

2020

The Fight to take Down “The Big Indian:” Public History Activating Social Change, A Case Study

Ariel Beaujot
Western University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/hearhereconference>



Part of the [Digital Humanities Commons](#), and the [Indigenous Studies Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Beaujot, Ariel, "The Fight to take Down “The Big Indian:” Public History Activating Social Change, A Case Study" (2020). *Hear, Here Conference Papers*. 1.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/hearhereconference/1>

The Fight to take Down “The Big Indian:” Public History Activating Social Change, A Case Study

Ariel Beaujot
Guelph DIGI Cafe Talk

(SLIDE 1)

Before we begin I would like to acknowledge that the City of La Crosse was built on the ancestral land of the Ho Chunk People. Also I am donating the proceeds of this talk to the fund to take down the Hiawatha Statue.

In 2015 a member of the Ho Chunk Nation recorded the following oral history while standing at the foot of a two story tall statue portraying an Indigenous person **(SLIDE 2)**:

I just turned my back, symbolically, on what the [University of Wisconsin La Crosse] Native American students used to refer to as “The Colossus of Kitsch” or as Riverside Park calls “The Big Indian.”

My name is Kera Cho Mani ga. That means “the person who paints the sky blue.” You know me as Dan Green – what Malcolm X might call my slave name. [In] the late nineties, the Chamber of Commerce in La Crosse [Wisconsin] proposed [putting] fifty-thousand dollars into a paint job on the Colossus – something that reinforces stereotypes about Native Americans. As a sociology student, I had for years looked into the influence of imagery, statuary, and I was a part of the national anti-Native American sport mascot movement. I traveled to University of Illinois, University of North Dakota, and Cleveland Ohio on a regular basis to demonstrate and to teach about the harms, the largely psychological harms, of this kind of imagery of the Big Indian standing behind me. So that was my interest, that here it is, in my hometown where I’m raising children that look like me – they’re brown-skinned, they’re dark-haired, we don’t get mistaken for anything but Native American, and here’s something in our hometown reinforcing harmful thinking about us, so I was compelled to do something.

This oral history is one of the first recordings done for a critical public history project called *Hear, Here*. *Hear, Here* seeks to bring previously overlooked or unheard stories to light as a way of enhancing traditional narratives of the region that highlight Christianity, prosperity, and whiteness, and ignore indigeneity, race, and cultural difference.

Launched in 2015 with 28 stories *Hear, Here* is an oral history project brought to life through signs in downtown La Crosse, Wisconsin (**SLIDE 3**). Each sign is placed where a story happened and the public can access each story by dialing a toll-free number placed on the sign. Once the stories are heard, callers are encouraged to stay on the line and to add their own story about that site or any other site in Downtown La Crosse. In this way the stories become user generated and the project comes to represent the living and lived history of the community. Today we have 70 stories as part of the project. The only requisite for a *Hear, Here* story is that it be told by the person who experienced it.

Between its inception in 2014 and the most recent addition of stories in 2019 the meaning of *Hear, Here* shifted from being a way to bring social history to the public to a project that could act as a catalyst for restorative justice. We found that the stories that were coming out helped prompt community discussion about the La Crosse downtown and how it might improve. Based on stories told by historically underrepresented and marginalized people, we came to understand that *Hear, Here's* mission was not only to present unknown stories, but also to foster conversations that might lead towards positive change. The questions at stake are these (**SLIDE 4.1**):

1. Why do people experience the same spaces differently and why does this difference matter?
2. How can a community come to hear, understand, and incorporate diverse voices when these voices challenge accepted wisdom?

I will start with a discussion of how *Hear, Here* is a digital humanities project and then discuss the long history of this controversial statue and how *Hear, Here* narratives like the one you just heard acted as a catalyst for change (**SLIDE 4.2**).

This talk is based on a chapter that will appear in an edited volume to be published by the University of Cincinnati Press in 2020 and will also form part of a chapter in my upcoming book, *Comfortable Lies, Uncomfortable Truths: Public History Private Memory and Race in 21st Century North America*.

Digital Backup to the Project: A Look Under the Hood of *Hear, Here*

There are various ways in which *Hear, Here* is a digital project:

- it was developed and is stored almost entirely on google docs
- the narratives are recorded digitally and edited using audacity and the unedited interviews are available through a digital repository
- some versions of the project are supplemented by an app (Driftscape)
- there is a website
- and the phone system is backed up digitally.

I am going to take this opportunity to talk about the phone system as that is the most innovative digital aspect of the project.

The phone system is an Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) called EZ Route that is hosted by CenturyLink. IVR systems are used in large companies to direct calls and provide recorded information. *Hear, Here* is backed up by this business solution, but it is employed in a more user-friendly way. The purpose of the project is to help users listen to a story while many IVR systems are used to triage callers and restrict their access to the increasingly minimized number of human agents. So, we have used a system designed to eliminate humans and their voices to amplify and expose more voices from more types of people.

The way that EZ Route works is via a phone tree. (SLIDE) *Hear, Here's* phone tree is based on the initial toll-free number, then on a location and story number. There are 9 numbers on our phone keypads so we use a 9X9 system. The location and story numbers allow us to have a phone tree that is at least one layer deep with 81 stories. We have created a branchier tree in some cases adding more than one story at a given location. Here we use the IVR business technology to give access to specific stories on certain days and other stories on other days, just like a businesses phone system might be set up differently for the weekends and evenings than during business hours.

The IVR technology also provides another benefit: we are able to track the days and times of the calls, the call volume for the months, the area codes for each

call, and the length of calls. This has been beneficial in that it allows us to see that certain seasons create change in people's use of the project: call volumes diminish in the colder Wisconsin months of November, December, January and February, they pick up in March and are especially strong July, August, September and October (**SLIDE of months, annually**). We have also been able to track whether or not promotion and events increase the use of the system. For example, our two major launch events that included thematic tours increased the regular calls for that month by twice the regular volume and four times the regular volume respectively, and also contributed to a more robust call-in month overall.¹ Interestingly the years in which we did large launches for new stories the call volumes increased not only for April, the month of the launch, but also for May and June as well (**SLIDE of April, May, June**). Clearly it has been beneficial to remind the public that this is an ongoing user-generated project.

The other thing that we track is the area codes of calls. As of August 2019 the system has been used by people in all 50 states along with people in Puerto Rico, British Columbia and Quebec (**SLIDE of maps**). In the first 5 years of the project we have had over 10,000 total calls, of those 50% are local calls and 48% non-local.² We have tracked the number of non-Wisconsin area codes that have called each month, which has indicated that for the first two years, 2015 and 2016, the system was used primarily by local residents, and in 2017 there was a shift with an 8 month stretch when there were more out of state calls to the system. This was likely due to the fact that we had become members of Explore La Crosse, the local visitors bureau, who had begun promoting *Hear, Here* and distributing our flyers. The IVR also allows us to track how long people listen to stories: the average call time for the full length of the project is 1 minute and 47 seconds.

¹ First launch was on April 12th, 2015 with 250 calls that day and 776 calls for the overall month. The second launch April 28th, 2018 had 380 calls adding to the 581 calls for that month. In comparison April 2016 had 84 calls and April 2017 had 96 calls.

² The exact numbers are 49.79% local, and 47.89% non-local, with a remaining 2.32% unaccounted for.

Lessons Learned

The EZ Route system is not without its problems, but it is easy to program, fit our budget and provided the lowest barrier to access. Some issues with EZ Route include that it only takes a very poor type of audio file called VOX, it allows for only 180 seconds of audio for each recording, is a lesser-known product of a large company and therefore it took a long time to coordinate access to the product, and is currently only available in America. When we began the project, in 2014-2015, we found EZ Route was the most affordable version of an IVR system.³ We looked into having an IVR system built for the project but this is a very expensive proposition, at about twelve times the cost. However, technology is ever evolving and now that cloud technology is being developed, we have done a new *Hear, Here* project in London, Ontario using Amazon Web Service's IVR product Connect.⁴ This has proven to be a less costly option, allowing for higher quality WAV audio files of any length, and can be used world wide, but is more complicated to program.⁵ **(SLIDES OF AWS SYSTEM, 10-14)**

Now that you understand how the project works in terms of digital technology I will spend the remainder of the talk examining the influence *Hear, Here* had in the most recent movement to retire the *Hiawatha* statue **(SLIDE 7)**.

Storytelling as an Element of Local Policy Change

Three stories emerged in the first three years of the *Hear, Here* project that acted as a catalyst for the retirement of a gigantic statue along the Mississippi. The first narrator was Kera Cho Mani ga, who we heard from at the top of my presentation.⁶ The second phase of the project included a 2017 poetry contest

³ Initial start up cost for EZ route was just under \$2000 for the first year (or \$167 a month) and just over \$1000 for subsequent years (or \$84 a month).

⁴ For more information about how to build a *Hear, Here* project using AWS Connect see: Fabrizio Napolitano and Mark Tovey, "Hear, Here at City of London: Build a DIY Audio-Tour with Amazon Connect," *AWS Contact Center*, April 9, 2019.

https://aws.amazon.com/blogs/contact-center/hear-here-at-city-of-london-build-a-diy-audio-tour-with-amazon-connect/?fbclid=IwAR11rCgmMFilLsIGBpQuC4EsJFthXbFxC0Y_BPsafGyA-do2fDLNxDydoVgE

⁵ Initial start-up cost for AWS Connect: \$190.02 (or \$15/month) and \$90.09 (or \$8/month) for every year thereafter.

⁶ A note about terminology: "Native American" is at best an awkward collective term in a highly contentious discussion about how to refer to so many different peoples grouped improperly under one name. The best way to avoid "Native American" and the associated problems is to refer to the particular

which generated a poem titled “Fun”. In this poem, William Stobb explains the ‘look’ of the statue as cartoonish.⁷ A third 20018 story is told by a Lutheran pastor who used the statue to talk about protests he participated in against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

By no means is *Hear, Here* the first to air La Crosse citizens’ opinions about the statue. In fact the “Hiawatha” statue has been embroiled in controversy for 60 years. There have been three major periods where the arguments surrounding the meaning of the statue have become particularly intense:

- 1) When it was first conceived, created, and named;
- 2) When it was in need of a costly repair;
- 3) And most recently when *Hear, Here* and other organizations came together to create pressure to change local policy.

1) 1958-1963 statue first conceived, created, and named

In the initial period of controversy arguments about the statue centered on naming and placement. The La Crosse Chamber of Commerce wanted to name the statue Hiawatha, and designed it according to Disney-esque visual tropes (as you can see here). This was done to appeal to the tourist market. The La Crosse County Historical Society strove for greater accuracy, by arguing that the statue be named Chief Decorah, a historical member of the local Ho-Chunk tribe, but ultimately only succeeded in placing a placard near the statue explaining the history of the Ho Chunk in the area. The naming debate lasted four years, and because of this the people of La Crosse went ahead and named the statue “The Big Indian” in print media as early as 1963 and to the present-day.

The second issue that came up in this initial period was one of placement. Alvin Blackdeer, Commander of the Winnebago (now Ho Chunk) Indians Veterans Association, made an impassioned argument against putting a statue named

tribe involved. However, when the cases, as here, stereotypical caricatures, the problem remains unresolved and aggravating.

⁷ William Stobb, interview by Ariel Beaujot, June 2017, *Hear, Hear La Crosse*, full interview housed at University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

“Hiawatha” at the convergence of the three rivers as this was considered by the Ho Chunk to be sacred ground. Blackdeer explained that, “[Hiawatha] had no connection with the State of Wisconsin...You can appreciate, perhaps why we feel that the worship of false idols should be eliminated from this sacred area... All things considered, including the loss of our lands, should we not at least be allowed to save our historical birthright for posterity[?]”⁸

At issue for Blackdeer was that the statue had the potential to erase from public memory the violence that marked the encounter between Indigenous people and settler colonists from Europe.

And the site of the statue is particularly meaningful in the larger history of the US government control, and removal of indigenous peoples (**SLIDE 9**). The Mississippi River on which the statue stands once separated Michigan Territory from Indian Territory. All tribes living east of the Mississippi were removed to Indian Territory as sanctioned by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

Federally-sanctioned Ho Chunk removal by steamboat from La Crosse on the Mississippi River occurred between June and November 1848.⁹ The location of the statue is not only sacred ground for the Ho Chunk, it is also a site that holds a history of violence, removal, and cultural genocide perpetrated upon the Ho Chunk by the US government on behalf of the settlers who come to live in La Crosse.

(SLIDE 10)

2) 2000 statue in need of a costly repair

In 2000 the statue again came into the news because it was physically deteriorating; the city was going to have to either take it down or pay \$35,000 for

⁸ Kidder, “Object to Hiawatha Statue: Indians on Warpath Against Chamber Unit,” *La Crosse Tribune*, March 29, 1961.

⁹ *La Crosse County Historical Sketches Series 1* (La Crosse: Liesenfeld Press, 1931), pg 31, La Crosse County Historical Society, La Crosse, Wisconsin; George Nichols, *Recollections of a Pioneer Steamboat Pilot Contributing to the Early History of the Mississippi* (La Crosse: Tucker and Company Printers, 1883), 17-18

repair.¹⁰ The decision to renovate, alter or retire the statue would be up to the 9 member Committee to Consider the Future of the Statue Hiawatha. Three of the committee members identified as Ho Chunk.¹¹ A new set of arguments about the statue centered around honoring: who is being honored, how to properly honor, and whether or not one culture has the right to choose how to honor another.

The pro-statue arguments centered on protecting the legacy of the deceased art teacher, Anthony Zimmerhagl with son and wife explaining what the statue meant to their relation and lamenting that it might be taken down.¹² The family also posthumously attributed their father with the intention to honor the Ho-Chunk people. The son summarizes this view thus: “The statue shows nothing but pride and strength... and Anyone who feels the Big Indian is offensive and is a stereotype is either ashamed of their ancestors and their past or are totally unaware of the true image of their roots.”¹³

Dale Littlejohn, an elder of the Ho Chunk Nation, challenged the artist’s intentions and spoke to the issue of who has the right to honor the Ho Chunk people: “You do not “honor a people” by building a statue that hopefully will bring in tourism dollars as stated by your family ancestor. Maybe it would be appropriate for the Ho-Chunk Nation to dig up your ancestors and see if they had “forked tongues”

¹⁰ David Holstrum, “Hiawatha Big Indian Construction,” May 11, 2000, Series 013, Box 16, File 5_2000-5-11, La Crosse Public Library Archives, La Crosse, Wisconsin; While early estimates for restoration amounted to \$50,000, post debate costs were reduced to \$35,000: Joan Kent, “Donation increases funds for Hiawatha statue restoration,” July 20, 2001, *La Crosse Tribune* Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library.

¹¹ “Report of Committee,” August 2000, Series 013, Box 16, File 5_2000-8-8, La Crosse Public Library Archives, La Crosse, Wisconsin; Joan Kent, “Committee: Keep Hiawatha,” *La Crosse Tribune*, December 15, 2000, Series 013, Box 16, File 5_2000-12-15, La Crosse Public Library Archives, La Crosse Public Library, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

¹² Betsy Bloom, “Family Wants Statue to Stay,” July 3, 2000, *La Crosse Tribune*, Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library. The widow of Anthony Zimmerhagl also speaks about the good memories of building the statue in her backyard: Joan Kent, “Park Board to Discuss Fate of Hiawatha Statue,” July 19, 2000, *La Crosse Tribune*, Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library. This theme of honoring the artist is so persistent that Matt “Stewart suggests a memorial to Zimmerhagl be erected because people who want to keep the statue want to honor his legacy as a teacher.” Joan Kent “Committee Disagrees on Fate of “Hiawatha”” November 16, 2000, *La Crosse Tribune*. Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library.

¹³ Joan Kent, “Indian statue repairs on hold,” *La Crosse Tribune*, June 16, 2000, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/“Big Indian,” University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

and sell replicas of their tongues to raise tourist dollars for our Ho-Chunk Nation. Think of this endeavor very seriously because we are only trying to “honor your people.””¹⁴ The second response to the question of honoring was put forward by *Hear, Here* narrator Kera Cho Mani ga who was heavily involved with this debate in 2000: “Here is this maybe well intended statue, but what we have to remember is that intentions do not determine consequences. Maybe these things were supposed to be honoring of Native Americans, and we appreciate the intention, but do we appreciate that maybe that’s not what they resulted in, maybe a mistake was made – well intentioned, but a mistake was made.”¹⁵ The nature of that mistake was articulated by a UWL student who changed the narrative from one focused around honoring to one focus on trauma. In Matt Stewart’s words the statue “symbolizes the mass genocide of our people. We get offended to see reminders.”¹⁶

One big difference between the 1960s debate and the 2000 debate was that the Ho Chunk were invited to speak. But in order to be heard they engaged with the debate about honoring that was set out by the family of the artist and his supporters. Those who tried to forge a new narrative about genocide and trauma were not given much space in the narrative. In the end the Ho Chunk were listened to but not heard.

The final vote by the Committee to Consider the Future of the Statue of *Hiawatha* ended in a 5-4 vote in favor of refurbishing the statue.–The deciding vote was by the Home School Coordinator for the Ho-Chunk Nation, who said he consulted with Ho-Chunk elders who did not find the statue offensive.

¹⁴ Letter from Dale Littlejohn to Mayor John Medinger, Hiawatha Statue Committee, “A Compromising of Neighbors,” October 9, 2000, Series 013, Box 16, File 5_2000-10-9, La Crosse Public Library Archives, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

¹⁵ Dan Green, *Hear, Here La Crosse*.

¹⁶ Joan Kent, “Committee Sets Public Hearing on Hiawatha’s Fate,” *La Crosse Tribune*, October 11, 2000, Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library

As evidenced by the final decision, it was those remembering the artist who were able to define how the statue honored, and for them it honored both the man who created it and the Ho Chunk that it was claimed to represent.

The reason why white Americans are able to make this argument so successfully is because of the presumed innocence of American culture bolstered by concepts of Manifest Destiny and American Exceptionalism. These concepts disavow the nation's imperialist endeavours, such as the conquering of land once belonging to indigenous groups, and end up as an underlying presumption of innocence not only of the nation itself but also of individuals who uphold these concepts.

The family and friends of Zimmerhagl feel attacked by the other side who consider Anthony to have engaged in cultural appropriation, "I object that those of us who like the statue are attributed with motives that are not true" one supporter said.¹⁷ There is a presumed innocence in this mindset and an arrogance that there is only one way of viewing the past and the present. This presumed innocence is not only on an individual level (as shown here) but on a national level. Statue supporters are able to assert their innocence in portraying Ho-Chunk people as "Big Indian," because the entire culture is innocent. They have effectively re-written history and forgotten the reality of their position as a conquering, warring force. It is from that position that they can claim to honor, the "pride and strength" of those who were forcefully removed from "hallowed grounds of the La Crosse County area." And it is with great irony that a family member can claim that it is the Ho Chunk rather than the white man who is "either ashamed of their ancestors and their past or are totally unaware of the true image of their roots."

Now we move to the third debate; this time HH was involved. **(SLIDE 16)**

¹⁷ Joan Kent, "Hearing Debate's Statues Merits" *La Crosse Tribune*, July 21, 2001, Hiawatha Statue Folder, Special Collections Murphy Library.

3) 2015-2018 *Hear, Here* and other organizations created pressure to change local policy

From 2015 through 2018, the statue again became part of a fierce debate. In 2015, the *Hear, Here* project launched Kera Cho Mani ga's narration.¹⁸ Later in 2015, a 24-minute student-produced video about the statue, which was shared broadly locally.¹⁹ In 2016 and 2018 two more *Hear, Here* stories about the statue emerged.²⁰ In 2017, because of national controversy around confederate monuments, the Arts Board and the Human Rights Commission at the City teamed up to create a listening session hosted at the Ho-Chunk Nation's Three Rivers House.²¹ Later in March, a petition for statue retirement and a letter-writing campaign began.

(SLIDE 17) On the anti-statue side, the arguments presented in this period were getting more sophisticated:

1. Stereotypical imagery -- internalization of -ve stereotypes leads to suicide.
2. Homogenizing Indigenous people --don't assume that Hiawatha can represent the Ho Chunk.
3. Historicising images of Indigenous people --placing Indigenous people always in the past is detrimental to those who live in urban environments today.
4. White supremacy²² --stereotyping, homogenizing, and historicizing are all forms of white supremacy used to help maintain white is right history and keep Indigenous people down.

¹⁸ Dan Green, *Hear, Hear La Crosse*.

¹⁹ Nathan Hansen, "UW-L Students Tackle 'Big Indian': Native American imagery in La Crosse topic of class video 'Patterns'" *La Crosse Tribune*, February 1, 2016, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art-Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

²⁰ William Stobb, *Hear, Hear La Crosse*.

²¹ Jourdan Vian, "Controversy Over Hiawatha Statue," *La Crosse Tribune*, December 7, 2017, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

²² Nathan Hansen, "UW-L Students Tackle 'Big Indian'" *La Crosse Tribune*, February 1, 2016.

The arguments in this phase for keeping the statue relied on the argument from 2000 focused on it being a tradition in the city, honoring the Ho-Chunk people, and nostalgic memories about the artist.²³ Two new arguments in this camp emerged: there were new claims that the Zimmerhakls have Indigenous ancestry and that Anthony Zimmerhakl taught his students reverence for the Indigenous peoples.²⁴

(SLIDE 16 DUPLICATE) Because of this renewed discussion around the statue, Mayor Tim Kabat called together a group on Valentines day, 2018. The group included council members, members of the Ho-Chunk Nation, and members of the Zimmerhakl family. The purpose of the group was to discuss possibly having the statue taken down, hopefully with consent from the artist's family. Calling a group to speak together from opposing sides of the debate was a way of

1. Discussing without voting and therefore taking sides
2. keeping the discussion out of the media, which inflamed the issue in the 2000 debate.

The group remained unofficial. The Mayor's goal was to have the issue resolved peacefully and quietly. The group concluded on July 24, 2018 to move the statue to private land, at a cost of \$50 000. This solution satisfied all involved parties,

²³ Arla M. Clemons, "Arla M. Clemons, Indian Statue Highlights Native Heritage" *La Crosse Tribune*, February 28, 2016, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin; Steve Kiedrowski, "Steve Kiedrowski: Hiawatha Statue is a Tribute," *La Crosse Tribune*, February 21, 2016, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin; Lilly Nelson, "Lilly Nelson, "Hiawatha" Represents Our Diversity," *La Crosse Tribune*, February 19, 2018, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

²⁴ Jourdan Vian, "Hiawatha Statue Debate Heats Up," *La Crosse Tribune*, December 9, 2017, in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin; Jourdan Vian, "Controversy Over Hiawatha Statue," *La Crosse Tribune*, December 7, 2017; Steve Kiedrowski, "Steve Kiedrowski: Statue is a Tribute to our Heritage," *La Crosse Tribune*, December 17, 2017. in vertical file: La Crosse: Art- Statues/Sculptures- Hiawatha/"Big Indian," University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Murphy Library Special Collections and Area Research Center, La Crosse, Wisconsin.

including Zimmerhagl's family, those who wanted the statue to remain in Riverside Park, and those who wanted the statue retired.²⁵

This third groundswell moment was different from the earlier two ways. First, the Ho Chunk and their supporters brought the issue to the fore *themselves* using the platform of *Hear, Here* and the student video allowing them to create and control the narrative. Open debates about the statue were held on Ho-Chunk property and were sanctioned by two council committees. This sets up a different power dynamic compared to the second groundswell leaving the family of the artist and their supporters scrambling to form a new narrative, and they ended up making arguments that did not relate to the narrative articulated and controlled by those against the statue.

Second, this debate came at a good time in local politics because the Mayor is a progressive, creating a policy window for this type of change. The mayor astutely created a group with key players that could come up with a policy behind closed doors that the population of the city would respect, no matter what side of the debate they were on. In the end it became obvious to the family of the artist that they were not going to win the long game: “Council members are going to change. Mayors are going to change. Ideas are going to change. We might win this time around but next time around, we may lose.”²⁶

This talk was about how a public history project became a small part of a movement to alter the meaning of a Native American statue in a municipal park.

²⁵ Scott Behrens, “Hiawatha Statue in Riverside Park may be removed soon,” *News 8000 WKBT-TV*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.news8000.com/news/the-hiawatha-stature-in-riverside-park-may-removed-soon/772656748>; Jordan Vian, “‘Hiawatha’ could find a new home outside of Riverside Park,” *La Crosse Tribune*, July 29, 2018, Accessed August 9, 2018, https://lacrossetribune.com/news/local/hiawatha-could-find-new-home-outside-riverside-park/article_d4a0c461-3167-5eba-8822-1d6f69bb4585.html#1

²⁶ Scott Behrens, “Hiawatha Statue in Riverside Park may be removed soon,” *News 8000 WKBT-TV*, July 24, 2018, <https://www.news8000.com/news/the-hiawatha-stature-in-riverside-park-may-removed-soon/772656748>

Sixty years of controversy around the statue has meant that there have been many different arguments and moments of influence. *Hear, Here* intersected with these histories and actions within the last three years--re-telling the story of one of the early protests. *Hear, Here* served as a way for Kera Cho Mani ga's story to be told and retold, allowing it to remain consistently visible rather than lost in 20 year old editorials. Creating yet another, and in some ways more permanent, source of visibility for his voice was one link in a sequence that included a variety of actions that would ultimately lead to a decision to move the statue.

While this is a win in some ways--a stereotypical statue is being taken down after 60 years of debate--in many ways it is a small victory that will do little to affect the larger goal of respect and understanding of the history of indigenous peoples. While the pain of the statue is removed, the entire tragedy of imperialism and white-is-right history remains. Until the powerful white population is able to understand and appreciate the position of the groups they have oppressed, express their sympathy and regret, and consider reparations to be made, this story will not be over. Statues may come down but it's the hearts and minds of those that would have them stay that are the real battlegrounds for change.

Thank you **(SLIDE 12)**.