

June 2017

Please review *Historical Overview on Colonization* which follows this statement and provides context for our affirmations and beliefs.

The Native Arts and Cultures Foundation affirms that:

- The arts and cultures of all people - especially those who have been historically underrepresented based on race/ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, gender, socioeconomic status, geography, citizenship status, or religion— contribute to the meaning and understanding of our humanity and should be honored and celebrated.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- Artists, culture bearers, their art, their creative process, and the organizations they create and support play a unique role in witnessing, demonstrating, and providing inspiration to foster societal equity and justice.
- Sustained colonized public policies and institutional practices, both conscious and unconscious, have resulted in unequal access to resources for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities and artists. This systemic unequal access to opportunity has resulted in generations of unjust and inequitable outcomes for Native communities throughout the United States and across US continental borders.
- NACF was explicitly founded to advocate and enact equitable support for Native and tribal communities, arts and culture organizations, and artists; our very existence and ongoing work marks a critical and actionable step towards the fair distribution of programmatic, financial, and informational resources.

The Native Arts and Cultures Foundation believes that:

- A historic societal and philanthropic bias has long undervalued the contributions of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian art forms, artists, and voices. NACF strives to implement relevant programs, break down institutional barriers, and identify allies who will join us in supporting Native communities, artists, and arts organizations through the United States as leaders, grantees, and partners.
- Our arts and cultures is central to Native life, health and wellbeing. There is nothing more powerful for transmitting cultural values and knowledge between generations, perpetuating practices central to our spiritual, political, economic and geographically-situated identity, challenging pan-Native stereotypes, restoring cultural pride, and building meaningful relationships and avenues for positive, healing collaboration between Native and non-Native communities.
- We strive to hold each other accountable, because acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.

The very creation of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation stems from promoting cultural equity and racial justice for Native peoples. In every aspect of our organization we are striving to increase philanthropic support

in arts and cultures for Native artists, arts organizations, and communities. We are supportive and in step with other groups in advocating for greater cultural equity, racial justice, and in addressing structural inequities in institutions.

We:

- First and foremost, celebrate and promote our Native cultures, knowledge, and artways.
- Approach our work from an assets-based model lifting up what is strong, resilient, and valuable among Native artists and
- in Native and tribal communities.
- Select staff and members for board service whose values include cultural equity and racial justice.
- Pursue cultural competency throughout our organization through substantive learning and formal, transparent policies.
- Commit time and resources to nurture diverse leadership within our board and staff.
- Encourage substantive learning to build cultural competency and to proliferate pro-equity policies and practices by all of our constituencies and audiences.
- Improve the cultural leadership pipeline by creating and supporting programs and policies that foster leadership that reflects the full breadth of American society.
- Advocate research and data collection that accurately represents the demographics and practices of Native artists and Native-led arts organizations.
- Facilitate research and evaluation practices that are more accurate and representational of Native knowledge, belief, and values.
- Facilitate representation by Native artists, keynote speakers, and panelists at annual conferences and other convenings.
- Convene artists nationally/regionally to provide resources and share best practices to create equity.
- Advocate for public and private-sector policy that promotes cultural equity and racial justice.
- Work with other national, regional, and local organizations who are also working toward greater racial equity in philanthropy.
- Regularly promote equity throughout all NACF's communication platforms.

Historic Overview on Colonization

Understanding the inequities and injustice around culture and race requires a basic understanding of the history of colonization, both from a global standpoint and as it applies to the founding of what is now the United States of America. Modern state global colonialism began in the 15th century with the "Age of Discovery," primarily led by Spanish and Portuguese exploration of the Americas, the coasts of Africa, the Middle East, India and East Asia. Britain, France, and the Netherlands followed in subsequent centuries. The purpose of colonization was linked to the ruling monarchies of each country with support of its religious leaders to create settler colonies to exploit the natural resources, land, and native population of that place for economic gain that benefitted the "imperial" countries. The native populations of these settler colonies were often destroyed or subjected to hard labor and slavery, or at the best, given menial jobs in servitude to their colonizers.

In order to accomplish such massive control and power over settler colonies across the globe, it was not enough to just physically overtake these places and their peoples. These early imperial countries believed that there was only one way to interpret and view the world. They believed in only one "truth" that was informed

and rooted in a western Eurocentric approach to life. This belief was the basis they needed to delegitimize and destroy the values, culture, and knowledge of the native populations of these places. One needed to make the people seem primitive and inferior. More importantly, the minds and spirits of the people needed to be colonized too. When you can colonize people's minds and spirits and they "willingly" succumb to your values, beliefs, and practices, the colonizer's conscious is relieved of guilt and they are validated in their belief that they are doing good for their country and humanity.

Yet something else needed to happen for the high level of success to be achieved. In order to perpetuate their "one truth" of the superiority of western Eurocentric knowledge, they also needed to establish themselves as the legitimate holders of this superiority. The idea of race was born out of this time period. If certain physical traits like skin color, hair texture, and features could be categorized and identified with the native populations of the settler colonies, whose skin colors were mostly brown and black, or in the case of East Asia, they may have had lighter skin, but they had almond shaped eyes, then the colonizing countries of western Europe could distinguish and legitimate their population or "white race" as superior. This isn't to say that peoples originating from Africa, the Americas, Asia, Polynesia, or Europe didn't have unique biologic identifiers that can be explained by western science. Or to refute that some scholars and scientists had honest intentions to understand human civilizations. But the construct and use of race was intended to validate the imperial countries conquest of the world at that time.

Ironically, North America was colonized under slightly different circumstances. Original citizens from many of those very same colonizing countries immigrated to North America to escape religious persecution, economic inequality and poverty, and lack of freedom. While original intentions were honorable and even courageous, these first settlers carried with them the indoctrination and worldview of their western European heritage, whether they liked it or not. Their original motivations were well intended and spoke to individual freedoms, justice, and democratic ideals. The establishment of the thirteen colonies and the Declaration of Independence were striving for a different kind of rule and government than they had experienced in their original homelands. The tragedy was the settlers, in trying to bring a new world governance structure and more democratic principles, actually ended up repeating the same colonization practices and subjugation of the first peoples or Native populations of North America, Hawai`i, and Alaska or what is now the United States of America. Population demographers and historians place the Native population at time of European first contact close to 30 million in what now makes up the US continent. If one adds Hawai`i, the estimated Native population at time of European and subsequent early American contact was at one million and Alaska Native population at time of Russian first contact was at 100,000.

The populations in all of these places declined significantly by up to 80% after contact through introduction of disease brought over by the settlers, intentional genocidal practices, and confiscation of land and natural resources.