



MMIW/MMIWG2S (Murdered & Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, & Two-Spirit)

Dr. Luhui Whitebear (Coastal Chumash, she/her)

Oregon State University

Assistant Professor, School of Language, Culture, & Society

Center Director, Kaku-Ixt Mana Ina Haws

Western Oregon University: Student Affairs

November 19, 2021



Session Takeaways

- Learn about the MMIW/MMIWG2S+ crisis and the ways in which we can all help to end these violences.
- Understand historic and current day contributors to the MMIWG2S+ crisis
- Understand how the MMIWG2S+ crisis impacts Indigenous students
- Recognize this is a systemic issue that will take systemic change
- Tangible ways to help address this crisis



Content Warning

- Sexual violence
- Gendered violence
- Settler colonial violence
- Generational trauma

Terminology



Indigenous: original people of these lands. Not a term to supersede Tribal/Nation/community words for specific populations.

Woman/women/girl(s): gender identity, not the same as sex assigned at birth. Includes trans women and girls.

Two-Spirit: Contemporary umbrella term for use only by Indigenous folk within the LGBTQI2S+ community as a unifier. Term to acknowledge identity and responsibilities within one's Indigenous community.

Settler colonialism: the process of going to a land and asserting one's own governing structures, belief systems, and norms as superior while striving to replace the existing systems. Not the same as immigration.

Terminology

Epidemic vs Crisis



"The word epidemic also suggests a short-term, isolated problem. ... Using the word epidemic deflects responsibility because it fails to acknowledge the agency of perpetrators and those who allow the problem to continue. The world also utterly fails to account for the crisis's roots in history and law."

Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*, pp ix-x

"The connotation of the word allows society to absolve itself of blame."



Historic overview

- Rape as a tool of conquest and control at contact (i.e. encouraged by Columbus)
- Trans-Atlantic trafficking/slavery of Indigenous people at contact (mostly younger people)
- Patriarchal norms of governance and disregard for women and Two-Spirit people's political autonomy
- Gendercide

Historic overview Gendercide

- Targeting of women and Two-Spirit people
- Viewed as "uncivilized," "sinful," conquerable
- Destabilized political systems, governing structures, and societal norms
- Created sense of fear within communities
- No accountability for the gendercide by colonizers



"Balboas's Dogs Attacking a Group of Panamanian Sodomites."
etching by Theodor de Bry

Historic overview

Normalization of Violence



Historic overview

Normalization of Violence



TRTWORLD What really happened to Pocahontas? Watch later Share

The real story of Pocahontas

When the white man arrived

Watch on YouTube

A YouTube video player thumbnail. The background is dark with a faint image of a group of people. In the center, there is a red map of the United States with the text 'The real story of Pocahontas' overlaid. To the right of the map is a play button icon. Below the map, there is a white box with the text 'When the white man arrived'. At the top left, there is a TRTWORLD logo and the text 'What really happened to Pocahontas?'. At the top right, there are icons for 'Watch later' and 'Share'. At the bottom left, there is a 'Watch on YouTube' button.

Historic overview

Normalization of Violence





Reflection

- What does it mean to have a master narrative about the Oregon Trail that romanticizes pedophilia?
- How does this impact local Tribes to this day?
- How does understanding Pocahontas' story amplify reasons "sexy Indian" costumes are problematic?
- How might this impact Indigenous college students?



Historic overview

Normalization of Violence

- kidnapping and rape become a love story
- forced servitude and assimilation become a story of bravery
- children become women
- a national imaginary is created to absolve colonizers from responsibility
- silence around these violences is normalized and expected



Historic overview

Takeaways



- this is not a new crisis
- young girls and teens are framed as adults to avoid talking about pedophilia and child rape
- kidnapped and trafficked people's stories are reinvented by dominant discourse
- gendercide in Indigenous communities must be talked about
- silence is intentional
- this all set the stage for where we are today

underreporting of sexual assault on college campuses is a reality, especially for Indigenous students of all genders.

Historic overview

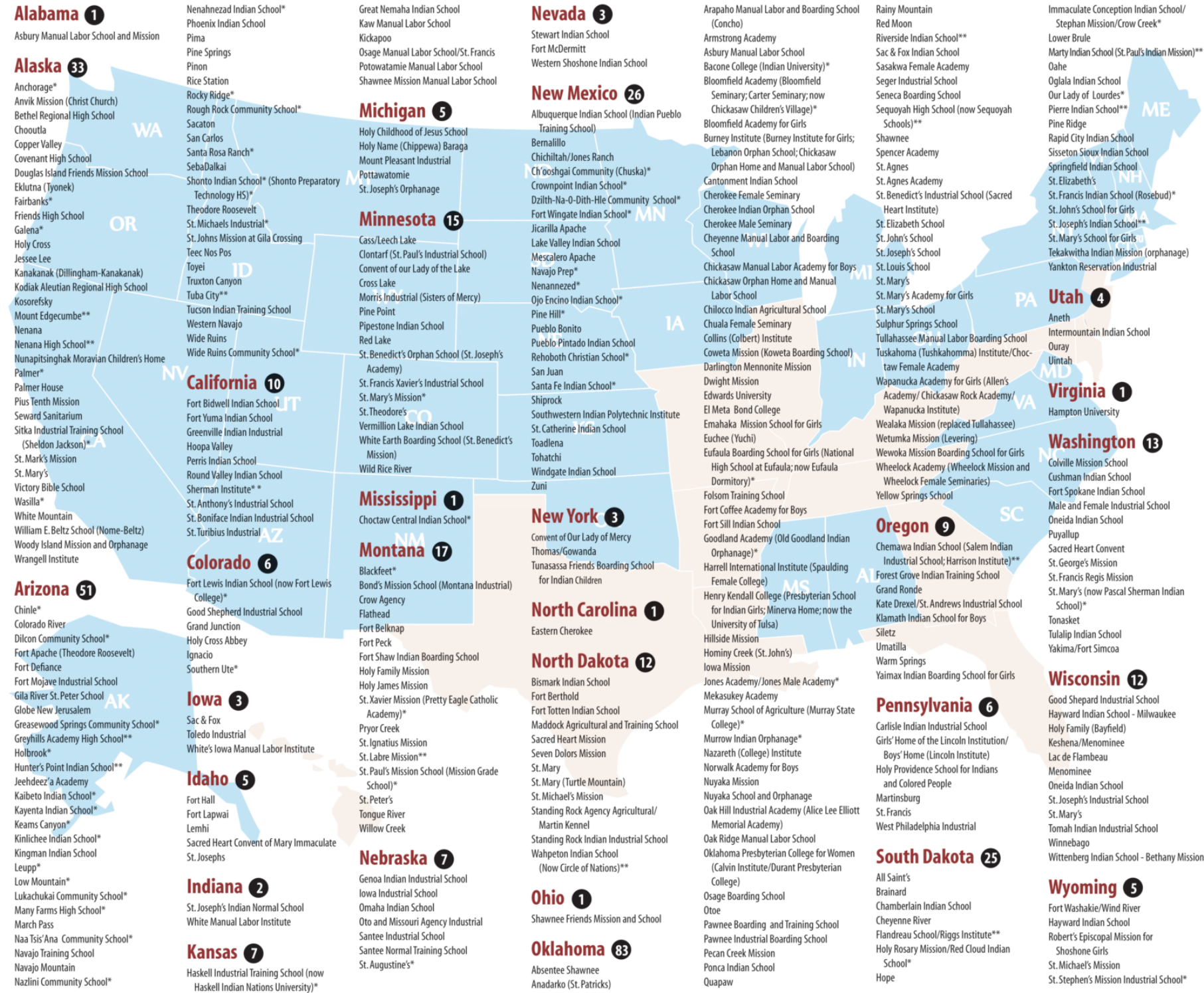
Theft of Children by Law



- Indian Civilization Act Fund (1819) supported religious groups establishing schools on reservations to help "civilize" Indigenous children and set the stage for what was to come.
- California Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (1850) put into state law the ability to remove Indigenous children and enslave them
- First boarding school opened at Fort Simcoe on the Yakama Indian Reservation (1860)
- Carlisle Indian Industrial School opened as the flagship off reservation boarding school (1879)

Historic overview: Theft of Children

American Indian Boarding Schools by State



367 Schools
73 remain open today
15 still boarding

29 States
The top five states with the most boarding schools were:

- Oklahoma (83)
- Arizona (51)
- Alaska (33)
- New Mexico (26)
- South Dakota (25)

14 Denominations

- Catholic (80)
- Presbyterian (21)
- Quaker (15)
- Episcopal (9)
- Methodist (12)
- Baptist (4)
- Jesuit (4)
- Dutch Reformed (2)
- Evangelical (2)
- Mennonite (2)
- Protestant (2)
- Anglican (1)
- 7th Day Adventist (1)
- Unitarian (1)

Originally compiled by Dr. Denise Lajmiodiere for the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), this list also includes considerable contributions from Dr. Rose Miron, Dr. Samuel B. Torres, and Ellie Heaton. This list may not be complete.

"By 1926, nearly 83% of Indian school-age children were attending boarding schools."
(boardingschoolhealing.org)

Historic overview

Role of Law & Policy



- Major Crimes Act (1885) stripped Tribes from authority to prosecute certain crimes on their own lands
- Oliphant v. Suquamish (1978) ruled Tribes have no criminal jurisdiction over non-Native people
- Tribal Law & Order Act (2010) increased Tribal sentencing ability and law enforcement presence
- VAWA Reauthorization (2013) allowed for prosecution of non-Native people for intimate partner crimes

*Even with increased jurisdiction and funding promises, funds were largely not allocated to support these changes.



Where We Are Now

Role of Law & Policy

- VAWA Reauthorization (2013) allowed for prosecution of non-Native people for intimate partner crimes
- Oregon HB 2625 (2019) launched an inter agency investigation to look into Oregon's MMIW numbers
- Savannah's Act (2020) reforms MMIW law enforcement and justice protocols
- Not Invisible Act (2020) mandated a commission to coordinate intergovernmental efforts to address MMIW
- OLJ Cold Case Offices (2020) established several MMIW cold case offices nationwide



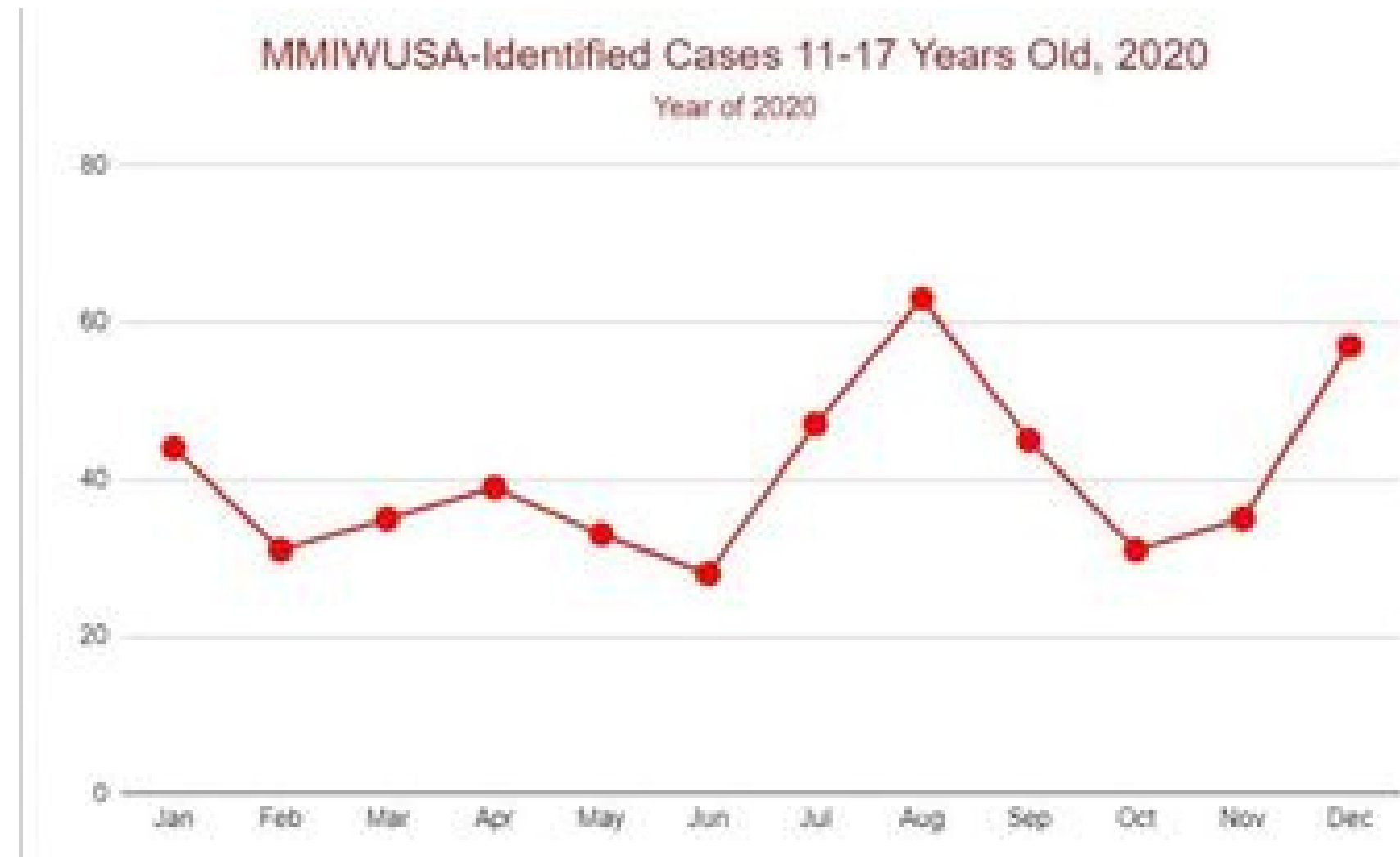
Historic overview

MMIW/MMIWG2S



- effort out of Canada by First Nations women and Two-Spirit people
- Canada launched an official investigation in 2016
- #MMIW helped spread awareness to the U.S.
- MMIW USA (based in Portland, OR) was formed in 2013 to help families with searches and recoveries. has branched out to prevention as well.
- MMIW is an international movement with grassroots organizers (primarily women and Two-Spirit people) across Canada, the United States, and Mexico

The impacts on youth MMIW/MMIWG2S



Indigenous students carry trauma before they get to college campuses.



Reflection

- How does dominant discourse and pop culture reinforce violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people?
- Why is talking about this at multiple levels necessary to create change?
- How can learning more about this impact Student Affairs work, especially as it relates to supporting Indigenous students?

How you can help



- If you are a policy maker, evaluate the tie to historic experiences of communities impacted.
- Grassroots organizers are doing on the ground work and need to be involved with major decisions.
- Advocate for local and national laws and policies being developed. (i.e. VAWA is still not reauthorized)
- Follow groups doing the work on social media and/or listservs
- Share information about missing people. It saves lives.
- Continue to learn more beyond this session.



Organizations to follow

- MMIW USA
- Sovereign Bodies Institute
- Urban Indian Health Institute
- OLJ's listserv
- The National Native American Boarding School Healing Project



What's next?

Write down you will take to learn more and/or advocate for change, then share with the group (if you're comfortable)



Presenter Publications (related to MMIW)

- 2020 & the Elections Can't Stop Us: Hashtagging Change through Indigenous Activism (Spark: A 4C4Equality Journal)
- VAWA Reauthorization of 2013 and the Continued Legacy of Violence Against Indigenous Women: A Critical Outsider Jurisprudence Perspective (University of Miami Race & Social Justice Law Review)
- Oppression from Within: AIM, Heteropatriarchy, Settler Colonialism, and the Death of Anna Mae Aquash (Oregon State University Scholars Archives)



Questions & Answers

Contact:

luhui.whitebear@oregonstate.edu