



Accomplice

For the Record

Installment 01: Introducing the Project

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February/March 2021

Background

There is only one course required of every Notre Dame student, carrying with it a singularly profound and transformative potential at both individual and institutional levels: the Moreau First Year Experience (commonly referred to as “Moreau”). Moreau currently includes a curriculum module that claims to tell the “History of Notre Dame” and the “Notre Dame Story.” However, the history we teach in this module is white-washed and insidiously incomplete. The Notre Dame story, as currently told in this University-sanctioned course and remembered by current and former students, erases the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi (Pokégnek Bodéwadmik) and their instrumental connection with the University’s genesis and continued presence. Let us be clear, their involvement was not consensual or collaborative: it is only as a result of their colonization, forced removal, and forced re-education that the University of Notre Dame exists. We want the story to change, and we are starting with Moreau.

We are publishing this story *for the record*: our purpose is to establish evidence of the efforts put forward by students to rewrite the institutionalized history of the University of Notre Dame. We will have monthly installments in *Accomplice* with three components: (1) a brief article updating you on our project’s status, (2) a list sharing the resources we encounter as we curate our recommendation for what should be included in the Moreau curriculum, and (3) a response form seeking your feedback on this project and asking you to share any resources you recommend.

The stories we tell about ourselves matter. They are artefacts of power, narrative, and memory. Social justice can only be realized through truth-telling, let’s start on our own campus.

Who are we and why do we care?

My name is Lauren Klein. I am a senior majoring in Biological Sciences and minoring in the Hesburgh Program in Public Service and Education, Schooling, and Society. I began this project this past spring with Anna Scartz (‘20) in an ESS course entitled “History of American Indian Education.” We were passionate about bringing awareness and dialogue to

campus, and we decided an important way to do this was through updating the Moreau curriculum to reflect the Notre Dame story we had not heard as freshmen. I am thrilled to be continuing work on this initiative with Jules this semester, as I truly believe in the potential of this project to create a lasting, inclusive, and imperative dialogue at the University of Notre Dame.

My name is Julianne Downing, I am an American Studies & Peace Studies major in the graduating Class of 2022. As Lauren said, she started this project with Anna in Spring 2020, and I'm joining now to add my experience and perspective as a member of the Moreau Student Advisory Council. MSAC is a team that reviews the current Moreau curriculum and proposes adjustments to be made each year. Anyone who has had Moreau knows it can be a polarizing experience. Some students bond instantly with their instructors while others do not; some students relish the opportunity to have a dedicated space for difficult conversations every week while others are challenged to the point of frustration. I know not everyone has a positive Moreau experience, yet I believe in the power of this course. I am enamored of the ideals of Moreau: providing a baseline of shared knowledge across an entire class at ND (no small feat), and I am inspired by its potential to encourage conversation, vulnerability, and exchange.

What's the problem?

It is likely you have heard University of Notre Dame's founding story. In case you need a refresher, [the University of Notre Dame history page](#) will do the trick:

"The University of Notre Dame began late on the bitterly cold afternoon of November 26, 1842, when a 28-year-old French priest, Rev. Edward Sorin, C.S.C., and seven companions, all of them members of the recently established Congregation of Holy Cross, took possession of 524 snow-covered acres that the Bishop of Vincennes had given them in the Indiana mission fields. ..."

If you are a student, you have likely known this story from your first week on campus. If you are a recent student, the University made sure you knew this story by teaching it to you in Moreau. You also know the story about Father Sorin mistaking the two lakes, St. Mary's and St. Joseph's, on our campus for one in the icy winter, contributing to the endearingly erroneous name, L'Université de Notre Dame du Lac (The University of Our Lady of the *Lake, singular*).

Come on, you don't need to hear this again.

But you do. Because you do not know the complete and true story of the founding of the University of Notre Dame. You do not know the crucial role played in Notre Dame's history by Indigenous nations; Notre Dame hasn't told you.

While there is an extensive history to relay, we will give you a brief version here. The Pokégnek Bodéwadmik lived and sustained themselves on the land on which we now live and learn. According to [the Observer Editorial Board](#):

“Most people do not know that Notre Dame was built on Potawatomi lands. The story of Notre Dame and the Potawatomi people began in 1830 when Leopold Pokagon, a leader in the Potawatomi tribe, traveled to Detroit to ask assistance from French priests. Fr. Gabriel Richard sent Badin, the first priest ordained in the United States, as a missionary to minister to the Potawatomi people. Badin purchased the land at Sainte-Marie-des-Lacs in parcels from the United States government with the intention of starting an orphanage — now Notre Dame.”

Twelve years later, Fr. Sorin—the famed founder of the University—[arrived in the region at the direction of Bishop Hailandiere to replace Fr. Badin](#), to continue to evangelize the Pokagon Band, and to build a college on Potawatomi land. In his letters to Fr. Moreau, Sorin frequently refers to “[his] poor Indians” and even mentions learning their language, which he calls only “Indian.” That our narratives now completely exclude the members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi with whom our founders were so intimately involved is reprehensible. [Sorin writes](#) that he “love[s], too, the Indians” and “thank[s] Heaven that [he is] among them,” but we know his relationship with his “dear Indians” is inherently exploitative. Sorin writes, “I have been informed of the best means of inducing them to do good, and I hope, with the help of God, to succeed in this some day,” exemplifying Sorin’s simultaneous patronizing evangelization and well-intentioned predisposition toward service, a relationship fraught with contradiction.

Notre Dame was founded on Potawatomi land, and is largely present because of the Potawatomi people, yet it fails to acknowledge its history with Native people. The (deliberately) incomplete story Notre Dame tells—once preserved through word of mouth—is institutionalized in the Moreau course, which disseminates this partial history to all freshmen who allegedly learn about Notre Dame’s community and commitment to diversity. We are not the first to call for an honest and inclusive narrative; in [an interview with The Observer](#) discussing the University’s origins, Marcus Winchester, the director of the language and culture department of the Pokagon Band, explained, “I think it would be a huge milestone if the University would acknowledge that we’re the ones that welcomed Fr. Badin and requested his presence. And then when Fr. Badin left, Fr. Sorin was the one who came in and replaced him. So you know, that institution wouldn’t be there if Leopold [Pokagon] had requested someone else.”

This omission is at odds with Notre Dame’s mission as a Catholic institution, Moreau course learning objectives, and promises of a robust, inclusive, and diverse community. Students should see the values Notre Dame purports espoused in the Moreau curriculum, which claims to impart these values to students.

There needs to be a change. What has been done so far?

During the Spring 2020 semester, two students (Anna Scartz (‘20) and Lauren Klein (‘21)) set out to integrate the full story into the Moreau curriculum in an attempt to tell a more accurate, inclusive, and consistent version of Notre Dame’s history. A [resolution](#) was presented to the student Senate, calling for inclusion of Native history and culture in the Moreau curriculum. This resolution was sponsored by the Directors of Diversity and Inclusion and Academic Affairs in the Notre Dame Student Senate, and its contents was approved and

supported by the Native American Student Association of Notre Dame (NASAND). As argued in the resolution, the University's omissions are at odds with its mission statement, Catholic Social Teaching, Moreau Course objectives, and student interest, necessitating action to veritably fulfill Notre Dame's obligations as a premier educational institution cultivating free and inclusive dialogue and inculcating Catholic values in its students. The resolution failed to pass by a *single vote*.

We believe this initiative must continue, and a more inclusive dialogue should be cultivated on campus which acknowledges and celebrates Indigenous nations and cultures. We believe it is necessary to hold the University accountable, because we believe it can do better, strengthened by a diverse, accurate, and inclusive narrative of its history and present.

What comes next?

Our primary focus during the Spring 2021 semester will be moving our still-to-be-enacted resolution through the student Senate, which will call for the Moreau First Year Experience course to present a more complete history of the University by foregrounding Pokégnek Bodéwadmik histories and experiences. This will entail reaching out to the Potawatomi community directly to hear *their* version of the Notre Dame story, consulting with MSAC and the Program Directors of First Year Student Engagement as we develop our curriculum recommendations, and working with other students of Indigenous history and decoloniality to consider the deep implications of righting this wrong, and personally dedicating time to un-learning and re-learning.

The resolution we will present to the Senate will be a refined version of the resolution Anna and Lauren authored and presented last year. Our argument hinges on the values which the University claims to uphold through its mission statement, its commitment to Catholic Social Teaching, and the explicit course goals of the Moreau First Year Experience course. Further, this is an issue of power and justice. Notre Dame undoubtedly holds the upper hand, so to speak, in terms of resources, influence, prestige, and name recognition in comparison to the Pokégnek Bodéwadmik. Every time the University tells or teaches the Notre Dame story in a way that deliberately hides the interaction with and colonization of the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi, our institution is complicit in erasure and exploitation. Especially now, after the protests and education movements of Summer 2020, after having experienced the long overdue awakening to racial [in]justice in the United States, the University can no longer claim innocence. Not actively seeking to correct racial injustice is complicity in that very injustice.

By putting together this *Accomplice* series, we hope to not only create exposure for our project and resolution, but to also learn (alongside you!) about Indigenous histories, cultures, and communities and the Indigenous lived experiences. We are building a shared community resource list, and remain open to your feedback and input. We know that the title "ally" cannot be quickly or independently earned, but we do believe habits and acts of allyship are most likely to be formed and performed by someone who has dedicated significant time to education.

We are currently exploring other avenues to signal-boost our project, including penning an updated Observer article (read Anna and Lauren's April 2020 article [here](#)); starting an educational Instagram account; reaching out to the dorm communities on campus and offering them our resource lists and feedback forms to gauge popular interest in our initiative; and collaborating with other pre-existing clubs, projects, and departments.

Our end goal

Our micro goal is to introduce the Pokégnek Bodéwadmik's role in the inception of the University of Notre Dame into the Moreau First Year Experience Curriculum, either as a new stand-alone module, or a revamping of the current "Notre Dame Story" module to correct the inaccuracies and untruths that we teach our own community. It is essential that we revisit this story from a critical, inclusive perspective and not simply continue to teach such a blatant lie by omission.

Our macro goal is to more broadly open a difficult (and sorely overdue) conversation on campus about [Catholic] colonialism, complicity, and Indigenous erasure. Had you heard of the Pokagon Potawatomi? What version of the University's history were you taught? How can you look back on your time at ND and notice microaggressions? Which important narratives were missing from your courses? Do you know whose land you've grown up on and been educated on? These are the tough questions that we want to prompt as we learn together through *Accomplice*, and build a platform to learn together through changes to the Moreau curriculum.

Contact us!

We would love to hear from you directly if you have any questions, suggestions, comments, or critiques. Email one or both of us, or let us know if you'd like to have a Zoom meeting. Get in touch with Lauren at klein1@nd.edu and Julianne at jdownin2@nd.edu.