *Stories from the Circle* app. Transcripts of those clips are below.

Full interview transcripts for ten of the interviewees are also available on the *Stories from the Circle* website.

### **Phillip Arnold:**

***Bio:** My name is Phil Arnold. I'm the chair of the Religion Department at Syracuse University. I'm also core faculty in Native American and Indigenous Studies at Syracuse University. I'm the founding director of the Skänoñh Great Law of Peace Center and was responsible for creating the narrative there. I'm also the president of the Indigenous Values Initiative, which is a nonprofit organization formed to educate the general public about the Haudenosaunee and Indigenous issues.*

**Audio clip:** Other elements of the statue that – So we have twin Haudenosaunee boys. They're now men. But seeing four disembodied Native American heads at the feet of Columbus has always been very difficult for our family. Also the reliefs, the bas reliefs, the scenes of the captives that Columbus had taken to the court of Isabella and Ferdinand in Spain in 1492, 1493, are also very painful to look at because they are in a submissive pose in front of the king and queen. So I know all of these messages go to the superiority of Europeans, of Christianity, and those kinds of things, but as someone teaching in Native Studies and also in Religion, these messages of the innate supremacy of Christianity over and above the worldviews of Indigenous peoples is constantly goading.

### **Sandra Bigtree:**

***Bio:** My name is Sandy Bigtree from Syracuse. I'm a citizen of the Mohawk Nation. But I did grow up in Syracuse, and I grew up performing on radio and television from the early ages, three years old, throughout my entire childhood, on a weekly basis, every single week of my life. In 1978 I had a band, and the Onondaga Nation asked me if I would bring my band down to the Nation to help draw non-Native people to the territory, so they could educate them on the Indigenous roots to American democracy through the Haudenosaunee. And I took that very seriously, and kind of redirected my life work. And I left performing and met Phil, we came back,*

*that's the work that we're doing. I was on the collaborative board for the repurposing of Sainte Marie Among the Iroquois into Skänoñh, so we could share that message of the Haudenosaunee. And I'm on the board of the Indigenous Values Initiative. I'm also on the board of the American Indian Law Alliance, which sponsors the work of Betty Lyons at the United Nations.*

**Audio clip:** In the founding of the American democracy, they used the clutch of the arrows, which was what the Peacemaker had demonstrated at Onondaga Lake. The Peacemaker said if you unite the five arrows, they're unbreakable. And it was a whole ritual that he did at the lake. So Haudenosaunee leaders were telling the founding fathers about this imagery and about the story of the bundle of arrows, and that's why it was incorporated into the eagle's clutch. The eagle is also held in imagery among the Haudenosaunee because it has the highest vision and can see the farthest distance, and that's what's clutching those arrows for protection. So that's what that image represents, and it goes right back to the Haudenosaunee.

### **Hilary-Anne Coppola:**

***Bio:** My name is Hilary-Anne Coppola. I was born in Syracuse at Saint Joe's, and raised twenty minutes outside the city as a child. I've lived in Syracuse for much of my adult life and I'm very active in the community and dedicated to the Syracuse area and its future. Whether I'm here or not, I'll always be connected to the people and the land here.*

**Audio clip:** I would love to see, you know, an interpretive site that could speak to every cultural community that lives in Syracuse, because Syracuse is very special as a sanctuary city. It has a lot going for it. I mean, I think of all the ways that new Americans have contributed to the community and how that story isn't really well known for a lot of them. It's been made very clear to me, since a young age, that Italian Americans were influential in the city. And I appreciate that and I want to see everybody else appreciate it as well. And I especially have an interest in seeing the Onondaga appreciated. And I think that with more stories being represented, there's more opportunity for healing, and there's more under more opportunity for understanding, and coming up with solutions to the problems that we all face together. There's a lot of knowledge and strength in diversity.

### **Sue Eiholzer:**

***Bio:** I was trained as a marriage and family therapist. So I focus on people and how they feel about things. And I was raised in Indiana, and I thought all the Native Americans were in the West. When I came to New York State, and found out about the Haudenosaunee, I was absolutely amazed. I have been working with Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation since its inception about fifteen to twenty years ago. And so I've gotten to meet a lot of Native people*

*across New York State, and I consider that a real blessing. So I've done a lot of work to promote that allyship and be supportive of them.*

**Audio clip:** I believe that we in America have not faced up to our history with the Native people. And a lot of it goes to that, to the Doctrine of Discovery, and that concept of Manifest Destiny, and that sort of thing. And I think that in NOON's [Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation's] "witness to injustice" exercise, we examine that history and present it to people. And so I think that the statue overshadows that, and that there is a need to bring in a more balanced history, and not just in terms of Natives, but there are people in Syracuse from countries that were also harmed by the Doctrine of Discovery. And so I think there's a wide swathe of ethnicities in this community, it's one of the assets we have in this community, that needs to be recognized.

**Blake Garland-Tirado:**

***Bio:** My name is Blake and I am a master's student at Syracuse University in Religious Studies. I started the petition to remove the Columbus statue in downtown Syracuse, which as of April 2021, sits at roughly 18,700 signatures.*

**Audio clip:** Personally, I'm African American and of Puerto Rican descent. And so Christopher Columbus has had a direct effect on my family lineage. I mean, when he stepped on Puerto Rico, which at the time he had called San Juan Bautista, he had raped many women on Puerto Rico, he had exploited the labor of many men. And he outright killed many native Puerto Ricans. And Christopher Columbus's exploits in the New World also opened up passages for the Atlantic slave trade. And so my family history is very much directly related to the terrible things that Christopher Columbus has done, and the things that he has brought to the Americas. And many people in Syracuse can attest to similar stories. So I think that people who have a positive opinion on Christopher Columbus need to remember that he has done very terrible things to many people that still have effects today.

**Clelia Ilacqua:**

***Bio:** I was born at St. Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse, New York, which is on the north side, which is the Italian neighborhood. I grew up here and went to school here. I went to Syracuse University. I studied biology and speech pathology. Then I went to dental school in Buffalo. I lived in Connecticut and New Jersey. I had my own practice there for 22 years. I sold the practice and came back home. So I'm back in Syracuse, I live on the north side. I came back here in 2011. So I've been here 10 years. I practice dentistry, but I do it part time, because I'm retired. I do volunteer work at the free clinic at the St. Joseph's residency program. I go to church at Our Lady of Pompei, and I sing in the choir there.*

**Audio clip:** Well, I hadn't given it much thought until last summer, when I started seeing people taking statues down and damaging them, especially in Boston. And I'm not terribly attached to it, except that my grandfather was one of the businessmen on the North Side who put their pennies together and erected the statue. They commissioned it, and then they had all the parts sent from Italy, and they put it together. So there is a little bit of a tie there. And I thought "this is ridiculous", that there's a chance that someone could knock it down. I understand that there are quite a few statues that have come down, and many of them have been vandalized. So I wrote to the mayor, because I knew he was toying with this idea of taking it down, and he had a commission that was studying the idea. And I wanted to express my opinion, because I'm a North Sider; I'm an Italian American. I have an historic interest in it, somewhat. And I thought he should know that there are some of us who are in favor of him taking the statue down for the sake of the statue. It's a beautiful statue; it shouldn't be destroyed. And there is a little bit of history and heritage there that belongs to us. And I don't want it defaced.

I think one of the reasons they attached themselves to Columbus was because he's considered to be brave. You know, he took off on his own without knowing where he was going, he was adventurous, and that took a lot of guts. I mean, that's a trait that is admired by the Italian Americans, especially these men that were the first immigrants coming here. They did the same kind of thing; they left their home, never to go back again. This was a trait that they admired. So in that regard, this is a good trait, I think.

**Andy Mager:**

*Bio: My name is Andy Mager and I came to Syracuse at the end of 1981 as a young adult, and have lived in the greater Syracuse area most of the time since then. I'm a community organizer, someone who believes deeply in social justice and peace, and about the importance of our relationship to the natural world. I have worked closely with folks from the Onondaga Nation for much of the time that I've lived in the Syracuse area.*

**Audio clip:** As someone who's Jewish, I, from a very young age, have been aware of the Holocaust, of the centuries of anti-Semitism which preceded the Holocaust. And now the decades of anti-Semitism which have followed it, including rising anti-Semitism both in this country as well as other parts of the world more recently. And I was taught, and I very much internalized the idea, that the way for any group of people, Jews or anyone else, to combat hatred and oppression is not just to try to protect ourselves, but to recognize that that sort of behavior, which is found throughout human history, needs to be opposed in a comprehensive, universal way. I have a responsibility to speak up for Jews who are being discriminated against or oppressed, but I equally have a responsibility to speak up in support and solidarity with Black people, with women, with LGBTQ people, with anyone who's targeted for discrimination or oppression. So that is the foundation that I bring into these discussions.

Columbus Circle has been an important site for a variety of things since shortly after I came to Syracuse. I have participated in dozens of vigils and demonstrations and protests there, not focused on Columbus, but rather because it was a central community gathering place. So the annual Hiroshima procession ended with a vigil at Columbus Circle for many, many years. I attended a vigil the year after I got here that was honoring the people who were massacred in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in southern Lebanon, at Columbus Circle.

**David McCallum:**

***Bio:** I'm Father David McCallum. I'm a Jesuit priest and educator. I'm the Vice President for Mission Integration and Development at Le Moyne College. And my role on the Columbus Circle Action Group was simply to be a representative member of the community, not to represent my institution, nor necessarily even to represent the church in my role as a Catholic priest.*

**Audio clip:** You know, I'll say with regard to the Catholic Church, my own work over the last few years is around raising consciousness about this Doctrine of Discovery: this series of papal bulls from the fifteenth and sixteenth century that entitled Western monarchs, Christian monarchies, to go and take that land, and if necessary to commit murder to gain it. I would say, from the vantage point of the Church's current social teaching, that those were sins of the Church. From today's perspective, the Church would see itself as overreaching its own mission and values by deploying military power to accomplish the work of evangelization. This was never the way that Jesus himself in the gospels taught the disciples to share the Good News. As Pope Francis has said many times, and has written in his encyclical *Laudato Si* on the environment, the word "dominion" has been abused by some of the Church over the course of history, and been used as a legitimation for domination and for destruction. While there was a context and worldview in those times that partnered ecclesial and secular power as if they were one and the same, this has had two disastrous consequences for many peoples, even as it also brought benefits and gains to the Church and those empires. However, in partnering the Church in this way with secular powers, or powers that were using their governments, their resources, their military might, in order to colonize and to gain for their own interests, this led to a kind of exploitation, insofar as it served their interests often at the expense of Native peoples, Indigenous peoples, not just here in the Americas, but around the world. And so when we think about the work of evangelization and see this destruction side by side, the Church still has yet to come to terms with its actions here. Even though many Popes have offered apologies to Indigenous peoples around the world over the last 30, 40 years, there's yet to be a sufficient process by which the Church acknowledges just how destructive those actions by those particular Popes at that time were. And the restorative justice that needs to be done around all of that is very significant, just as there is in the United States such important restorative and reparative work to do around the descendants of slaves, by Catholic organizations and by the Church. So I think as we take stock of the Columbus statue, as we see it, in this context, both historically and from our

present perspective, our view is complicated. And it involves, I think, very difficult challenges and tensions around understanding what it is that we should do now, when we look at that statue, and what it represents.

**Sarah Nahar:**

***Bio:** My name is Sarah Nahar, and I am a PhD student in religion at Syracuse University, and in environmental studies at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. I am the descendent of both willing and unwilling settlers in the United States, fugitive Mennonites, many religious, economic persecutions in Europe, and also the descendant of unwilling settlers, people who arrived on these lands through the human trafficking that happened in the Transatlantic Trade in African people.*

**Audio clip:** I really encountered the Columbus monument most while marching with Black Lives Matter in the summer of 2020. It was in the midst of the pandemic, we were protesting police brutality, and as we moved, marching, through downtown, seeing the Columbus statue was a reminder of the connection between history and current events. Him standing there atop other symbols glorified the colonial narrative, and it devalued other histories, Indigenous histories. And so I recognized, as we chanted, that the Doctrine of Discovery compelled Columbus to do what he did and to act towards those he met on arrival not only with disdain and devaluation, but the Doctrine of Discovery as a precursor to international law gave Columbus the power of the state, and the church supporting him in many ways, to be the first cop. He was an agent of the state permitted to use lethal force on others. So people protested then, and we continue to protest in this generation.

So we're in the street rallying for our lives, because we've been unable to have our humanity uplifted in society's major institutions. So seeing Columbus elevated there between the institutions of the courthouse and the cathedral is painful, because it's a monument to someone for whom our lives did not matter, and who used lethal force on Black and Brown people via the state. And so we need some symbols and central places that uplift all beings.

I want people to know that Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty are linked. Throughout history, sometimes we have been pitted against each other because of the limited amount of resources that have been available to our communities, as well as the different ways that white supremacy has impacted Black and Indigenous communities. For Black folks, it often seeks to exploit, and for Indigenous folks, it often seeks to erase. And so by reframing our struggle, not as one for scarce resources or competing against each other, but about the ways that we need each other, for Black liberation, for Indigenous sovereignty, and how we can learn from each other's struggles and resistance to racism and colonization -- it's by showing solidarity with each other that we will be stronger together. And that's what was happening as we were marching and coming together around these connections.

Let's find symbols for our connections. And of course, being stronger together also includes European and Americans, and European Americans and others, to see that their welfare is bound up with the welfare of all of our neighbors. It's not possible to segregate any longer. This era cannot be one of us versus them. It's a time of all of us or none.

### **Neal Powless:**

***Bio:** My name is Hawhenawdies. The translation is: His voice is heard among the people. I'm commonly known as Neal Powless. I am a member of the Onondaga Nation, and I am Eel Clan. I am the Syracuse University Ombuds, and the co-founder of Indigenous Concepts Consulting with my wife, Michelle Shenandoah, and we do consulting on diversity, equity and inclusion as well as assisting groups, organizations and companies on how they can incorporate Indigenous concepts, values and how to work with Indigenous communities across the country. I'm also a former professional lacrosse player. I currently coach the Dutch national box lacrosse team. And I am a movie and film producer including documentaries, short films and different types of media projects. I am currently engaging in my PhD studies at Syracuse University's Newhouse S.I. School of Public Communications.*

**Audio clip:** If I think about the scale of the land itself, I think about the proximity of the current space that this Columbus statue sits on, and its proximity to Onondaga Lake, and the history of Onondaga Lake, that it has, not only for Haudenosaunee people – it represents the ratification of our Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the unification of our five original Confederacy nations and then eventually Tuscarora coming under that umbrella as well to make the Six Nations – but also that relationship that the Haudenosaunee and our Leadership have had, the impact on American democracy. The three branches of government, the federal and state system of governance. The idea of a democratic process of all people having a voice. The American seal says “*E Pluribus Unum*”; in Onondaga and the Haudenosaunee, we say “One dish, one spoon.” They're one and the same. And that's just one of hundreds of relationships that exist there. And you can look at the geography of the entire country, and you can go down to Virginia and see that the Shenandoah Valley National Park is right next to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest. Why are the three of those names connected together? It's because they sat together during the formation of, the drafting of, the Constitution, because Chief Shenandoah, an Oneida Chief, advised them along with his Clan Mothers to help America come up with their version of a useful transmission of power and governance. To me, the proximity of Columbus and the statue, and how close it is to Onondaga Lake, the most polluted lake in the country, and yet, on those shores, the origins of democracy on this continent. I think we should all be celebrating the lake, if not more than this site, as a group, together. And maybe that this space could then be, because of its proximity, a beacon of that relationship, as opposed to a symbol of the degradation and attack on my ancestors that it currently represents with this statue.

I understand and recognize that the Italian community is traumatized. And I understand that the Indigenous community and other communities that exist in Syracuse that represent refugees, that come from all over the world, that represent traumatized peoples. And the great thing is that our Great Law of Peace is signified by the Tree of Peace, the Great White Pine. And they say that that Tree of Peace, the roots extend to north, south, east to west, all around Turtle Island, all around Mother Earth. And that anyone can follow those roots of peace to come and take shelter in peace and tranquility under that umbrella of peace, if they so choose. And I don't think it's by accident that Syracuse, as a city, is one of the hubs for refugees around the world. We have over ten thousand refugees that exist in Syracuse. They don't know why they're here, but Indigenous people that are here do. They followed those roots of peace, because that's what they were seeking. And this community is responsible for teaching what that peace means. And the conversation on this site, upon this space, is one that we need to engage in for all of those that will follow, for future generations yet to come that have not been even born. The grandchildren of the young girls that exist in city of Syracuse, whose eggs are already existing there, that DNA knowledge is being developed now for those young women that will impact their grandchildren. So if we can find a way to resolve this in a peaceful and loving manner today, the impact on our community and our city for generations to come will be monumental. That is what inspires me, from my culture and my history and my family, to be a part of that conversation and a part of that resolution for the generations that are yet to come. It's not about me or even my own children, or my children's children, it's their grandchildren's grandchildren, that we need to do this for.

### **Sophia Powless:**

***Bio:** Nya•wéñha Sgé•noñ', Hothahyoñnih nwa'wage'se•e'deñ' gaiye•i wa'ganoñhsgeh Ga nëndawaks' ongya•stha'. So that roughly translates to: Hello, I'm thankful that you are well. My name is Shakes the Hemlocks, and I am Wolf Clan, longhouse from the Onondaga nation. All of us have that introduction. And I think a lot of people aren't really aware, we each have our own Indigenous names, that are connected to medicine. And that, of course, is very powerful. That name is mine. And mine since I was given when I was a child, and that's what I like to be known as. Of course, I go by Sophia, in the regular sense, but I also have that identity that's very strongly tied to me. That's how I like to introduce myself any time I have events that I'm a part of, because I think showcasing myself as being Indigenous is such an important thing. Because not many people get to meet someone who is Indigenous, or don't know about my life or point of view, or how I grew up, or anything like that. So that's how I like to show myself first.*

**Audio clip:** I believe people need to know more about the Indigenous people he [Columbus] encountered. I forget the name of the tribe, but I definitely remember learning in school when I got older. All you hear about is his voyages, what he did when he discovered America, but you don't really hear about the people, how they were affected, what things were said about them. I



believe they refer to it as bringing "civilization" to these peoples. That's kind of the general term. They said it was bringing civilization to these peoples. And that's kind of the outlook everybody sees it as. It's "Columbus came, discovered it, he brought civilization, now we have America, everything's great." But what is really not considered is the fact that there was already a culture, a developed culture, a developed civilization with language, food, ceremonies, dances; everything was already here. And you don't learn about that.

### **Robert Searing:**

***Bio:** I'm Robert Searing. I'm the curator of history at the Onondaga Historical Association. I'm also a historian of Antebellum America with two Masters degrees from Syracuse University. In addition, I am an adjunct instructor in the History Department at SUNY-Cortland and Tompkins-Cortland CC.*

**Audio clip:** It [the statue] represents many histories. I mean, first and foremost, I think it represents the history of the Italian American community in Syracuse, the struggles that they went through to be accepted as Americans, to be accepted as white people in the city. I think that really speaks to their pride and what they went through as a community to raise the funding.

You know, the monument lacks interpretation, which I think is just generally a problem with so many installations of public art, which this certainly is. It's just a statue with nothing around it and, you know, nothing where it came from. So when I found the histories and when I really researched the histories of the Italian community that came together and rubbed nickels together in many places to bring this thing together, it really put it into a new light. Now, as an American scholar, and somebody who's studied American history deeply, I'm fully aware of the history of Columbus as a man and the atrocities committed both under his direction and while on his watch, which makes it a very weird subject.

So, I mean, it's the histories of the people that built it. Then it's the histories of the Haudenosaunee as well. I mean, this is Onondaga land.

### **Danielle Smith:**

***Bio:** My name is Danielle Smith, and I am part of the Onondaga Nation, and I am Hawk Clan. Because we're a matrilineal society, I get my clan from my mother. So she's Hawk clan; her mom's Hawk clan. And I also have a Onkwehonwe name, which is basically just a name in Onondaga that represents what clan you're from. I grew up here on the Onondaga Nation. I'm 35 years old. I have a 10-year-old daughter. And I currently live here. I had moved off at different points in my life, and lived in different states and areas. But for the majority, I've been*

*here, home, on the Onondaga Nation, and I have this deep connection to the land itself, and also to the people, my family.*

**Audio clip:** I'm not sure if people know, but the Onondaga Nation, that's part of the Six Nations as a whole. We're the central, basically, nation. We're the Firekeepers. That means that we hold the Central Fire, so that's where Grand Council, which is our form of government, meets, and that's where our Tadodaho is from, here in Onondaga. And what I was going to say was, what's really significant about this area, and especially the land where Syracuse is situated, is that it's Onondaga Nation ancestral land, and that land is unceded. That means that the land was never given up, it was never sold, it was illegally taken from my ancestors, and that is also another reason why a statue such as Columbus being in a public space, such as Syracuse right downtown near the court, is really problematic for a lot of Indigenous people, and specifically Onondaga people.

**Cindy Squillace:**

***Bio:** I am a woman of Southern Italian heritage having lived for 45 years in the City of Syracuse. My husband is also Italian and we raised our family here. I am a licensed social worker, a bereavement/trauma counselor, community organizer, and have worked with many populations of people in Syracuse and Onondaga County.*

**Audio clip:** A big part of my background has been as a grief counselor. And one of the things that happened with all the different groups that I was a part of is that it was very evident that all of these groups and all of our ancestors suffered losses, and had grief, and had pride in those who came before them. So trying to get underneath any of the political stuff, and just get to that place where people see each other as human beings who have had pain, and who have had joy, and who love, you know, their families and their communities. So finding a way to not avoid the truth, because I think the truth needs to be spoken, and not sugar-coated, but to somehow connect that with -- that all of us feel these things, but just some of us have come out of it in powerful positions, and being able to talk about racism, and why some groups have not been able to get past the power structures.

**Colleen Zawadzki:**

***Bio:** I grew up in the city of Syracuse on the North side with my Italian mother and my Italian grandfather. I went on to become a Syracuse City School District teacher of social studies-- originally junior high, and then moving to high school. Then, I went on to become a high school principal, at the OCM BOCES campus. Throughout that time, I was also a trainer of teachers and administrators in the area of curriculum and social studies. So I have that perspective as a*

*longtime educator and teacher, but also as a Northsider that grew up in Syracuse with my close Italian family.*

**Audio clip:** Well, I think that we have to begin by honoring whose land it's on. And I think that's really critical. I don't know how one goes about that in a way that both respects and honors the pennies and nickels and dimes that so many people contributed to change it from St. Mary's Circle to the Columbus Monument Circle, because before that it was an Italian Cathedral in an area that had gardens there. And my grandfather Albert was a groundskeeper for Clinton Square gardens, and I even heard possibly the St. Mary's gardens. But it's really important that we both honor the struggles that the Italian folks had, as they were envisioning that, and their desire to honor their heritage, with the desire to not negate the challenges that the Indigenous people faced when everything was taken from them, and they got sort of relegated to the Onondaga Nation area and lost everything that was here, the lake, the streams, the kettle lakes, everything. So I don't know how one goes about balancing all of that. But I think that through celebration of our diversity and honoring the struggles that we have had, entering a new culture, while balancing, hopefully, a respect for people that have always been traditionally disrespected, is a really -- it's a dicey situation. I don't know if through metaphors and symbolism, we can honor Turtle Island or, you know, the Great Tree of Peace, while we also honor the gardens of the Italian families that were coming here and the struggles that they were faced with. I don't know if there is a symbol, person, that we're looking at that represents all that is amazing about the Italian culture, or perhaps it's really just vignettes and stories about our ancestors that may do that. But there's no question about it. Our story, I mean, balancing all the people that came with all the trauma that they were faced with as new entries into any culture, needs to be acknowledged. But we really have to do it in a way differently than we have done in the past with the people that have owned this land. This was their land. So I don't know how you do that.