

Michael ([00:00:19](#)):

Welcome to Space of Justice. I'm your host, Michael Betts II. My pronouns are he, him, and his; and today, I'm joined by my brilliant friend and colleague, Chicano filmmaker and photographer, Bishop Ortega.

Michael ([00:00:30](#)):

A Duke Master's of Fine Arts graduate in the experimental and documentary arts program, Ortega's work has forced Duke University's community to come to terms with its hateful start on the backs of indigenous boys through its Trinity College Industrial Indian School. Thank you so much for joining me today, Bishop.

Bishop Ortega ([00:00:47](#)):

Oh, it's been my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Michael ([00:00:49](#)):

Before we get really, really deep into it, can you do me a favor and kind of introduce yourself for the audience that's listening? Tell us who you are, where you are in relationship to Duke now, your areas of interest with your work, and pronouns, facts about yourself that you find interesting, just the usual.

Bishop Ortega ([00:01:04](#)):

Yeah. Well, my name's Bishop Ortega. I'm originally from Phoenix, Arizona. I'm currently now living in Cary, North Carolina.

Bishop Ortega ([00:01:11](#)):

But before we get to me, I kind of just want to do a land recognition and start the program by recognizing Duke currently sits on the ancestral land of the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation. Part of the reason why we do this just isn't to recognize the historical trauma or the struggled past of the area or the land, but we also want to recognize that those people are still here.

Bishop Ortega ([00:01:31](#)):

They're thriving. They're alive. They have families, and they didn't just go away somewhere, but they are still here. A lot of people that I've found in North Carolina don't even know that there are indigenous bodies here, that there are still Native indigenous people here currently.

Bishop Ortega ([00:01:48](#)):

So I just want to put out that they are here. They're thriving. There's many other nations here in the Carolinas, not just North Carolina.

Bishop Ortega ([00:01:56](#)):

And I just wanted to acknowledge that. As far as myself, father, four children, kind of a late bloomer. I think I was the oldest guy in our program, right?

Michael ([00:02:06](#)):

Yes.

Bishop Ortega ([00:02:07](#)):

When we met. So yeah, man, just came to life pursuing art as a career where I had previously worked in banking doing loans and refinances. And my soul was dying a little bit every day, every day in a cubicle.

Bishop Ortega ([00:02:23](#)):

And when, what was it, back in 2006, 2008, when the economy crashed, I got released with about 3,500 other people from a pretty well-known bank. And during that time, me and a couple of other artists did a mural in downtown Phoenix.

Bishop Ortega ([00:02:39](#)):

And I think it was during that time period when I got laid off and we did this mural, my wife finally said, "You know what? I need to let him be an artist and stop trying to fit him in that suit and tie."

Bishop Ortega ([00:02:52](#)):

And when your partner sees it, and you guys can journey together, it makes things a lot easier. And I think after that happened-

Michael ([00:03:00](#)):

Definitely. Definitely.

Bishop Ortega ([00:03:00](#)):

... it freed me up. And I ended up in North Carolina. I came to Duke to explore filmmaking and documentary-style photography. That was in the Master of Fine Arts for Experimental Documentary Arts.

Bishop Ortega ([00:03:15](#)):

I was in Phoenix, Arizona. I did my undergraduate work at Arizona State University in their filmmaking practices college. And I just saw people who had graduated from ASU were just doing hip-hop videos on the weekend, or they were getting jobs in marketing.

Bishop Ortega ([00:03:35](#)):

And I didn't want to do little films or pictures of people's merchandise. I didn't want to do hip-hop videos until I was 50. I wanted to tell stories for real.

Bishop Ortega ([00:03:47](#)):

And I just researched documentary programs, master's programs around the country, and I saw that that Duke had one of the best ones. And I only applied for Duke.

Bishop Ortega ([00:03:57](#)):

I was just like, "I'm older. I have four children. I'm married. Either they're going to accept me, and it's meant to be; or I get denied, and I go back to writing loans for people."

Bishop Ortega ([00:04:14](#)):

So I put all my eggs in one basket, and somebody at Duke for whatever reason saw my portfolio and my application and decided to take a chance on me. And we moved to North Carolina.

Michael ([00:04:26](#)):

I appreciate you giving us a little bit of a backstory, kind of how you came to this work, because I think that a lot of times, the work that you need to do, it finds you. And so before we get too deep into your specific work, I really want to stop and kind of get a historical lens on the Trinity College Industrial Indian School. From your research, can you tell us that historical arc?

Bishop Ortega ([00:04:57](#)):

Richard Pratt was the general that came up with basically the playbook on Native American boarding schools and how to institutionalize them, how to make them white, make them American and to kill the Indian and to save the man. And he's the one that coined that phrase.

Bishop Ortega ([00:05:16](#)):

So the attempt to kill the Indian and to save the man, by save the man, they mean to make him white. And a lot of the Baptists and the Lutherans and of course the Catholics, part of that was also baptizing them.

Bishop Ortega ([00:05:33](#)):

And making them Christian was also making them white, unfortunately. And it was interesting, I found a document from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, which says, "Treat them good, but don't treat them too good because they'll never be treated like that again. It'd be unfair and mean to treat them too good."

Michael ([00:05:53](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:05:53](#)):

So the Native American boarding school system was created because they knew if they wanted to tame the Indian and to make them a part of white society that it'd have to start with the children. So across the nation, especially the Indian country, like in Oklahoma and Arizona, places like that, they literally just stole kids, took them off, took them away from their parents and brought them into these boarding schools across the country that were typically ran by religious organizations.

Bishop Ortega ([00:06:29](#)):

But a lot of time, they were ran by government organizations, and they seem to go back and forth through different periods during this time, so around I think first it was 1879. So by the time Trinity has their boarding school, they're really new across the country.

Bishop Ortega ([00:06:48](#)):

I mean, Pratt, the one that had the first one... Carlisle, I believe in Pennsylvania I believe was the first one... kind of set the tone and the pattern for all the boarding schools around the country. And it was to militarize, to strip away the culture, the identity of the Native child and make them white, make them Western, make them Americans, so that they could fall in line with the government's plan to spread West.

Bishop Ortega ([00:07:23](#)):

So it was a total brainwash and reprogramming places for children, boys and girls. And parents were not allowed to follow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:07:34](#)):

In fact, there's pictures of teepees and tents outside of schools and parents just missing and loving, just wanting to see their kids. And they're not allowed to. They're not allowed in.

Bishop Ortega ([00:07:46](#)):

There was horrific treatment. I mean, as I said, I believe it was 22 children murdered in this system; molestations by priests, nuns, parishioners, teachers and stuff.

Bishop Ortega ([00:07:57](#)):

Canada followed suit. Hitler was quoted speaking about his camps were made after the reservations, and the re-education of children was something he learned from us and how we treated the Native Americans.

Bishop Ortega ([00:08:10](#)):

It was bad stuff. There was nothing cute at all about boarding schools. During Reconstruction, Trinity College isn't doing very well financially. The Civil War is done. Their attendance is down.

Bishop Ortega ([00:08:24](#)):

Somehow, the president, Braxton Cravens, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs had just started this program. Without the internet, it's hard for us to imagine how information got out, but obviously Braxton Cravens was a man of his time.

Bishop Ortega ([00:08:42](#)):

And he knew what was going on because somehow he figured out, "Well, if they're giving out money to house and educate Indians in Pennsylvania, I could do it too." So somehow, he contacts the Bureau of Indian Affairs, creates a deal with the then-chief, [Joseph Nimrod Smith 00:09:00]. And they create a deal, and they send 20 Cherokee boys from the age of eight years old to 18 down from Cherokee, North Carolina, down to Randolph County where Trinity College was. And they were able to get more money per Cherokee student than what they were getting per white student.

Michael ([00:09:23](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:09:24](#)):

So it was a five year period from 1880 to 1885. When the boys are sent back in 1885, one Richard Smith writes... he was one of the possibly chief Nimrod's son; I wasn't able to verify that, but it appears it was his son... writes back to Braxton Craven and says, "Hey, I want to return. How do we make this happen?"

Bishop Ortega ([00:09:50](#)):

And somehow, they're able to get two students to come back. And two Cherokee students finish out two more years after the school closes, which may have been the actual, real first two Cherokee graduates from Trinity College.

Bishop Ortega ([00:10:10](#)):

But I wasn't able to verify that. And we'll probably get into it a little bit later on, but kind of the problem of this story is the lack of real archival information and evidence, a lack of holding onto this information. I was only able to find one photo of these students, and it was so blurry. Basically all you could see is silhouette, just kind of a portrait style, wet plate photo of the campus for the school. You see other students.

Bishop Ortega ([00:10:48](#)):

It's like all the students are in front of it, the white students included, and you kind of see this in the background, and the only reason why I knew it was the m is that it was the caption on the bottom. And it was from a periodical at the time: Cherokee students in the far right corner.

Michael ([00:11:03](#)):

Right, right. Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:11:06](#)):

And that's it. And that was it.

Michael ([00:11:07](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:11:08](#)):

Yes, sir. And everything else, I mean, this whole thing starts from a handwritten roster of 20 names and ages that we were given.

Michael ([00:11:20](#)):

So that's a really great segue. So I mean, this whole thing, what is this whole thing? Is that your master's thesis that-

Bishop Ortega ([00:11:27](#)):

Yeah, yeah, my thesis project. Yeah, my thesis project. So the school had brought Myron Dewey. Actually, the Center for Documentary Studies, CDS, brought in professional Myron Dewey, who was the drone camera man for the DAPL, you know, the pipeline?

Michael ([00:11:48](#)):

Dakota Access Pipeline?

Bishop Ortega ([00:11:49](#)):

Yeah, he was a water protector, and they made a great movie. And they brought him out here, and he was teaching, and they assigned me to be his TA, which was really a blessing in disguise. And I got to work with him.

Bishop Ortega ([00:12:04](#)):

He taught a class on indigenous media, and professor, Eli [Meyerhoff 00:12:14], sorry for butchering your name... he brought us the story to the class. He said, "Hey, I'm doing research on," I believe, "colonialism and universities." And he came upon the Trinity Indian boarding school, and he handed us this roster and kind of a little quick PowerPoint presentation of the information he had found. And I was like, "Wow, this is pretty interesting. Let me do a little further research, see what I can find."

Bishop Ortega ([00:12:48](#)):

And it turned out that the Duke archive, because every couple of years, somebody stumbles upon this Indian boarding school, they just keep a folder on hand with some brief documents showing, yeah, there was a school here.

Bishop Ortega ([00:13:04](#)):

So they handed me the folder. I was like, "Well, this isn't exhaustive enough. This isn't enough."

Bishop Ortega ([00:13:08](#)):

And then that's where it just kind of got the wheels turning, like, "This sounds like a story that wants to be told if people keep just stumbling upon it every couple years. We kind of got to get this out here."

Michael ([00:13:20](#)):

Right, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:13:21](#)):

And then I found on the Duke website, there was a story about it, but it was just this cute thing, how these 20 Cherokee boys came down from Cherokee, North Carolina and saved a school from going under, just really happy and kind of cute. And then the Nasher did their exhibit, Native American artists.

Bishop Ortega ([00:13:44](#)):

They had a little thing on the wall, kind of question, "Did you know?" And it was cool. It was this cool little cute thing. "Did you know Duke had an Indian boarding school?"

Bishop Ortega ([00:13:55](#)):

And if you know the history of Indian boarding schools in the United States, it's not a cute story. I mean, there's nothing good about cultural genocide, kidnapping children from their homes, throwing them in these basically brainwashing camps to cut their hair, strip away their language.

Bishop Ortega ([00:14:17](#)):

And one report said 22 kids were murdered in the Native American boarding school system in the United States, countless molestations and rapes and deaths. And then, yeah, so it's like, "This is not a cute story."

Bishop Ortega ([00:14:32](#)):

And I didn't find any evidence that any of those things happened at Trinity, at Duke. And if stuff like that did happen, it wouldn't be archived, right, anyways?

Michael ([00:14:42](#)):

Right, right, right, right, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:14:44](#)):

But there was no evidence. I mean, because Braxton Cravens, not only did he run Trinity College, but he's also a dairy farmer, so he was cheap. So he just fed them all dairy products.

Bishop Ortega ([00:15:01](#)):

And indigenous DNA and our stomachs, they don't do well with European dietary needs, like grains and milks. So it was hurting their stomachs.

Bishop Ortega ([00:15:12](#)):

So they were running away not to travel 200 miles back to Cherokee, but to fish and to hunt and to find the local greens and vegetables and insects, things they ate at home, because it was hurting their stomachs. So there's articles about them running away but finding them hunting and fishing.

Bishop Ortega ([00:15:32](#)):

And then there was one little tiny little clip that said something about, "Young Cherokee boy breaks his arm. It's the fifth time he's done so."

Michael ([00:15:42](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([00:15:42](#)):

And that's about all I found about their safety or how they were doing physically, you know?

Michael ([00:15:52](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:15:52](#)):

And so yeah, there's no evidence of abuse, but it's just the fact that once you join this narrative, you become a part of this story. You carry that baggage.

Bishop Ortega ([00:16:04](#)):

And in my thesis paper, I kind of made the parallel between the Duke homestead getting off the hook for being a homestead and not a plantation. How many slaves do you have to own and have a cash crop... Where does that distinction stop?

Michael ([00:16:22](#)):

Right, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:16:23](#)):

And I was like, man, even though I love Duke, and I'm so grateful they took an opportunity on me, took a chance on me, gave me this opportunity, I can't let them off the hook. I have to contextualize the proper placement of the school in the history of the United States, which we all fall under. You know?

Michael ([00:16:41](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:16:42](#)):

And so this wasn't a cute story. It wasn't something of just saving the school. I mean, and if it did save the school, where's their monument on the Duke campus?

Michael ([00:16:53](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:16:54](#)):

Where's the marker that points to that this event happened? It's not there, and so the question became why. Why isn't it there?

Michael ([00:17:03](#)):

Right. How do you feel that your engagement with this story is helping to change the Duke community? You're saying this is a story that was wanting to be told.

Michael ([00:17:15](#)):

There is no monument. What about your work is bringing this story into the Duke community in the current ethos and really into the Durham community as well?

Bishop Ortega ([00:17:29](#)):

Yeah. Well, kind of going back to the fact that the Duke has this history of having made a bias, I mean, it goes back to the tobacco and the Duke families, right?

Michael ([00:17:45](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:17:46](#)):

That's a product that comes from indigenous people of this hemisphere, right?

Michael ([00:17:51](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:17:52](#)):

That they grew their wealth on. And then in the advertising of their product, they used racist and indigenous images to sell their product. And then before the Dukes, you have Trinity College, which was saved from going under by indigenous people.

Michael ([00:18:12](#)):

Right, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:18:13](#)):

And then today, in current times, Duke has recruiters that go to reservations and recruit kids and bring kids onto campus. So we have this cycle of making money off of indigenous products and bodies.

Bishop Ortega ([00:18:29](#)):

And today, what I would like the school to see, it's not necessarily to build a monument, but to say, "With this history, how do we take care of our current indigenous student body? What could we do better?"

Michael ([00:18:46](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:18:46](#)):

You know?

Michael ([00:18:46](#)):

Right, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:18:47](#)):

And Duke's a research school. Studies show that when indigenous people, kids, come onto these campuses and there's no cultural familiarities, they get depressed. They withdraw back, and they have high dropout rates.

Michael ([00:19:05](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:05](#)):

So if we're going to go onto reservations and bring kids in, what are we doing for them? Where are our Native American cultural centers on campus?

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:14](#)):

Where's our Native faculty and staff? Where's our Native department?

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:19](#)):

Where are our centers for the sweat lodges and other ceremonial areas? I mean, NASA, the Native American student group on campus, did a great job finally getting the school to give them that room in the Bryan Center, but that should be done at the beginning.

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:34](#)):

I mean, and that took a lot for them to do that. I'm glad they finally got that done.

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:37](#)):

And that was all them. And going forward, man, I mean, not to pin races or people groups against each other, but every group seems to have their own, you know what I mean -

Michael ([00:19:51](#)):

Space.

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:52](#)):

... area, but with the history of Natives and the school, they could do better. They could do more.

Bishop Ortega ([00:19:58](#)):

And what I'd like to see is the school do more, do better, hire that Native staff, give them -

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Bishop Ortega ([00:20:03](#)):

... more do better. Hire that native staff. Give them their own building, their own areas for ceremonies and worship and prayers. And allow them to thrive here more than they already do. I mean, native students do great here, right? I mean -

Michael Betts II ([00:20:16](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:20:16](#)):

But they could do better and the school can make it more conducive for them to do better, right?

Michael Betts II ([00:20:21](#)):

Exactly. Which I think is a perfect kind of lead into this conversation that Just Space has been having surrounding the idea of anti-racism in general. And so one of the things we've been asking a lot of our guests on the podcast is one, how to define anti-racism and then, how do you define it? And then two, how do you think that the work that you're doing helps to kind of lay that territory and lay that track out for Duke to be a further anti-racist community and institution?

Bishop Ortega ([00:20:54](#)):

Well, I think it starts with acknowledging its past. Acknowledgement. It has to come to term and address what it's been a part of.

Michael Betts II ([00:21:05](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:21:06](#)):

And then ask the question, now how do we move forward without just tokenism? Like I said, put up a quick monument or... Which there's nothing wrong with those, but you know what I'm saying? Just one act and done, hire one professor, we're done. How can we create long-term change, recognition and move forward and celebrate also some of the accomplishments of our native students, once they've graduated.

Michael Betts II ([00:21:37](#)):

With that in mind, what do you see the role of the university is with relation to ensuring justice is created, especially regarding things like permanent spaces for Native and Indigenous remembrances and celebrations?

Bishop Ortega ([00:21:49](#)):

Well, I said, if you're going to actively recruit those students, you have to create a space where they can be the most successful. It's not enough just to bring them here and say, okay, here you go. No, you can't do that. I mean, you're bringing them some cases, 2000 miles away. And maybe one or two other students from their native, from their tribe there with them. And just because they're from the same tribe doesn't mean they know each other.

Michael Betts II ([00:22:24](#)):

Right. Exactly, right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:22:27](#)):

Yeah. They have to do more, they have to do better. The university is supposed to be the place for universal thought, right? Its supposed to be the place where people from all over come and they learn ideas and they learn knowledge, wisdom from all over the globe, all three types of discipline. It can't be centered just on one people group.

Michael Betts II ([00:22:56](#)):

Right. Exactly.

Bishop Ortega ([00:22:57](#)):

And for those students to be successful... And also, it has to change. They have to be within the [inaudible 00:23:08] also. We have this past moving into the future with it... How do we become stronger? How do we do better?

Michael Betts II ([00:23:20](#)):

Well, and then how do we see one Native or Indigenous person is not indicative of all Native Indigenous peoples.

Bishop Ortega ([00:23:28](#)):

Exactly. And have different histories and past that... [inaudible 00:23:33] and respecting those differences and nuances. I say that, the nuance, I think is a huge word that kind of gets lost sometimes.

Michael Betts II ([00:23:46](#)):

What do you mean by that?

Bishop Ortega ([00:23:49](#)):

Just like, [inaudible 00:23:51] says, we're thinking of all native people, that's from the East coast or West coast as just one people group. Understanding that there's different languages, dialects, can be all different heights, physical appearance differences. All of it, all that [inaudible 00:24:10]. And then when you think of all just one, and you don't get into the nuances of... And some people have different dietary... Well just academically, you see especially when it comes some of the hard sciences, you see evolutionary science or talking about how native people came across the land bridge. They came across from Asia. Well, not all native peoples have that creation story. So what do you do with that? So when you teach the opposite, are you saying their elders are liars?

Bishop Ortega ([00:24:48](#)):

And not only that, it's a lot of times, especially when it comes to anthropology or when they find a site, and they argue, they find remains, they argue about who these remains belong to. A lot of the time, the local native population says, "No, those were our relatives, we want them." And science and the universities argue and they fight, they know it predates you guys being here. And nine out of 10, the tribe's right. They do the DNA, it's their ancestors.

Michael Betts II ([00:25:21](#)):

To your point of the discovery feature. The school comes in and says, "We found these folks." And the Nation's like, "No, we knew they were there all along."

Bishop Ortega ([00:25:32](#)):

Yeah. I don't know, maybe this is kind of got off track, but this is kind of where a lot of universities, they don't respect... More than that, also in not providing the space, but not respecting the history that comes with native peoples and their tribes. Like the history of the land, their creation stories. Not trying to understand and just blink through it. And also why, like when we talked about land recognitions... I don't 100% trust the university doing their own land recognition because they had a skin in the game where they may have to give up the remains of somebody's relatives. They may have to give up artifacts that they found and then it would empty out their collections.

Bishop Ortega ([00:26:29](#)):

So do we really trust, I mean, can we really trust that they're going to be trustworthy and do an official legal land recognition? There could be ramifications for them. That's why I was like, when I talked about land recognition, we really got to get with NASA, the Native American Student Body, work with them. And let's find that one that's historically accurate for Duke. And for Durham. Because in my studies, it seemed like the Occaneechi, it seemed to be the most... It was most likely them. But I found two other tribes that it could have been. When I went up to Western Carolina University, one of the professors there told me a story about how, pre-revolution, the British sent the Seneca tribe down into North Carolina and chased a lot of these tribes out into Virginia. The people that were in Durham may have been chased out by the Senecas.

Bishop Ortega ([00:27:34](#)):

So it's really messy... I think the best candidates to really find like a true land recognition for Durham and Duke would be to go to the Occaneechi. What do they have to say first? And then speaking with NASA. We have this information, what do you guys think? How are you guys doing this?

Michael Betts II ([00:27:58](#)):

And constantly, basically investigating. We're going to go and we're going to talk to everybody. And then theoretically speaking, if everybody's story, we should be able to piece it all together. And there may still be a piece that's missing. There may be pieces that are missing, but we'll have a much fuller picture.

Bishop Ortega ([00:28:15](#)):

Definitely. And for the purpose of acknowledgement and honor, and understanding who was here first. And also, like I said again, knowing that they are still here. And they're still part of the tapestry of the United States.

Michael Betts II ([00:28:35](#)):

And I think that goes also to the idea of the romanticization of Indigenous bodies.

Bishop Ortega ([00:28:42](#)):

Yeah.

Michael Betts II ([00:28:42](#)):

Talk about that.

Bishop Ortega ([00:28:43](#)):

You got the mythos, right? The wise Sage and walking the planes and... I mean, that's another reason why a lot of Europeans, they think they have Native American blood or they do a DNA test and they finally, they did have an ancestor. They get so excited because of Westerns and that mythology there. But at the same time, they don't want to acknowledge that there was genocide by the hands of our government. And the Native American, the genocide on this hemisphere has been going on for over 500 years. And so far, still continues today with the missing and murdered Indigenous women. There's just things happening still. And just to brush it off with, "Well, they're a conquered people," or, "Oh, they were killing each other." It's ignorant. It's not true. And I think it's a passive way that Americans look at it and the romanticism helps ease their guilt.

Michael Betts II ([00:30:00](#)):

Let's take a step back from some of these larger histories. I want to talk really specifically about the making of this particular work. Walk us through both your research, because you got it a little bit earlier, but walk us through how your research informed the practice itself, what you went did, where you went, those kinds of things.

Bishop Ortega ([00:30:22](#)):

I started off with this roster that was written in pencil. And I knew that they' were Eastern Band Cherokee, but I didn't know if the names were all boys and girls. I didn't want to assume, right? I went to the archive, the Duke archive, and I just started pulling boxes. I pulled like 11 or 12 of them. And pulled

pictures and documents. And the people there, they were a great team. They put me in of those special fishbowl rooms, right.

Michael Betts II ([00:31:02](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Bishop Ortega ([00:31:05](#)):

They allowed me to take pictures inside of there. They were great. It was just one of those things where, you know how it's like when you go to the mall and you see you're being followed around, right? Because you just get that feeling. If I just picked up a document and held it up, they were rushing in. And it just like, ah, just that feeling came back, like, oh crap. You know what I mean? I didn't know the proper protocols. I was learning the protocols of that space.

Michael Betts II ([00:31:36](#)):

Well and [crosstalk 00:31:37] I was going to say, part of it is, if it's not an exposure that you've experienced, and this is a side story for folks, do you remember the first time that Lisa had us touching documents and touching these archival materials?

Bishop Ortega ([00:31:54](#)):

Yeah. It was like \$3 million in the middle of the table.

Michael Betts II ([00:32:00](#)):

Right. Do you remember my response?

Bishop Ortega ([00:32:01](#)):

I didn't want to touch it.

Michael Betts II ([00:32:03](#)):

I didn't either. [crosstalk 00:32:03] I didn't either.

Bishop Ortega ([00:32:03](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. [crosstalk 00:32:03].

Michael Betts II ([00:32:03](#)):

You got two men of color in here who, we have been markedly told this is a no-no. You never do this. It was very interesting to watch our white colleagues tell us, it's okay to touch it. And then we were like, "No, it's not." That's not the way this works.

Bishop Ortega ([00:32:19](#)):

Yeah. You just told me if I don't return this at a certain time, men in brown coats are coming. [crosstalk 00:32:24] They're looking for me.

Michael Betts II ([00:32:25](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:32:27](#)):

I'm not touching this. I remember we were in a room with marble walls, right?

Michael Betts II ([00:32:31](#)):

Exactly. So you were having that same experience while you're in this fishbowl trying to do [crosstalk 00:32:36] research.

Bishop Ortega ([00:32:38](#)):

Yeah, and it already looks like I'm in a high rise law office, with the marble walls and the glass, and the brass whatever handles. I'm kind of nervous and like, ah man. And as I get in, every time I do that, it's like, ah, it's that feeling again. And you're being watched or being followed around the store. But then I just got into it. Got used to it. [crosstalk 00:33:02]. I just got into going through boxes. It was document after document, not in order. Or it's a little sentence, like I mentioned where they said, "So and so broke his arm, it's the fifth time he's done it." And that's it. Or, "On this date, the Cherokee chief came and visited the school." And [inaudible 00:33:25] like what? Or he took his son home.

Michael Betts II ([00:33:27](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:33:29](#)):

And it's all this stuff here and there just scrambled around. And it really could have been in one area. And I don't think I got everything. Probably 90% maybe. Because of just... For being there a couple of weeks from open to close. I had enough. Anymore, it's starting to paralysis from over analysis. [crosstalk 00:33:56] And I just had so much of... I had a story. I understood they taught them in the basement of the chapel. I understood that they worked from eight to noon, three days a week and spent the rest of time working on the farm. Okay, I got that. I'm starting to paint a picture of how their day was. And then I was looking because, contemporary Native American boarding schools put them in military uniforms and they did that to a, to wipe away any cultural familiarities. That's why talking to you, you got to bring those back.

Bishop Ortega ([00:34:35](#)):

So they put them in these uniforms, they cut their hair and made them speak English and didn't allow them to speak their own languages. And I was like, if Braxton Craven, which what I read about him, he was into fashion, but he was cheap. And he spent a lot of time in New York, and he was a Freemason. And I was thinking about this guy, he would have brought these boys down and he would have had to put them in a suit or he would have put them in a uniform. Because all the other native boarding schools were all suits and uniforms, right? And I realized, because he's cheap that because Duke had the Trinity Guard, they may have uniforms leftover from that Confederate regiment they had. And I was like, well, let me try to find any pictures of this Trinity Guard confederate uniform that the Duke had. And of course, all archive had was the buttons of the uniform. And they somehow misplaced their uniform. Right?

Bishop Ortega ([00:35:40](#)):

So I'm looking for [inaudible 00:35:43] they would have been military or suit looking at least, military suit looking. So, let me try to find these guards and of course I couldn't. So I looked at, I researched North

Carolina confederate uniforms. [inaudible 00:35:58] So I had to ask [inaudible 00:36:01] and then I took a contemporary Native American boarding school uniforms and tried to marry the two to re-imagine what these boys, young men would have been wearing. But that search for these uniforms, which I thought was a key piece because it could really contextualizes the putting in line and even the Bureau of Indian Affairs, they were very clear about putting them in line and making them white. And making these boys white. And so this is what they would've been doing at Trinity, is trying to make these boys white.

Michael Betts II ([00:36:43](#)):

Was there a... Not to interrupt, was there a particular policy that they had laid out or spelled out relative to trying to make them white?

Bishop Ortega ([00:36:51](#)):

Richard Pratt was the general that came up with the... There's a playbook on Native American boarding schools. So he creates this playbook on how to strip away Native American identity culture, and then make a white... And then there was senators and congressmen that just stood in front of the House and said these things like, "We need to breed the Indian out of them. We need to take away their food supply, kill the buffalo." There's just things that our country did to erase these people. It gets rid of the cuteness, right?

Michael Betts II ([00:37:31](#)):

Right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:37:33](#)):

So for me, these uniforms were really important to re-imagine. I had to show what they look like. How to let people be able to walk around them and see them. So I had one made the size of an eight year old and one size of an 18 year old. And so part of my journey was I went to Salisbury, North Carolina because that's where the prisoner of war camp was where the Trinity Guard was stationed for their tour during the Civil War, guarding union, soldiers that were caught. So I went to Salisbury. Maybe in their museum, maybe have a County museum or I saw the actual location of the prison was still around. It had a museum onsite, so maybe they have a picture of the Trinity Guard? Maybe they have something I can use. And when I get there, of course they did not.

Bishop Ortega ([00:38:31](#)):

And what was funny was that like where I'm from when somebody says it's a museum, it's a museum. But North Carolina, it's somebody's house. And I did not know that. So I show up in this neighborhood and I can see old buildings and I'm like, "Man, where's the entrance, this can't be right." Like, oh man. So I'm looking around and finally this guy comes out, asks me what I'm doing. And I tell him, I'm a student at Duke, I'm doing my work assignment, I'm trying to do some research on the Trinity Guard and the prison here. And the guy's like, "Oh, okay." So he invites me on his property, he starts telling me about the true history of the South. [crosstalk 00:39:16] Yeah. Yeah. So he starts giving me the history and I see his Confederate flag and he tells me the true history of the real flag and all this stuff. And I'm just learning, I'm just trying to get his point of view and hear him.

Bishop Ortega ([00:39:31](#)):

Of course, he tells me about his proud German heritage and all this stuff. And then finally he says, "You know what, I really don't know anything about our... don't have any idea what the uniform for the Trinity Guard would have looked like. But there's a store on Main Street, just around the corner. And the woman [inaudible 00:39:56]." He gives me her name, says she recreates period clothing and costumes and uniforms. She may know. If anybody knows, then it's her.

PART 2 OF 4 ENDS [00:40:04]

Bishop Ortega ([00:40:03](#)):

So I leave that I leave he's like a block away from main street and so yeah and I wanted to so when I went on location to them to not drive but walk around and kind of feel the location and maybe feel what these kids felt or saw I can you I get a sense of the geography because really just like it would have been alien to the Cherokee boys it's alien to me coming from phoenix I'm used to desert cactuses and of seeing for miles not trees I had no idea there if so much water on this continent until I came over here that it so yeah so yeah that's kind of part of my protocol is I want to feel what the Indian felt in the second I walk out and like hey and just head north I guess and I get to main street it's a block and when I make a right towards this shop he explained where was at all of a sudden this police officer on a segway pulls up behind me and I see it in them I see the corner of my eye and say oh crap so oh so I knew don't acknowledge him because then he's going to talk to me I don't want to.

So I walk into the store and he kind of just that I see him out had heard of go by and I talked to the lady and there's people in there who are in costume or period clothing I shouldn't say costume period clothing right it's real to them right yeah so anyway so I wait for her to help some people that and yeah so it's a total period store man everything is that would have been there in 1880 and I talked to her I introduced myself I say my name is bishop and I tell her what I'm doing I don't tell her about the boarding school I told her about I'm researching the trinity guard and that and then yeah and then I tell her about the uniform and what I'm doing I tell I want marry the two and figure out a way to reimagine what these things would look like and she goes all right yeah and do you have a business card or anything and we can email and we can start working on something together not yeah I said cool yeah so I hand to her my MFA EDA business card they gave us and it has my name on it she goes oh Bishop Or, Or, are you Mexican and I said yes I'm Mexican and she was ok and she was done talking to me she was like you should probably go to the county museum and over there they if anybody knows they know so I left the store and as soon as I walk out and she tells me the block down and then the opposite of the road you can't miss it the county museum I say oh cool.

So I left the store the second I leave that guy in the cop on a Segway is right on my butt again he's like two feet from me behind me following me he follows me a block across the street and then I go I go into the museum and I talked to the curator the guy in charge he was a real a real nice guy we talked for like an hour and a half he said he had heard of the trinity guard and but there was a time where I guess after the war they burnt all the uniforms or something So it was probably his guess they were all burnt in this burning and he said the person that that that loaned us all the artifacts or all the memorabilia from the prison owns a, what was it, like an antique store by the Cheerwine factory and gives me directions so I want to walk around anyway so oh cool man I'll walk out and I walk over there in the second just the second I stepped out onto the sidewalk I hear from behind me oh there you are there was the cop on

the Segway so there you are and as I was like man and then I see it I see ahead a squad car pull in so I just what I make a joke I say you know what I always thought those Segway's should have been like a throw net button on of them so when you guys are chasing bad guys you can hit the button and on a throw a throw net grabs them and then the guy starts laughing he's like yeah that's a good idea and then he just kind of let me walk away I was like you know what I'm getting in my car I'm making these people nervous yeah so I get in the car and they had nothing so anyways I make a long story even longer what I'm like it just what I felt was kind of that that that racism in the south that's hospitable and nice like being called sweetie and sugar and you know what I'm saying being welcoming but at a far it and as I was like and they've [inaudible] helped me to understand and I feel what these boys were there are I go by it down but they weren't really wanted there that racism and they actually in in Arizona in phoenix racism is more abrupt in your face you see it coming because you can you see it for a mile here like it's like what was softer it wasn't as abrupt and I'm like man and I see it and it just that loneliness finally the feeling of being other and not being from there not belonging it's from that man this is what they must have felt walking into the church on a Sunday and when you know how to sit in back but not being able to come up front just stuff like it down and like oh just being stared but also happy to see you.

Michael Betts II ([00:46:03](#)):

Analyzed researched stared at sterilized put back on the shelf.

Bishop Ortega ([00:46:09](#)):

Yeah that menagerie I'm glad you're on my shelf yeah that's just what had been I felt or say saw I know oh so it helped me to contextualize and really think about what they were going through being 200 miles away from their land from their homes being around people they don't know eating food that's foreign to them learning a language that's foreign to them having to be put into these scratchy wool uniforms that probably didn't fit right and you know what I mean so yeah so oh so he took and then I know there I went to the Randolph county library and met this really cool guy named Mack in the basement of the library their archives and he just threw books at me he didn't know he had on trinity college man we were having a good old time man that guy named Mack he was a good guy we just went through stuff and it and it really made me think and where right I yeah I brought up not knowing how much to trust the universities is that he had that he was showing me this book he threw it on the table in front of me oh it had been I know most people don't know what a phone book is anymore but I didn't fit right the two phone books big this book of a survey that happened I don't know in like the 80's of like 6,000 native American artifacts that were found on a reservoir being built they were [inaudible] Randolph county they found over 6,000 and I know like I had items from it would look like a quarter of a quarter of a mile dig the survey and UNC came took all the artifacts and shut it down and the guy told me last I heard they're in them the basement of the pharmacy department.

So he could be wrong but I see that he was told but still the so oh so that the history and the proof it's here it's in the ground it's all around it's being buried it's being buried it's being buried in basements it's being to sit in people's private collections and can we trust that they'll give it up so yeah so yeah so they belong and so anyways and when I got to Randolph county which is where trinity college was located just seeing like oh just seeing like that the old school is not there where it is where the boys they stayed with the Braxtons and it in the farm and it in the barn that they went up to do they would with my have work worked more because an industrial school really means free labor yeah they got to learn how to shoot horses some blacksmithing carpentry work how to farm the European way telling the natives didn't know how to farm right right right right grow tobacco anyway so yeah so those are and they

learned these skills as soon as the country is becoming more industrial and modern that they could use and he could use and that's kind of the messiness of a boarding schools that there are indigenous people that that had a great time they weren't abused they know they actually did learn a skill and a trade that they took and may know they had comfortable lives with that skill it take away though right and I had that in back on my mind too when doing my work was I was I go I didn't want you are I didn't want to so much to them I knew don't want you know what I didn't belong I don't want to dishonor them those people who had that feeling towards the boarding school they went up to.

Michael Betts II ([00:50:07](#)):

Right right right right right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:50:10](#)):

Yeah.

Michael Betts II ([00:50:14](#)):

It's to the point that there are things that the time that nothing is all good and nothing is all bad even if it feels like it should be there are silver linings so a prime example we're in the middle of COVID right now and so for me an example of a silver lining to COVID is that I've gotten to spend a ton of time with my partner that I have never gotten to spend that is a messy feature to COVID so I can only imagine that's a small small version of the messiness of a it's a good experience at a place that is supposed to be atrocity inducing for you trauma inducing for them. So no I'm intrigued a lot about kind of the roundabout nature of having to piece this together and like you not only were you in full investigative mode but you are effectively having to pull from the ground you're waiting you've planted and now you're waiting for the harvest to come in and you're pulling from the ground it's that kind of labor the right remnant of this story even down to the fact that the school itself is not standing anymore what was at that space where the school was standing now.

Bishop Ortega ([00:51:35](#)):

There's a bell its like the church bell for the school and a gazebo over it, and then there is a historical marker that has four different schools that were there at the same time too but it does not have the trinity college Indian industrial boarding school on it so it was erased its just gone. It's not there where the boys slept at night and they stayed with the Braxtons right place. Those houses are gone.

Michael Betts II ([00:52:07](#)):

Do think there's a reason for why that would have been left off

Bishop Ortega ([00:52:13](#)):

That guy named Mack he had been like a lot of the homes were destroyed he was probably his shop he took pictures of what he literally wrote the book on the missing buildings of me oh so oh so he just said it's something they did they just got rid of having to do with why the point of boarding school is not there it's not known about what I took out of other people don't know there was a boarding school there where the fact when I went up to Cherokee North Carolina and as I spoke with a lot eastern band Cherokees and they didn't know they had no idea so it's just something it was this five year blip in this five year blip in history that I just kind of got forgotten by everybody wow so yeah.

Michael Betts II ([00:53:11](#)):

So I guess to this idea of remembrance do you believe that your work specifically for the remembrance for the university for Duke university do you believe that your work while as a master's student at Duke university is kind of a land acknowledgement in and of itself it's a remembrance document in and of itself do you see your work in that way and if so why do with why do you feel that way if not why not.

Bishop Ortega ([00:53:45](#)):

Yeah I do the story is finally being to contextualize and it in its right place I feel like I feel like it's putting it in that same realm of other Native American boarding schools around the country I'm saying that that that's it's just no longer this cute story of just the school being saved and I think one of your questions too I think about a question too I had to come in that I would love for why that would love for the school to purchase or I'll give them the uniforms that I created and put it to put it in that museum and have in the Bryan Center I would love from them to do that and then there's a plaque saying you know [inaudible] what the right word is.

Michael Betts II ([00:54:38](#)):

Commemorative or commemorate.

Bishop Ortega ([00:54:39](#)):

There you yeah do the school was there.

Michael Betts II ([00:54:42](#)):

Can you do me a favor and say that whole phrase.

Bishop Ortega ([00:54:46](#)):

Yeah I would love for Duke to take the uniforms that I created and put them in that in that museum space in the Bryan Center so that they can acknowledge and so that when that when people visit the school they can see that there was the store the alumni can see other native students can see the history that there's shoulders that they stand on of that paved the way even if it the first shoulders that were forced the story [inaudible] the amount of wealth and opportunity that there is at Duke it was something that that that made me shrink back it made me feel lonely and like I didn't belong and when I was to experience this burning and as I was like my kids need to experience this so they know how to navigate these types of spaces and that they could be successful in them so when I said knowing the history knowing the past I feel could help those native students know like hey other people like you have been here and they've been successful and it and it goes back to the beginning of the school the very beginning.

Michael Betts II ([00:56:13](#)):

Literally at the foundation.

Bishop Ortega ([00:56:16](#)):

So you yeah do you have the road to be successful here now you just have to do the work.

Michael Betts II ([00:56:21](#)):

There's two things here that I want you to really tease out of what had been your intention had COVID-19 not happened what had been your intention for your master's thesis exhibition where was it going to be.

Bishop Ortega ([00:56:40](#)):

In the middle of the Bryan Center right.

Michael Betts II ([00:56:46](#)):

The brown gallery right.

Bishop Ortega ([00:56:48](#)):

The brown gallery yeah I was to display it there and I'm like yeah and then afterwards I was going to take it up to Cherokee and hopefully have it exhibited in their museum and have an artist talk there and bring in some other guest speakers but just COVID put the kibosh on all that.

Michael Betts II ([00:57:13](#)):

It can happen just post COVID.

Bishop Ortega ([00:57:16](#)):

Yeah I really [inaudible] too was the point of put into the Bryan Center and also the Bryan Center right it's in the library which is.

Michael Betts II ([00:57:27](#)):

Yeah it the Rubenstein library.

Bishop Ortega ([00:57:29](#)):

The Rubenstein library yeah boom there we go I keep calling it the wrong thing as you can tell I didn't spend a lot of time there and I'm an art student anyways [inaudible] because during that time where the exhibition was to be it was also alumni week and I wanted alumni students to be forced by and he just let me I just for a second just to say oh there where the boarding school here like what are these uniforms and like what are these images why do with why that there documents on the thing I just wanted that story be told to them in some [inaudible] to me my first audience was to the school as I got deeper it I say oh just like well then I'm data mining for the eastern band Cherokee too once everything closes I'm going to hand them all the documents I have everything on a flash drive whatever all the documents I took out of the archive and yeah and those are my two audiences but I really wanted to do it just to be in your face with it this is what happened here and it on also if people want to see my exhibition they can go to bishoportega.com and see the photos from it I tell I took 20 headless portraits of the uniforms and put a plaque representing each kid and their age that was at the school so on one side of the room you have an alumni wall of headless portraits and two very large portraits and [inaudible] that space of seeing like why do with why are there no heads what's going on here and the erasure they're not here but they're here and put them back on the Duke wall where they belong I want you to also understand that Duke has erased who they are so that juxtaposition of those two things but

for me last I had to put them back on them I know there are there are alumni wall they deserve to be here their name on a plaque their time here like it's like a ton of people need to see that that they were here and also I was speaking to

PART 3 OF 4 ENDS [01:00:04]

Bishop Ortega ([01:00:03](#)):

the history of photography where why Europeans would take pictures of native peoples and not put their names to the portrait? So I want to see a portrait in her name. So I'm speaking to a couple of things there. But yeah, it was mainly just creating an alumni wall, putting them back on the wall so people could know they were there and they're still here. They're hidden in our archive. So I'm pulling them out the archive, putting them on the wall for everybody to see so that we can, so that we can acknowledge that this happened, that this blip is five years, that history happened.

Michael Betts II ([01:00:41](#)):

As you're talking about the reinstating basically of who they are and putting them back in their space, what other things did you uncover that ... I'm trying to get this question right. Because you hit on something just a second ago, talking about kind of this split between European photographers, not putting names to the people they were taking the photos of. So what other things did you have to go through to figure out the names accordingly because wasn't there a whole ordeal rounding names?

Bishop Ortega ([01:01:21](#)):

Yeah, well because the information is so spread out, sometimes there was a difference in spelling of the last names and then sometimes they would just abbreviate the first name. So it would just be the last. So because of the different stylings and the abbreviations there might've been up to 26 to 29 actual Cherokee students here in that five-year period. And then also when I went up to Western University, they gave me a roster of all the Cherokee students and what schools they were sent to. So it's a huge flash drive of [inaudible 01:02:10] with the fish ... you know the fish [crosstalk 01:02:13]?

Michael Betts II ([01:02:12](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bishop Ortega ([01:02:15](#)):

Yeah. That somebody digitized. So I was comparing those names, trying to figure out what, and finally I just rested, you know what? I got this original roster, I'm just going to use the 20 on there and how their names are spelled because that's what I was originally given. Trinity College would put out their yearly catalog. It would list all the students and it would have the Trinity College in the back, the boarding school in the back and their names and they change spelling and stuff. So yeah. And also what they call the school changes a lot too.

Michael Betts II ([01:02:55](#)):

Yeah.

Bishop Ortega ([01:02:55](#)):

So, yeah. And so they could tell, they didn't really know what to make of it. Like the board of Trinity and the Cravens had two different plans for this. And it seems like Braxton like I said, was kind of the slick guy, right? The slick con man preacher was really trying to just pocket money. This thing was all about money. And then when he dies, after like two years, his son takes over and now it's really just like ... it comes to a point where the school is like, hey, we were getting us this amount. Now we're getting this amount. How come? We want all the amounts. These kids are here, they're under our ward from the Bureau of Indian affairs. We want all the money. And it caused this huge rift. Caused a huge fight. The Bureau of Indian Affairs steps in and says, you know what? I'm sick of you guys bickering, Chief Nimrod wants the boys back anyways. Just get them gone, get them out of there. In fact, get them out of there. We'll even pay for it, because you guys can't seem to stop fighting about this.

Bishop Ortega ([01:03:59](#)):

So that's how the boys go back because they're fighting over the money. So it's been all about money the whole time. It is very obvious and yeah, it was crazy. I even found hidden at the end, like after almost all of my work was complete. I found correspondence where the company in Charlotte that made the uniforms originally or made the suits was never paid for them.

Michael Betts II ([01:04:35](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([01:04:37](#)):

And they're suing the school to get their payments, like 320 bucks or something. Right? Which was a lot back then. And the board tells the company in Charlotte, oh, don't sue us, sue the Braxton widow.

Michael Betts II ([01:04:51](#)):

Wow.

Bishop Ortega ([01:04:53](#)):

So they go after the widow for the money. Yeah, man. So the school was mad about them being there. They didn't want them there.

Michael Betts II ([01:05:02](#)):

Wow. Dude, there's so much here. There's so much here. All right. So I've got a couple more questions and we'll wind down. I've just been so grateful to just spend this time with you. One for you to just kind of contextualize a lot of this story of the heritage that Duke University sits on and just space, this community that we're a part of this, this committee, excuse me, that we're a part of, really believes in being able to kind of, to your point of earlier, when you define anti-racist, you said we got to acknowledge the history, what we very much believe in that as a function. So to be able to sit with you for a moment and have you help to contextualize history has just been fantastic. So I'm going to ask you, like I said, I got two questions. The first one is if President Price were to call into this recording session now, and anything you say in the next 15 minutes, Duke will make it a reality. What are you telling him?

Bishop Ortega ([01:06:04](#)):

Well, I'm telling him they need, like I said, put those uniforms in their museum and have a real gathering of the archival information. Also, they need to create a cultural center for the Native American student

body, have a Native American department with Native American faculty and staff and give them a real cultural center to meet and gather, to do their ceremonies and sing their songs, and be like some of the other leading universities and institutions in this country. Have a sweat lodge there for them. Go to those schools and see what they're doing and do better.

Michael Betts II ([01:06:49](#)):

Right. What would you ask of the university's alumni and students? How can we be fighting for the causes in remembrance of our indigenous alumnus and faculty and staff?

Bishop Ortega ([01:07:05](#)):

Yeah. Well, people need to talk with NASA, and figure out what are their needs, what are their concerns and how can we help? Because they're the ones that have put ... I just did an assignment, right? I mean, they're doing this every day and they're the ones that are trying to push forward the school. They're the ones on the front lines. So I would ask them to go to them and say, how can we help? What do you guys need?

Michael Betts II ([01:07:34](#)):

Bishop, what are all the other ways that people can engage with you online?

Bishop Ortega ([01:07:39](#)):

Yeah. My, my thesis project is actually on my website and they can also read my thesis paper. I'm not sure how much longer I'm going to have it up. I wrote poems too. So because so much of the story is like Swiss cheese from the archive, so many holes, I wanted to re-imagine too what day-to-day life was like for these boys. So I just wrote documentary style poems. I took a class Jackie Shelton Green, the Poet Laureate of North Carolina. And I just went through some ideas with her, and I wrote 20 poems, I believe. And about day to day life, the boys, with their stomach's hurting and looking for food, stuff like that. Taking classes, just trying to fill those gaps in a way that was honorable and respected, the school and what happened, what these boys time was like.

Bishop Ortega ([01:08:36](#)):

And yeah, so if they want to read those, they want to see the pictures of the exhibit that actually happened at the Power Plant Gallery, because of COVID, they just put a bunch of our exhibitions in the same space. So they can see pictures of that. And they're going to see photos of the sculpture I did. So when I went up to speed with Eastern Band Cherokee up in Cherokee, North Carolina, I took some moldings of an Eastern Band Cherokee man's face and his hands and his feet because I wanted people to see the uniforms experience. But I didn't want to put them back on the Eastern Band Cherokee, if that makes sense. So I was trying to figure out, how do I do this in a way that honors Eastern Band Cherokee, but also just more puts at people's faces that this really happened and people were in these uniforms.

Bishop Ortega ([01:09:38](#)):

So I built a sculpture and I used his hands and then I put them in the uniform. And then I draped the American flag in one hand and put the flag at his feet. And then in his other hand he was holding hair. And when I started this project, I started growing my own hair out and I was looking for a way ... not for a way. I was looking to see, how was I in this project? Where was my story in this project? And as we talked about earlier, they would shave the hair of these young boys, which was a sign of their power,

sign of their warrior side, it was that side of their culture, their belonging. So to remove that, to remove their strength, they would shave their head and put them in these uniforms, I was dealing with my hair and showing and showing he's trading the hair for this flag but he doesn't know what to do with it, with this thing he has in his hand.

Bishop Ortega ([01:10:50](#)):

And then in my own search, my own story, this project for me and where I'm in it, it's a kind of a catalyst to thinking about my ancestry, whereas my, the father's side, our ancestral land, our ancestral prayers and songs and medicines, it's been taken from us. First by the Spanish, when they came. And then by the United States, when they did the land grab of Texas, my family has been in Texas for tens of thousands of years. And we don't know what tribe we're from. We don't know our ancestral language or people. They're there, but we've forgotten them. They've forgotten us. So this is kind of my search for what was taken from me. And so my hair is kind of in there, I'm part of the story too.

Bishop Ortega ([01:11:48](#)):

So, they'll see a picture of that. And the head, I was going to have the head melt. I built this heating mechanism and the mold, I filled it with wax up his back, his name's Mike. To Mike's hair. And anyway, I made a wax mold of it. And I had in the center, connected to a wooden rod the water spider, which is central to the Eastern Band Cherokee's creation story. And when the head melted and went over the uniform, all was left, was going to be that water spider. And my reasoning was, is like, I wanted to destroy the uniform, but not get rid of it because people still needed to see it.

Bishop Ortega ([01:12:36](#)):

So the covering that the wax was destroying, it was also translucent. So you could still see it through, and then also melting away of the whiteness that no matter how much [inaudible 01:12:48] or trying to institutionalize and to take away the culture, the Indian was still going to be there at the end, no matter what you did to try to take them away, that you couldn't kill the Indian. And then in the water spider story, the water spider goes across the water to get the spark. Sorry. [inaudible 01:13:13] I pushed the story. But to get the fire so that they could be warm, that the thunderbolt was hidden in the tree. So the water spider was the only one that could cross the water, weave a basket and bring the amber back in a basket on her back and bring it back to the Cherokee.

Bishop Ortega ([01:13:31](#)):

And I was thinking the new generation of kids coming to Duke or other universities are what's going to save and bring the Eastern Band Cherokee now into the future. They have the spark, they have the knowledge, they have the fire, that's going to bring them going forward. So I didn't get to do that because of COVID and yeah, so they'll see the head of the sculpture, hands, they'll see the hair and the American flag. And they'll see the plaques and they'll see the portraits. And yeah. At bishoportega.com, Twitter, DTRUBishop and Instagram is DTRUBishop. D-T-R-U Bishop.

Michael Betts II ([01:14:19](#)):

I didn't know you were going to do all that, man. That's absolutely beautiful. Absolutely beautiful.

Bishop Ortega ([01:14:25](#)):

Well, I would love to see Durham. Reach out to the Occoneechee Band and supporting nation and see, do they have a celebration season or time or a month that's important to them and see if there is a way that they could do something in the middle of Durham. Downtown Durham or in a park and make it part of Durham's celebration as well, to recognize that the past and the future. The members of the community that still live in Durham, I would love to have artists, art. I know Durham is doing a lot for African-American artists, which is awesome and amazing. I'd love to see them do the same for Native American artists from the area as far as murals and photography. And so their presence can be seen as felt. Yeah, I would love to see that.

Michael Betts II ([01:15:28](#)):

I love it. I love it. Bishop, you are amazing. Thank you so much.

Michael Betts II ([01:15:45](#)):

Thank you so much for joining for this episode of Space of Justice. If you like what you heard today, be sure to register for Just Space Week, Duke University's conference centered entirely on the conversation of spatial justice happening right now this year Just Space Week is focused on anti-racism, equity and connecting Duke to Durham in meaningful and just collaborations. Head on over to sites.duke.edu/justspace/conference to sign up today. A special thanks to Bishop Ortega for taking time to talk us through the indigenous origins of the Trinity College Industrial Indian Boarding school and Duke University's need to recognize its past and responsibly act on behalf of its native and indigenous students moving forward. If you'd like to connect with Bishop or find out more about his work, be sure to head on over to www.bishoporortega.com or catch him on the gram at DTRUBishop.

Michael Betts II ([01:16:40](#)):

Again, that's at Delta Tango Romeo Uniform Bishop. Today's episode was logistically possible because of the brilliance of Elmer Orellana, Paige Vinson and Lindsey Miller Furiness. Francesco Santos, and Matt Stark are the genius minds behind our assessments and analytics. To the fearless podcast team of editors and collaborators that consist of Samaiyah Faison, Ling Jin, Esra Uzun Mason, Brian Lackman, as well as Just Space conference chair, who was pulling double duty, Kevin Erixson. Thanks to Marcy Edenfield crew for making sure our equipment specs are just right. Just Space Conference Marketing is handled by the illuminous Sarah Neff, Sam Babb's keen eye keeps us all looking perfect and synchronized. Kathryn Lester-Bacon and Victoria Krebs ensure our online learning design is tight. Jeff Nelson and Jeanna McCullers are the tireless captain and first mate of the Just Space Committee. Tasha Curry-Corcoran is kind enough to ensure that the office of student affairs at Duke University keeps us going.

Michael Betts II ([01:17:44](#)):

One more turn around the sun. Our theme song [inaudible 01:17:48] is by Lassana Diabate, and mix of today's episode is by yours truly. As always be sure to check back every Tuesday for the next episode, a special non-sponsored shout out to Zencaster for making it possible for our team to do remote recording sessions safely while in an international health crisis. Please, please, please remember to continue to wear a mask and wash your hands. And although the vaccines are here, we are not quite at the finish line. Also be sure to get all your questions answered. So when it's your turn to get the shot, you can. It's been a pleasure to spend some time with you today. And I can't wait to see you next week. As always, I'm Michael Betts II, and this has been Space of Justice.

This transcript was exported on Mar 22, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

PART 4 OF 4 ENDS [01:18:47]