



PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

S6E17: Two-Eyed Seeing with Claudia Fox Tree

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Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: [00:00:00] I think that's what happens to kids. Once they find out they weren't told the whole truth, they're mad. And so, we need to do a better job at actually teaching the two-eyed seeing, the, the multiple perspectives.

Sam Fuqua: That's Claudia Fox Tree, and this is Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. In this episode, we talk with Dr. Claudia Fox Tree about the critical importance of Indigenous perspectives in education and culture. She is a consultant, activist, and educator who worked for over 30 years using a systemic model called [00:01:00] IDEAS. That stands for Initiatives for Developing Equity and Achievement for Students. Her work focuses on decolonizing curriculum, racial identity development, and expanding Indigenous representation in teaching and scholarship. We spoke with Dr. Claudia Fox Tree at the 2026 White Privilege Conference in Seattle.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi, Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi, Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we're so happy to be talking here in Seattle at the 2026 White Privilege Conference with Dr. Claudia Fox Tree. Hello. Welcome.

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: Hello. I'm happy to be here. So, I said a greetings in Arawak Taino language, introduced my name. It is also she/her pronouns. I didn't say that part of it. And, that I was happy to be here. And I will add, uh, uh, Deutsch ist meine [00:02:00] muttersprache, so my first language is German, but because I speak fluent English, I often use that as an important access point because, um, English language has given me the ability to advocate for others and to read English laws and things like that. So, it's been an important piece of a place I have privilege because as a woman of color, there are so many places I don't have privilege. Um, so I like to point out when I do.

Sam Fuqua: So much to talk about within your, your very rich background of, of work. Let's start by giving us some background and perhaps a definition of two-eyed seeing.

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: Two-eyed seeing is a Mi'kmaq term. It's relatively, um, recent, and it is a way to explain the history of invisibility in this land of Indigenous people that is not seen, talked about, or known about typically, especially in [00:03:00] anti-racism conversations. However, in general, anything that has to do with the experiences, culture, and land which does not include Indigenous people is making Indigenous people invisible. So, two-eyed seeing, unlike some other ways of thinking, like, um, double consciousness or code switching, is challenging the dominant narrative on equal footing. And there is a piece of unlearning and relearning. However, the focus of two-eyed seeing is here is the Western way, here is the Indigenous way. Can we see them both together when we're on someone else's land? So, it's taking each concept that you might have

from what you know and adding the Indigenous piece to it, the Native American part of "and it is also this thing."

Alexis Miles: Could you give an example so that people can hold this?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: There are a [00:04:00] lot of stereotypes about Indigenous people and the land. One of them is that this was a pristine wilderness. However, Indigenous people maintained, manicured, took care of this land. So, it is, the fact that it's seen as pristine is pristine with human involvement. And some of that human involvement included, um, paths that people used on land. Obviously, the highways were the waterways and the canoes, and on land they were paths. And those same paths are what became the roads and then the highways. And so, when you only teach about roads and highways, you're missing the entire Indigenous piece to the meaning of those roads and highways. The other is that Indigenous people took a lot of time with that pristine wilderness, and the last protected lands were our national parks. And so, those parks were taken from Indigenous people who were still protecting them. [00:05:00] And, the taking of lands and the idea that it continued into this century isn't something that we normally learn about either. So, stereotypes are a way to quickly see Indigenous perspectives that are missing, but they are not the only ones.

There's also things like protecting forests through, uh, controlled fires and controlled burns. So, the Indigenous technological knowledge is an important piece of two-eyed seeing and bringing in and weaving in that perspective. Understanding that the oppression of Indigenous people is not just through race. They have all the experiences of race based on where they live, who they, what they look like, that kind of thing, and they have the experience of being a political group that had treaties and agreements with the US government, which is why they can fish in their treaty-determined lands any time of year, but non-Indigenous people, not non-racial people, non-Indigenous people can't. They [00:06:00] have to do it during the, um, hunting season or fishing season, whatever it is. And so there's a relationship with the land that Indigenous people have had for centuries, eons.

I consider the work that I do an, as an ally to the Indigenous people of the land who I'm on. My nation's not from the continental United States. So, that piece of understanding is kinda common across nations in terms of the relationship with the land and the non-human beings on the land as well. And, I recently attended a conference where part of it included how do you get water to people who are denied access? Because water is already, it's not gonna be, it already is, uh, a f, a fight, a resource where it's gonna cost money, and you're gonna have to work with power structures to get clean water to different places. This was a worldwide [00:07:00] conference. And it occurred to me, Indigenous people need that too, but their fight is different. Their fight is protecting the actual water, not where the water is going. And that kinda sums up what it is, the protection at the source. You know, uh, there is a statistic about the small percentage of Indigenous people worldwide controlling the most untouched land in the world. And so, really trying to hold on to the infrastructure that is the land and the earth and the water.

Alexis Miles: So, would that be an example of two-eyed seeing? On the one hand, it's seen as living, and on the other hand, as something to be dominated.



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Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: Yes, but I would say the living is the protecting of the actual water. Like, you can pass around water, you can figure out how you're gonna get the water. It's not gonna matter if it's polluted. And so, that would lead [00:08:00] you to looking at not just obvious things of pollution, like where do the oil pipelines go? Also, less obvious, like even some water sources end up polluting the water in terms of algae and things that are introduced that kill the fish and plants in the water.

Alexis Miles: Have you seen instances where this two-eyed seeing has played out in a way that would not have happened with just the one-eyed seeing?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: I mean, it's all the time. This is Indigenous land, so anything that is done here or taught here, K12, college, any of those things will always have an Indigenous perspective. It has to. Even if the Indigenous perspective is that they didn't care or they didn't do anything. But if it happened here, it has an Indigenous perspective, everything. And that is not [00:09:00] required in most states. I think one state, and I could be wrong, but I think it's Montana, has a constitution that requires Indigenous education, which is not the Department of Education deciding it. Others have departments of education that say it, but having it in a constitution that formally is very different. And like I said, there's one, and I think it's Montana. So, just getting Indigenous history and culture and perspective into every subject, every grade level would really help because when we learn about ancient history here, and I was a, uh, middle school special education teacher for thirty-seven years, so I worked as a co-teacher with lots of different teachers at different grade levels and diff, different subjects, I did history, too, ancient history and modern history. And we teach about Greece, Rome, [00:10:00] Mesopotamia, Egypt, and I'm sure other countries do too, and I'm not saying those are not things we should teach about, but I am pretty sure China teaches more than that, and Japan teaches more than that. And if we're living on this land, we really need to be learning about the ancient peoples who are now also contemporary people in what we now know as North and South America. And so those other places can be included, but how are we supposed to have a relationship with the land we are on if we have not passed on any of the knowledge and history of the land we are on?

And the other thing is, as allies and activists We need to be aware that that invisibility needs to be made visible. That we actually need to start to advocate for making sure that that history, [00:11:00] culture, knowledge is included in this land that we're living on for our future generations. And there's one thing that makes, there's so many things, but one thing's that makes the United States, but also what we know as North and South America, so unique is that everybody has an arrival story of the place they came from, except the Indigenous people. Their arrival story is, "We've always been here," right? It's not an arrival story. It's a creation story. And it matters because the things that are passed on generation to generation have to do with the, the climate and the mountains and the waters and the animals from this continent. Everyone else's stories are from another continent with their mountains and animals and rivers. [00:12:00] And so, understanding the stories from this land will help us understand this land better, and we have nowhere else that this story is being told. Every other group that has come here or been taken and forced here or come here as a refugee, the list goes on, there is another place in the world where their stories exist, where their ancestors exist, except this land. So, if we're gonna be good allies, we need to make sure those stories are actually told here, 'cause they're not being told anywhere else.

Sam Fuqua: So, I've been researching Lake Superior for some other reporting I'm going to be doing, and I was reading a study about climate change on Lake Superior that incorporated, very intentionally, traditional knowledge. And, it was the, the observational knowledge, the oral history, the people who have been living on the big lake for thousands of years. And, and the reason I'm bringing it up is it was [00:13:00] remarkable to me in that I, I'd never seen that before. It struck me that, that that was incorporated, and is that rare, uh, in the mainstream science community?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: I am not as knowledgeable as you in terms of reading those kinds of magazines. However, my life experience is that most people know nothing or very little about Indigenous people who have grown up in the, what we know as the United States. Canada is slightly better. They've done some truth and reconciliation, um, things and offer, try to make up for stuff with Indigenous people, but they have a lot of problems too. Taking children from families, to put them in residential boarding schools stopped in the United States in 1978, but it did not stop in Canada until 1996. So, it is literally this generation that is dealing with having been removed from their lands and [00:14:00] their families. So, Canada has done something. They have a larger population. They have more, around 12, 15 percent Indigenous people, two percent who identify as Black, and it is reversed in the United States. That's still millions of people, um, but there were 100 percent of Native Americans on this land, and now there's two percent, which is a pretty big attempted genocide. And for comparison, my understanding is that there's also two percent farmers. So, it is enough people, you know, to sustain, and there's more on the west than on the, the east. And, in my experience, most people know almost nothing about Indigenous people. They haven't learned about the history or the culture. Canada requires it. At least people can name treaties. I did two workshops here. Folks knew one treaty from this area, which is better than most places, and, um, maybe one other. [00:15:00] But there were hundreds, and that what's, that's what creates the intersectionality of race and political sovereignty, the treaties with the US government.

Alexis Miles: I think about that sometimes, that some of us live on unceded land. That's big. I sometimes think it's like I went and kicked somebody out of their home, and now I'm living in that home, claiming that it's mine, and claiming that I don't know what happened to the people who lived here. They just disappeared. And sometimes, I think, I'll, I'll speak for the US and, and my part of the US, which is Colorado, that people just disappeared. They just up and disappeared.

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: I'm not surprised to hear that. The number one stereotype assumption [00:16:00] among Indigenous Native American people is, uh, the assumption that we're all dead or gone. Number one. And, I see it play out in daily interactions. Didn't happen here at the conference, but it has happened where I will talk to someone, and they will say, "Oh, you're Indigenous. What nation?" And I'll say, "Arawak." And they'll say, "Oh, they're from the Caribbean." I'll say, "Yep." And then the next thing they say is, "Aren't they all dead?" And, I'm like standing in front of them, just said, and it just comes out of people's mouths because it's so ingrained in this culture that they're all dead. And so, the idea that there might have been somebody with claim to land and you never even thought about it is not surprising to me. I mean, that is, that is the going piece. [00:17:00] But it isn't, it's like, you can't, it's not, you can't put the jack, jack-in-the-box back together, right? It's not like we're gonna become a country free of racism. It exists. We need to figure out where to move forward from this. We're not gonna become a country that gives all their land back to Indigenous people. That's just not gonna

happen. So, how do we make it survivable? You know, what can we do? One thing we could do, not my idea, but we could give the national parks back to Indigenous people. And, I'm not saying, like, "Now these are yours and nobody can go." Not saying that's a bad idea, but that's not what I'm suggesting. I'm suggesting in terms of the stewardship. Like, give it back to still be able to do the things that had previously been done to take care of those parks.

So, there are ways that you could still do the stewardship. There are ways in which, like, the history of, um, research on Indigenous people has been extractive and harmful. [00:18:00] You know, interviewing some groups and saying, "Oh, schizophrenia is so heavy in this population," and then that becomes a stigma for that group. You know, used, um, in ways that do not help the groups. That is now being looked at differently. I just went to a conference at Harvard University about their ethical relationships with, um, Indigenous people, and the Indigenous people are stepping up. They're like, "You're doing two hundred hours worth of video? I want it all. You need to sh, this is part of our contract. You need to share all of it, even if you only use five minutes, because we deserve it for our own archives and preservation. You have books with an, original notations in the actual ancestral language? We want that too, 'cause you don't need the notations. You're not gonna be able to read them, right? Give it back to us." So, there are ways that you can move forward with that kind of work that is respectful of the [00:19:00] Indigenous knowledge and the people.

Sam Fuqua: What about teaching the history? Typically, state-by-state approach to curriculum is the norm here in the US. How do we advance a true history?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: I taught seventh graders, and I taught them a lot of the stuff that they weren't particularly learning in school. Some of it they were, but some of it they weren't. And, they were super angry, and they're just seventh graders who think they know everything. And, I think that's what happens to kids. Once they find out they weren't told the whole truth, they're mad. And so, we need to do a better job at, at actually teaching the two-eyed seeing, the, the multiple perspectives. But that is true of a lot of things. And then, you know, we get to be adults and make decisions about stuff. I have a few thoughts on that. One is, no matter how much we [00:20:00] read or watch TV or watch documentaries, it is always secondhand knowledge unless we have relationships with Indigenous people. So, we, I mentioned the relationships with the land and the non-humans, but we have to have some human-to-human relationships. It is through those relationships that we really build that empathy and knowledge and see what is happening as it is happening from a firsthand perspective. So, I'm not saying go out and make, you know, get your new best friend. I'm saying show up. Show up at Indigenous things. Show up at pow wows. Show up at speakers. Show up at, at author talks. Because if you keep showing up, your commitment will be seen, and then you might build your community and friendships. It is important to not just get secondhand knowledge.

The other is that it was never 100 percent [00:21:00] for any kind of big change in this country. It wasn't 100 percent for women should be able to vote or own property or run for Congress. It was not 100 percent who believed that slavery should end. However, when slavery ended in, um, the federal larger sense, states had already made decisions that slavery was not gonna be in this state. Towns had already done it. Cities and towns had said, "Yeah, you wanna run for elected, elected office? You cannot own other people." And so, given that it's never 100 percent and it is



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still happening, like, people are still doing the work, we just need to have enough people doing the work. So, we need to have enough educators and administrators seeing that this is important work, and once you have enough, there's a tip. And then, alongside, working with the power structures is also important. You know, calling legislators, f, [00:22:00] filing bills, that, that kind of thing. Maybe through the Department of Education, but clearly there's other ways. Other states have done it other ways. And, working to get things changed at the state level at this point. We're looking at states, but it could be federal at some point. Indigenous people need to be given the opportunity to lead the way and have their voice equally heard, and there's two percent, so it's really hard to do alone. The ally work becomes very important and shouldn't take it over, it just is needed. A lot of the social justice movements were never just that group, you know? It had to be them and their allies and their community. I'm using allies 'cause most people know that word, but that's not necessarily the best word.

Alexis Miles: What's a better word?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: Co-conspirators, collaborators, there's other words to use for that kind of work.[00:23:00]

Alexis Miles: Meaning, to my ears, we all have a stake here.

Sam Fuqua: Part of the conclusion of this podcast is a land acknowledgement. What we say in the prerecorded outro to the podcast is, is that we produce these in Colorado, traditional lands of the Arapahoe, Ute, and Cheyenne people, and then we direct people to our website where we have a much longer land acknowledgement. So, that's what we do.

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: Um, I think that's great. I think if we're gonna say our name and our pronouns, we should say whose land we're on or what land we work on, even if there's been an official one. So, like, it's great for an organization to do a tribal land acknowledgement. I encourage it. It doesn't mean we shouldn't do one individually. You know, when I say I'm on Pawtucket, Agawam, and Massachusetts land, the last one gives it away, that isn't the case everywhere, right? And, as folks do that, I get an [00:24:00] entirely new map of this country, and I get to hear the names of those words from the people who are living in the state. I've had people here not know how to say Wampanoag, and I certainly didn't know how to say all the names in Seattle and had to look them up and ask my daughter who lived nearby, um, how to pronounce them. And that's important work, too. How do you pronounce them? How do you get that new map in your mind of where the nations were? Because the nations are not bounded by the political boundaries of states either. They're, they're gonna go across those state lines.

Alexis Miles: What gives you hope? What is happening right now in the worlds that you traverse that gives you hope?

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: I've been recently thinking about the next generation of Indigenous folks, uh, you know, our children. I often think of our children and way further into the future. However, our children are choosing to continue living in the culture and doing [00:25:00] things in the culture. And, you know, it's our moment to, as older folks, elders even, to step back and hand over, like, the reins, if you wanna call it that, of, uh, what are you gonna do with this? And the

thing is, it's not everybody. It's never everybody. I already said that. And so, you know, if you have a few, you have enough that are continuing to hold events for Indigenous people and hold events that educate non-Indigenous people or introduce them to aspects of understanding traditional educational knowledge, whatever, ecological knowledge. Whatever it is, knowing that the, I can see the next generation stepping up and they're choosing to do that is very hopeful to me. Am I sad that it's not everybody? Sure. But I'm very hopeful about it. Um, and I will add a second piece, which is the, [00:26:00] um, Indigenous nations themselves getting a little more power, maybe a little more money, maybe some more support with laws. Whatever it is, but being able to become self-sustaining, to activate their sovereignty, to be able to have a language resurgence, that is a huge thing. You know, there's a time when folks, grandparents were passing away and, you know, how are we gonna even learn this language to pass it on? And so, we had a generation who didn't learn their language, however, they are now reteaching it to their children, so their children will have the language. And having a language of your people is, gives you a different way to view the world. And so that language piece and the next generation, which are not necessarily the same because there are older folks learning language as well, do give me hope.

Sam Fuqua: Dr. Claudia Fox Tree, thank [00:27:00] you for spending time with us and our listeners. We appreciate it.

Dr. Claudia Fox Tree: So, thank you. You are welcome.

Sam Fuqua: Dr. Claudia Fox Tree is a consultant, an activist, an educator. Her website is drclaudiafoxtree.com. We spoke with her at the 2026 White Privilege Conference in Seattle. She also contributed to an upcoming book entitled, *Exploring Racial Code-Switching in Education*. White Privilege Conference founder Dr. Eddie Moore Jr. is one of the editors of that book. It'll be published this fall by Routledge Press.

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