

Land Acknowledgement at History of Science Society Annual Meeting 2021

The document was updated for the HSS 2021 virtual meeting by Marissa Petrou, Rosanna Dent and Ashanti Ke Ming Shih.

We have created this page to introduce, explain, and provide resources regarding ways to honor Native land during HSS 2021 in its online format. These practices are complex and non-innocent, and we think that as historians of science it is particularly salient to reflect on colonial processes that underlie our own knowledge production. The colonial, visual and global turns in the history of science have started to bring attention to the historical significance of Indigenous knowledge systems. As land acknowledgements evolve in the virtual context, we are reminded of the legacies of colonialism embedded in technology and that while we are not meeting on shared land, we are located on land and at institutions with different relationships with stolen land and land back. We see land acknowledgment policy as a next step towards more inclusive and accountable scholarship in the history of science, in tandem with the work of other HSS groups, including the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion.

Whose land were we scheduled to meet on for HSS 2021?

HSS was planned to take place in New Orleans, but due to the COVID pandemic and the lasting effects of Hurricane Ida, the conference will be virtual. Historically, New Orleans was a meeting place for numerous nations in the Gulf South, including the Acolapissa, Bayagoula, Chitimacha, Choctaw, Houma, Tunica and Natchez. The Taensas, the Chawasha and the Washa lived in the surrounding region. The Choctaw referred to what is now New Orleans as Bulbancha, “a place of foreign languages.” The Tribes who live in South Louisiana were among the hardest hit by Hurricane Ida. Please consider donating to support them in the long process of recovery: the federally recognized [Chitimacha Sovereign Nation](#), the [Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana](#), and the [Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana](#); the state recognized [Grand Caillou/Dulac Band of Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw](#), the [United Houma Nation](#), the [Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe](#), and [Isle de Jean Charles Band](#), as well as the [Atakapa-Ishak Nation](#).

The region presently known as Louisiana includes the Chitimacha Sovereign Nation, the Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana, Jena Band of Choctaw Indians, Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana, the Addai Caddo Tribe, the Biloxi-Chitimacha Confederation of Muskogee, Choctaw-Apache Community of Ebarb, Clifton Choctaw, Four Winds Tribe Louisiana Cherokee Confederacy, Grand Caillou/Dulac Band, Isle de Jean Charles Band, Louisiana Choctaw Tribe, Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana, Pointe-Au-Chien Indian Tribe, the United Houma Nation, the Atakapa-Ishak Nation, the Avogel Okla Tasannuk, the Avoyel-Taensa, the Canneci N'de Band of Lipan Apache. This region is also the land of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town, Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Nation of Oklahoma, Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Muscogee (Creek) Nation, Osage Nation, Quapaw Tribe of Indians, and Seminole Tribe of Florida.

Where does the practice of Honoring Native Land come from?

Indigenous communities in North America and Australia have diverse traditions of honoring sacred relationships with their lands and waters which have existed for thousands of years. In recent decades, colonial institutions have also begun to practice Land or Territorial Acknowledgements (in what is currently the United States and Canada) and Acknowledgements of Country (in what is currently Australia). These practices seek to make plain that these institutions of culture and education are constructed on and continue to benefit from lands that were often taken under unjust and violent circumstances. They draw attention to the fact that settler-occupied lands continue to be essential to the identities and worldviews of Indigenous groups. Acknowledgements provide a small but tangible way to publicly recognize and begin repairing the harm caused by mainstream historical accounts, which have

excluded Indigenous voices and obscured the centrality of violence to colonialism in the United States and elsewhere.

To Honor Native Land takes more than simple words. As the Duwamish [teach us](#), “The power of an acknowledgement lies in learning as much as you can about local treaties and practices, while working to build accountable relationships.”

Why do we recommend you consider and practice Land Acknowledgement?

In this time of virtual conferencing, we expect land acknowledgments to take a new form, in which each session participant acknowledges the land from which they are joining the virtual meeting. It is important that predominantly white institutions recognize the ways in which they support colonialism through erasure as well as through placing the burden of redress on already oppressed peoples. We encourage our members to prevent ongoing systemic inequality by undertaking the necessary labor to educate themselves about the Native history of the land on which they live and work. Make the effort to enact genuine change by developing relationships with local Indigenous communities. For those of us who are occupiers of Indigenous land, it is our responsibility to build relationships with the original stewards of the land and demonstrate commitment to long-term relationships.

How can you develop your own way of Honoring Native Land?

Depending on where you are joining the virtual event from, it may or may not make sense to prepare a specific way of honoring Native land. These practices are location-specific and depend on the particular history of colonialism and politics of Indigeneity in the place where you live and work. If you are based in places currently known as Canada, the United States, Australia, or Aotearoa, there are likely shared colonial histories that make this practice particularly relevant. We encourage all to think about the histories of the land where you are and how they inform the practice and politics of your work.

If your institution or a neighboring institution has a Native and Indigenous Studies program or similar center, we recommend you consult the resources that they have developed. You may also wish to consult this [list of Federal and State recognized tribes](#) in the United States. Acknowledgement guides by the [Duwamish Tribe](#), [Australians Together](#), the [Canadian Association of University Teachers](#), the [U.S. Department of Art and Culture](#) and [The Native Governance Center](#) share a number of recommendations. They point to a similar general format for an acknowledgement, which could sound something like: “Before we begin [description of event], I would like to acknowledge that we are gathered today on the ancestral territory of the () peoples, and I pay my respect to their Elders both past and present, as well as living descendants and future generations.”

As Polly Olsen (Yakama) advised us, we will make mistakes, but it is still important to act in good faith, learn from them, and improve. If you are not uncomfortable you are not doing it right. If you are not feeling like you need to do more, then you are not doing it right.

All three guides also state that it is important to be genuine in the acknowledgement, so this basic format should be adapted to include information that is appropriate to your specific setting. Below you can find guides to learn about the land that you are on and additional action steps to build accountable relationships. This process should be only the first step and must be followed up by further concrete action. We suggest actions of solidarity below.

How and why have people critiqued practices of Territorial and Land Acknowledgement?

As legal scholar [Chelsea Vowel](#) (Métis) and other Native scholars suggest, land acknowledgement should constitute the first step in a process of opening dialogue with Indigenous communities to learn about the specific laws and protocols of that Nation regarding the responsibilities of guests. A verbal acknowledgment, moreover, **must** be accompanied by concrete allocation of time and resources to both educate regarding the colonial history of the specific land upon which the meeting or event occurs, and to support the participation of Indigenous people in the society or institution.

Dylan AT Miner, a Wiisaakodewinini (Métis) artist, activist, and scholar stresses that Land Acknowledgements must be followed with ongoing commitments to these same communities. As Hayden King (Anishinaabe) [points out](#), if forms of Honoring Native Land become rote and are not followed up with concrete education and action for change, they can be tokenistic and provide a false sense of action where there is little real investment of time, energy, and resources. It is also important to learn about traditional Native or Aboriginal protocols without appropriating ceremony that is not intended for outsiders.

What else can we do?

We emphasize that consultation and acknowledgement are insufficient to redress inequity. There are many steps you can take, including but not limited to:

- Amplify the voices of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous people leading grassroots movements;
- Support or participate in efforts to investigate the colonial history of your home institution;
- Support efforts to establish Native Studies programs or centers at your home institution;
- Donate time, money, or other resources to Native nations and Indigenous-led organizations;
- Pay rent to the Native nations whose land you live and work upon (e.g. <https://www.realrentduwamish.org/determine-rent.html>; <https://sogoreate-landtrust.org/shuumi-land-tax/>);
- Return land.

We also advocate that HSS take active measures to invite and financially support Native scholars and community members with interests in the History of Science. Relationship building with scholars in Native and Indigenous Studies has great potential to transform the ways we study the history of science.

Identify whose land you are on: [list of Federal and State recognized Tribes](#)

[Bibliography of Works of Interest by Indigenous Scholars](#)

Honor Native Land Bibliography and Resources

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