

source: AWAKE Media Project www.awakethefilm.org

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Native American group reaches out to Covington Catholic High School to offer workshops and talks

Filmmakers and elders hope to turn the firestorm over taunting incident into a teachable moment about treatment of Native Americans

[New York, NY – January 25, 2019] The leaders of the AWAKE Media Project, a collective of filmmakers and community leaders helping young Native American journalists and filmmakers, has conveyed a [letter](#) to Covington Catholic High School to offer what it called “a learning opportunity” in the wake of the national firestorm over Covington students taunting a Native American elder last week.

“As administrators of a Native youth media program, we often have to find ways to facilitate healthy discussion around racism, culture, and understanding,” said the letter, signed by filmmakers who collaborated on the 2017 film “[AWAKE: A Dream from Standing Rock](#),” Doug Good Feather, Floris White Bull, Myron Dewey, Teena Pugliese and Josh Fox. “While we know that this is a divisive time, we are coming to you with a hope to build understanding. We appreciate the official release from the school administrators that did not condone the actions of their students and we know that there is an opportunity here to learn from what happened. We would like to hold a workshop or a series of talks guided by our program leaders and community elders to help your school staff, administration, and students learn about our lives, our beliefs, and how to treat people of different backgrounds with thoughtfulness and care.”

The letter was conveyed to Covington High School yesterday, and is posted in full [here](#). At present writing the issuers are still awaiting the school’s response.

On January 18, 2019, Omaha elder Nathan Phillips was attending the Indigenous Peoples March at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. After the rally, there was a confrontation where high school students from Covington Catholic High School taunted Phillips as he sang a unity song meant to deescalate the situation. Chaperones did not intervene and the incident was documented by videos shared on social media.

Nathan Phillips has offered to go to Covington Catholic High School to talk with students, and the Lakota People's Law Project and the Indigenous Peoples Movement have undertaken an initiative to make that happen. The AWAKE Media Project has reached out to those groups to coordinate approaches.

The signers of the AWAKE Media Project letter say the taunting incident demonstrates deep disrespect, a misunderstanding of Native people, lack of leadership among school staff, and miseducation of the students that permitted them to so dehumanize Phillips. But, they hope, it is also an opportunity for learning and growth.

"This is a teachable moment," said Floris White Bull. "It's a prime example of how detrimental out-of-date history books are to entire nations, and how dangerous it is to continue to perpetuate stereotypical images of indigenous people. Throughout the Capital you'll find imagery used to justify the genocide of nations that no longer walk this earth, and the near-genocide of tribes that remain. Yet we have contributed to 'US' history throughout -- in medicine, agriculture, and much else. The US system of government is itself an indigenous concept, modeled on the east coast tribe of Haudenosaunee. Now is the time to update the history books."

"The taunting incident was a clear act of bigotry and bullying," said Josh Fox, "but we want to answer it with constructive dialogue and teaching."

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About the AWAKE Media Project

The AWAKE Media Project launched in 2017, with the understanding that Native people too often have been unable to control the narratives created about them. In these uncertain and divisive times, it is incredibly important to return to truth and allow indigenous people to tell their own stories. AWAKE Media Project empowers young content creators, teaching the skills needed to produce media about their own tribes, allowing them to show us and the rest of the world the history, beauty, and culture that they know. The AWAKE Media Project is supported by [International WOW Company](#). For more information about AWAKE Media Project visit: www.awakethefilm.org