

The Healers Project Decolonizing Knowledge Within Afro-Indigenous Traditions

Clip of Interview Gwen, Inclusive Narrative as Healing (Transcript)

Recorded by Dr. Ana-Maurine Lara and Dr. Alai Reyes-Santos

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With my voice and be in charge of how this word gets out about how we all connect together, that we don't hear

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from our dominant culture. I don't want the dominant culture telling me my history. I want to set a platform that is inclusive of others

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that help tell the Timber culture, and the culture of the migration and the inclusion of the indigenous people.

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But also that what I do here has been seen as sort of an anomaly because even I say, well, black loggers. My dad was a logger? Why don't I know that? To ask

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my family, my siblings, I'm next to the youngest. Did you know? And they were all like--my oldest brother who's in his seventies now said, "Dad and I drove up and down the road by Maxville many times cleaning cold furnaces,"

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and he never once said, “oh yeah, that’s how we got to Oregon. And I was married to somebody else then, and that’s how Grandpa and Grandma came. We lived in a logging camp.” He never once said that to me. And so it’s the thought of like,

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why didn’t they? And it wasn’t the good old days. It was a struggle. It was hard work. I mean I don’t know if you’ve seen the logger’s daughter that we did. I mean, it was--it's like,

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“it’s no place for pleasure.” That’s from the black folks. And from the white folks, “yeah, it was all good.” You know, maybe they came from the South with family members, or they were homesteaders that came 5 generations at a time.

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So it was a totally different experience. And plus when they came in 1923, the laws were still on the books for excluding free African Americans from owning land, doing

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business therein, and for any of the people that brought them in. So they were really brought here not legally, and I don’t know if they knew that. I have no way of verifying that yet. Again, I learned a lot

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about my culture. About my black culture, not my rural culture, late in life, and it’s not in the schools yet, so we started doing course curriculum. And I know they’ve been building it up and they’ve got dates

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saying that it should go into the systems, it doesn't mean everybody's gonna teach it. And so to be able to be a forerunner of some of that, through the work we're doing, and collecting it through documentation, archeology work, we've purchased 240 acres

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that includes the original town site that we're putting on historical register right now under its archeology, under a multiple properties document for rural places,

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rural properties for African Americans in the state of Oregon. We're becoming a viable space to help tell that inclusive narrative

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that's interpreted based on document versus an African American lens in some ways, it's the inclusion. Because the history I heard about Maxville before was

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not truthful. It came from the dominant culture. And it was like, yeah that's not true. That's not true. And that's not true. You know? But it's what's been published before now.

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And so for me to use my voice and my talent, my passion, and what it's done since the very beginning, it has created healing, not only for myself and my family members, but

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for the public at large. There are a lot of people that come into the museum that sit with us, retired educators, folks that say, "you know, I was born and raised in Oregon, why don't I know

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my own history?" And so we share laughter, we share tears, quiet contemplation and stimulating conversations, over all of this. Which, you know, there's all these deliverables. People are like, "how can I help?"

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How can I donate? How can I volunteer to help you in this cause? Because it's our story." Or a lot of women from many spaces that say, "I'm a logger's daughter too."

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And so we're finding the common connections versus the differences.

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