

[00:00:02] **CHRISTIAN A. CROUCH**

Good evening, everyone, and welcome. I'm Christian Ayne Crouch, and I'm faculty in the programs of History and American Studies here at Bard College. And it is my pleasure to welcome you to this afternoon's event. In the spirit of truth and equity, it is with gratitude and humility that we acknowledge that we are gathered on the sacred homelands of the Munsee and Muhheaconneok people who are the stewards of this land. Today, the community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Nation. We honor and pay respect to their ancestors past and present, as well as to future generations, and we recognize their continuing presence in their homelands as well as in Munsee and Mohican communities worldwide. We understand that our acknowledgement requires those of us who are settlers to recognize our own place in and responsibilities towards addressing inequity, and this ongoing and challenging work requires that we commit to real engagement with the Munsee and Mohican communities. Inviting our speaker, Heather Bruegl today, building our continuing Speaker Series in relationship to the Center for Curatorial Studies's show "Sky Hopinka: Centers of Somewhere" and making these broad open community events is one of the ways in which we are trying to approach this issue of engagement meaningfully.

[00:01:27]

It is my distinct pleasure to be able to introduce our speaker today, Heather Bruegl. Heather is an enrolled citizen of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin and is the first line descent of Stockbridge-Munsee. And I can think of no one more suited to be able to share with us the history of these native homelands than Heather. And I have to say, it gives me particular joy to be able to welcome her, not only in her formal capacity as Director of Cultural Affairs for the Stockbridge Munsee community, but also as a fellow educator and as a trained historian with specialties in US and native history. "Sky Hopinka: Centers of Somewhere," which opened on Saturday at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard offers us an opportunity to reflect on innovation, creativity, and resilience that have characterized Indigenous communities and Heather's participation today is a celebration of this. This afternoon, she joins us to speak about Munsee and

Mohican history that has shaped and importantly continues to shape our present. We are honored by her generosity and being willing to share this knowledge. And I hope you will join me in giving Heather Bruegl a very warm welcome to Bard. Thank you so much, Heather.

[00:03:33] **HEATHER BRUEGL**

I am super excited to be here. I'm not going to touch anything on my computer because right now it's good. But I want to, I appreciate the acknowledgement that the college has done. I appreciate that. We'll talk a little bit more about land acknowledgements later on in my talk. But I also want to let you know that I am coming to you from northeast Wisconsin and where my home sits, I sit on the ancestral homelands of the Menominee Nation, whose native homelands encompass just about the entire state of Wisconsin, the eastern part of the state, along with the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. So I am currently residing on their ancestral homelands, and it's my honor to come to you and honor the ancestors past and present and be able to spread more knowledge. So I'm really excited to be a part of this event. Christian and I had talked earlier in the year and I'm so excited to connect with her and with Lauren, who's been great during this process. And so I'm going to talk to you guys for about 30 minutes or so, and then I hope we'll delve into some really great questions and conversation. But again, I'm really excited to be here. Full disclosure, I have three dogs that are currently being very good and quiet. If they do start to bark, I apologize in advance, the perks of being at home.

[00:04:58]

So I want to start with just a little bit of who we are, who are the Stockbridge-Munsee people. We're the Mohicans, we're known as the Mahicantuck people, people of the waters that are never still. And a lot of our settlement is along the Mahicantuck River Valley. You know, the Mahicantuck as the Hudson River, but our name for it, our Mohican name for it is the Mahicantuck. And it's the river that flows both ways, so that's what it means in our language.

[00:05:26]

So I think it's important to know that a lot of areas have now colonized names, if you were to say. But there are many areas in the country, in the United States itself, even within Turtle Island, so if you encompass Mexico and Canada and things like that; that a lot of the names derive from native names. So Michigan is derived from a native name. Wisconsin is derived from a native name. The county that I live in Wisconsin, is derived from a native name. And there have been pushes to have things changed back to what the original names were. I would love it if the Hudson River went by the Mahicantuck, I think that would be amazing. And we've done that with other areas. Mount McKinley is now known as Denali, and Black Elk Peak is what it's known now in the Black Hills. And so I think that's super important to point out that even when we refer to it today, we refer to it as the Mahicantuck.

[00:06:25]

So the Mohican-Munsee territory covered about six states. So very, very large. It was the southwest part of Vermont. The entire Mahicantuck River Valley in New York, from Lake Champlain to Manhattan. Manhattan was mainly the Lenape area. Western Massachusetts, up to the Connecticut River Valley. Connecticut actually also derives from an indigenous word. Northwest Connecticut and portions of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. And the portions of Pennsylvania and New Jersey would be Philadelphia and across the George Washington Bridge in that area in New Jersey, and that would also be Lenape Area. Lenape is also referred to as Delaware. Delaware is the colonized named for it. The Leni Lenape is the actual name for it, also known as Munsee. And Munsee is a form of dialect that was spoken by the Lenape people. So we have kind of a unique and rich history. A lot of people don't know about who the Mohicans were, who the Lenape were. It's almost folklore, I think when people think of Native Americans and the New England eastern area of the United States because we're not there, there's not many of us there anymore. And so it's almost as if we didn't exist. And thanks to James Fenimore Cooper, a lot of people do think that we didn't exist. If you're not familiar with James Fenimore Cooper, he wrote the book "Last of the Mohicans". There was a movie made in the 90s and Daniel Day-Lewis was in it and all that fun stuff.

[00:08:05]

But because of that novel, there's a misconception that we no longer exist. There's a misconception in general that Native Americans don't exist. It's 2020, and the last time I actually traveled to lecture was last year. So in 2019, before the pandemic, and I had people come up to me and say, Oh wait, Native Americans still exist. And it's like, yes, we do. And then on top of it, when I'm introduced to Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohicans, they're like, hold up, your Mohican too? What does that even mean? Like, I don't understand that. So that's a thing that we have to combat a lot. But we have a very, very rich history and [inaudible 00:08:51] . I'd love to tell you a little bit about who we are, leading up to a little bit more in conversation. But in 1609, Henry Hudson, you might be familiar with him, sailed up the Mahicantuck into the Land of the Mohicans. We like to joke and say we discovered him off of our shores, which is funny, especially with the Indigenous People's Day just happening. And we know what day that falls on. Henry Hudson was a fur trader and with him, a lot of fur traders came into the area. Here, even in Wisconsin where I live, John Nicolay was in this area and there was a lot of fur trading that happened. Detroit was also a huge capital for fur trading as well. But we're going to focus on the Mohicans in the Munsee area.

[00:09:37]

So fur traders came in and traded, hunted for the first traded, first paid Native American nations to go out, get furs and things like that, just trade back with the people. But as the fur trade continued, the first became very difficult to find because as with anything, if you hunt it long enough, it's going to be hard to come by. And so tensions began to build between the Mohicans and the Mohawks, which was another area, which is another nation that settled in similar areas. Our areas we're very close to each other. If you look at New York, so if you think of the Mohicans in the Mahicantuck River Valley, you travel north, you've got the Mohawks. If you go even farther north, you've got the Haudenosaunee, the Iroquois Confederacy, that's what they are. And I am enrolled Oneida. So I am part of that Confederacy, which is really exciting. I'm very honored to be part of that. So tensions began to rise, but then native people were also in an

interesting position where they were caught between the Dutch, the English, and the French. The Mohicans were eventually driven from their territory west of the Mahicantuck. So this is the start of our removal. So I'm going to basically tell you how we ended up in Wisconsin, how we got here and what we're doing now and going through some of the great work that we're doing.

[00:10:58]

So in the early 1700, the Mohicans were moved further east near the Housatonic River in what is present day Massachusetts and Connecticut. Economic life was changed for the Mohicans, along with other native nations. The minute European settlers came in, our economic way of life changed. It became different and it became different because there were different things that we were encountering from them. So traditional items that we may have been making kind of went by the wayside. And new items that you could get at trade sites such as iron kettles, cloth, guns and colorful glass beads became available. So we shifted what we were doing in order to be profitable. So our economic way of life shifted. If you go to the New York State Museum, there is some amazing bead work that was done there, that was done early on, that's been done later on. And it's something that's still done a lot through today. I know some amazing beaders who just produce the most amazing work. I do not have the patience to do that. But if you can look it up, it's absolutely beautiful. So our economic way of life changed.

[00:12:17] - Heather Bruegl

The English who now replaced the Dutch, so you have— even colonizers, it's changing hands. In the area aimed at making Native Nations "civilized". So the English were instrumental, I guess, in the assimilation process of Native Americans. They set up boundary lines and fences that were put up if the land was shared with non native people. One of the most famous borders that was put up was actually put up by the Dutch and it was put up in New York City, in New York, down an area you might know as Wall Street. Wall Street got its name because it was an actual wall that was put up to shut out the Lenape from the Dutch settlers. So if you're ever traveling down Wall Street,

just know that you are standing on a constructed, colonized border that was meant to shut us out, so you have this introduction of boundaries. And that's not something that we were really known for. We don't believe, number one we believe you cannot own the land. Number two, we believe in the free movement of people. So as more settlers arrived, the Mohicans became dependent on the settlers in order to survive, which is actually a common story amongst many Native Nations.

[00:13:34]

Once you're moved onto reservations, once your normal way of life is taken away, you become dependent on those people who made that happen. So on reservations, you're dependent upon the rations that you get from treaties, from annuities. And with the Mohicans and other tribes in that area, they became dependent on those little trade centers that the settlers set up in order to survive. And the other thing that happened is there was also disease that was brought to the Native Nations in that area. It was something that they were not used to. So disease, such as smallpox, was introduced to the area. And our immune systems weren't set up for that. They weren't built for that. We didn't know how to fight it off. And so a lot of our numbers had dropped because unfortunately, people died from this disease, from diseases.

[00:14:27]

Then there was the arrival of missionaries that entered Native villages to help convert Native people. So prior, contrary to popular belief, what you see now in the practice of religion amongst native communities was not always the way it was. We were not Christians until missions started. We practiced traditional religions. The nature was our church. And Creator, or Great Spirit, however you referred to them, was there. Everything had meaning and everything had importance. The introduction of missionaries, they wanted to convert us to that Christian religion. That is very common and that's practiced a lot today. There are Native people, though, who do practice the traditional religions such as ghost dance, Sun dance, sweat lodges, things like that. Native people agreed to be christianized after seeing the prosperity of the settlers. They believed that there was a correlation between the two. So the Mohegan people, along

with other Eastern tribes, were christianized. were colonized and christianized very early on. So a lot of those traditional ways were lost. And that's something that we are still working on getting back, currently. So they decided, hey, you know, these settlers are doing really good for themselves, maybe we need to practice this as well.

[00:15:52]

So for focusing on the Mohican people in 1734, a missionary by the name of John Sargent was introduced to us. He came into the Mohican village of [inaudible 00:16:03] and he started to preach and baptized many Mohicans into the Christian religion. In 1738, the Mohicans gave permission to John to actually start a mission. So a mission house was built and it's a building that still stands today. More Europeans moved into this area and they eventually renamed the area Stockbridge. And Stockbridge is located in the Berkshire area of Massachusetts, so that would be the western side of the state. And that is where a lot of our story takes place. And that's an area of significance for most of us. So others who wished to hear the missions' teaching also came. This included other Native American groups and included the Wappingers, the Brothertowns, the Pequots, the Mohawks, the Narragansetts, and the Oneidas. So they came and they merged with the Mohicans and we kind of became one.

[00:17:04]

And so our name became the Stockbridge Indians because we encompassed so many different, different peoples. There were several wars that were happening between 1700 and 1800. There was the French and Indian wars that were conflicts really between France and England over the territory that they took from Native American people. The American Revolution and the War of 1812 was about creating an independent nation and what to do with that land that was taken from the Native American people. I'm very proud to say that the Stockbridge-Munsee Mohicans or the Stockbridge Mohican, the Oneidas, the Tuscarora and other Native American groups fought alongside the colonists. So it makes me... One of my specialties as a historian is early colonial history. And so I'm very proud as an Oneida and Stockbridge-Munsee woman that my ancestors fought alongside the colonists to create the United States of America. That

conflicts with my indigenous historian side sometimes, but it's something that I think is super important to acknowledge. There's a whole big thing.

[00:18:15]

Reform to the Stockbridge militia, which was led by Daniel Ninham, who was a Wappinger chief of Stockbridge-Munsee. They were instrumental at the Battle of Van Cortlandt, which happened in Brooklyn, present-day Brooklyn. And it was very significant because a number of Stockbridge Mohicans actually died in that battle. So after the war, many returned to Stockbridge. We actually in 1787, I believe it was, there was an ox roast that was held for us by George Washington. And it was to thank us for the work that we had done and be very grateful, yada, yada, yada, all that fun stuff.

[00:18:53]

And then we returned to Stockbridge, Massachusetts. So after getting back there. It was found that the lands that we had there had been taken and that we had basically been pushed out of the area. So we talked with the Oneidas. The Oneidas offered us a place to live. And so we went to New Stockbridge, which is near Overnighter Lake in New York. And while we were there, we flourished. Leaders developed, diplomats developed. We farmed, we had schools, we had churches. It was a beautiful time for our people.

[00:19:28]

But then we needed to move again because just because we were becoming "civilized", quote unquote, it didn't stop colonizers from moving us out of our homeland. So the next stop on our list was White River, Indiana, and there we lived among the Miami and the Delaware, the Lenape. But when we arrived there after a year of travel; so it took a year to get from New Stockbridge to White River; we found that the Lenape that they had been coerced into selling their land and so they had moved on. But back in New York, under the war department, there were negotiations that were happening for... Negotiations happening between the Menominee and the Ho-Chunk and the Indian commissioners under the War Department. At that time, we were under... The

Bureau of Indian Affairs, was under the War Department, the Department of War, which later became the Department of Defense.

[00:20:27]

And then we were moved... The Bureau of Indian Affairs, was moved under the Department of the Interior. So and there's a, there's a whole... I have feelings about that as well. But there were things that they were negotiating with the Ho-Chunk and the Menominee who lived in Michigan territory, which later became the state of Wisconsin, for the New York Indians, so to speak, to move to. So in 1822, there was a treaty that was reached and the Stockbridge moved again. And we settled down in the Fox River area, in a little town that's still super adorable today called Cocona. And we were, you know, we set up a mill, we set up a school, we set up stores. Others of our people who were still in New York traveled and joined us there. We were one of the first English-speaking groups that arrived in the area. We have the distinction of having tribal member elect John Quinney, who became the first public school teacher in what would become the state of Wisconsin. We had the first Protestant minister in the area and we also formed the first Christian Temperance Union in the area.

[00:21:36]

But adopting all of those Eurocentric ways did not prevent them from moving us again. So then we moved a little farther south to the east shoreline of Lake Winnebago in 1834, and that's in the southern part of Wisconsin. So these two, the Cocona and what became Stockbridge, Wisconsin, are in the southern part of the state. It was while we were in Stockbridge, Wisconsin, that a group of Lenape joined us. And from that moment on, we became known as the Stockbridge-Munsee people. So that's very... I think that's super important to know about.

[00:22:16]

But we weren't done yet. We were moving yet again. And through the treaty of 1856, the tribe moved for our final time, moved up to where we currently are now in Shawano County, on a reservation that encompassed two townships, Bartelme and Red Springs.

Forestry became the base of the economy there. The land was not that great to farm on, it was swampy and marshy. There's still a lot of swamps on the reservation today, so forestry became what was happening. But because the forests were so dense, outside foresters came in. And they cleared the land. They cleared a lot of the land. And in 1871, the tribe was forced to sell 54 sections of forested land just to survive. So even though we finally had a home, so to speak, we were still victims of outsiders coming in. It wasn't until different native policies were put in place; the policy of the Indian Reorganization Act or the IRA, in 1934 was passed. And the IRAs did a lot to stop allotment, which was a previous policy. It was passed in 1887, also known as the Dawes Act. And what happened under it was beneficial to a lot of native tribes. It had its problems, as many policies did. But in our case it was extremely beneficial because through the IRA we regained fifteen thousand acres of land in the township of Bartelme. Only twenty five hundred of those acres were immediately placed into trust, which became reservation land. In 1972 the remaining thirteen thousand acres were placed into trust.

[00:24:09]

In 1937, we established a new constitution that was based off of the Bureau of Indian Affairs model and we had a land base for people to finally build homes on. We were finally home. We had a place that we could put our heads down, finally. Currently in the town of Red Springs and even in the town of Bartelme, the tribe does buy back land when it goes up for sale. We have the process of buying back land and then it goes through a process of becoming trust land once again. And I know I have mentioned at the beginning of this that I was grateful for the land acknowledgement because I feel like land acknowledgements are the least that any cultural or educational institution can do. I think it's the least that even you as a person can do, knowing whose land you are actually on. So I feel that telling the story of the Stockbridge-Munsee people, how we ended up where we are today from where we started is very, very important, I think.

[00:25:13]

And even myself acknowledging the importance of whose land I'm standing on today,

right now, I think is very important. Because as we move forward, I think we have a tendency to forget that we are all, no matter where you're at, you're standing on native land. You're, in some cases, standing on stolen and unceded land, land that we never gave away, land that was forcibly taken from us. So I think having land acknowledgements is immensely important. And if you need help, you know, if you work for a cultural or educational institution and you need help writing a land acknowledgement, please reach out. I can absolutely help you. Just because I work for one Nation and I'm an enrolled citizen of another nation doesn't mean I can't help you reach out to the correct nation that you need to work with in order to make sure that you're doing that. So a lot of the work that we do today is about regaining who we are as a people.

[00:26:13]

As it was stated earlier, I'm the director of cultural affairs for the Stockbridge-Munsee community. And part of my job is to oversee our history, our language and our archives and our preservation. So we just have had our historic preservation office, which is located out east. It was located in Troy, New York, and that just moved; and when I say just moved, it happened on Friday; to Williamstown. Williamstown, Massachusetts, which is in the heart of Mohican territory, and it's going to be at Williams College now.

[00:26:46]

And the significance of that is more than what I can say it is. The Williams College is founded on land that was not very nicely taken from the Mohican people. And so for us to have that footprint back there again is super important. But what our historic preservation office does is we protect our historic sites in our homelands. We also bring our ancestors home from museums and get them back into the ground. And we work on repatriating items of cultural significance.

[00:27:20]

Here in Wisconsin. We have our library and our museum. It's very small. We're in the process of working on building a larger cultural center. But I have the honor of

overseeing the largest archives of Mohican history in the world. It started in the 1970s, actually, even before that. But officially, I guess to say, it started in the 1970s with people from our community traveling back out east to look at documents, go to museums, go to libraries, go to schools and handwrite on just pieces of paper, handwrite our history and bring it back home to us. One of the other things I have the privilege of doing as well, and I know it was something that Christian had wanted me to touch on and I'm excited about it, is our language revitalization.

[00:28:09]

And so back in the 1970s, along with our historical surge of getting things back, we had community members get together and they started focusing on bringing language back. We believe in the native community that we can't fully heal from what has happened until our language is brought back home. Because it has... It holds so much significance to us. It holds history. Its words hold history to who we are as a people. And so in the 1970s, there was a push to bring the language back. The first language that they were drawn in was the Munsee language. And we were lucky enough to be able to travel out east and to Moraviantown in Canada and work with Munsee speakers there who were fluent in it. And through years of hard work and workshops, we were able to bring that language back to the community where I hear it spoken pretty frequently. I mean, obviously, obviously, and unfortunately, English is our first language, but I can still hear our Munsee being spoken through people. I actually had a naming ceremony in September and my name was given to me in the Munsee language. So I thought that was extremely significant and the ceremony was done in the Munsee language. And so I found that quite beautiful.

[00:29:30]

The other exciting thing that we have been working on is we've been working on bringing back our Mohican language and that's significant in itself because it was a language that was almost dead. We like to say that it was asleep for a very long time and now we are in the process of waking it up. And we were able to do that through a grant that our community received a couple of years ago. And we were able to work

with a linguist out of Canada who holds the only PhD in the Mohican language. And through documents that we had. Through catechisms that were written in the 1700s, that were written from English into the Mohican language, so those who were attending church services could understand it. Through that we were able to take those words and bring those words back to life. But then we were also able to take those words and create new ones. So Munsee and Mohican are actually quite similar. They're both part of the Algonquin language family. So any... if you need a new word for something, you can look to the Munsee language and you can look to other Algonquian languages and help come up with that word.

[00:30:42]

The last fluent speaker that we had of the Mohican language actually died in the 1930s and there are recordings of him out there, somewhere, that we're trying to find of him actually speaking it. But he did a lot of writing and so it was through those writings that we were able to put sounds together and try to figure out how things might have sounded. Obviously it's going to be a Stockbridge Mohican language. It's not going to be the Mohican language that some of our great diplomats and leaders like John Quinney or Hendrick Aupaumut would have spoken. But it's going to be similar.

[00:31:22]

And we are so excited about that, because the more that we can bring our native language to places like Bard College, to places out east that are located on our historic lands, is more exciting than I can even fathom, because it's that language being spoken on our homelands where our ancestors lived and loved and died and where they are still. They're still there, their spirits are still there. So when they hear that language, it's like they know that we haven't forgotten about them and that we're coming home. And, you know, it's more important than I can even.... than I can even tell. I get emotional talking about it because to have your language back and to hear it being spoken. You didn't know you missed it until you heard it and you didn't know your heart, longed for it until you heard it. And so it just heals your soul. And so being able to do that and to be part of that creation, it's probably my most favorite part of my job

right now, is to bring that language back.

[00:32:34]

And so I am so excited to be part of this and to bring this history of the Stockbridge-Munsee community to you. And I thank Lauren and I thank Christian and all those who put it together. I think Sky's beautiful work, art exhibits, and I hope you get a chance to see those. And so I am open to any questions or conversation that we might have. And so I will throw it back to either Lauren or Christian, and I am super grateful for this opportunity.

[00:33:20]

**Questions and comments not transcribed.**