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**Tailyr Irvine:** I don't want people who think like me because, if that were the case, I would just photograph myself and do this whole thing in the first person. I want to hear everyone's opinions. I want people to challenge what I think, and I want to challenge what people think with my work.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** From the National Museum of the American Indian, welcome to the *Developing Stories Native Photographers in the Field* podcast. I'm Cécile Ganteaume, *Developing Stories* curator. This online exhibition presents photo essays by Native photojournalists Russel Albert Daniels and Tailyr Irvine. Created in collaboration with the museum, each explores an issue that has long been of personal interest to the photographer. I'm delighted to be talking with Tailyr Irvine today. She is an independent photojournalist and documentary photographer. She graduated from the University of Montana in 2018. And, thus far, her work has come to the attention of ESPN, CNN, *The New York Times*, and *National Geographic*, in addition to the National Museum of the American Indian. Before striking out as a freelancer, Tailyr worked for several major city newspapers. Tailyr's *Developing Stories* photo essay, *Reservation Mathematics: Navigating Love in Native America*, explores the different ways that blood quantum requirements for tribal enrollment impact tribal members' relationships and lives. Tailyr, thank you very much for joining us. I want to talk to you about both your career and your *Reservation Mathematics* photo essay.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Thanks for having me. I'm excited to be here.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Great. So, let's get to it. Tailyr, I'd like to begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about yourself. So, if you would, tell us some about where you were born and raised and then when and how you first realized that you were getting seriously interested in photography and photojournalism.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Absolutely. I was born and raised in a town called Ronan. It's on the Flathead Reservation in northwest Montana. I've always been interested in photography as a child. My parents bought me cameras for Christmas, and video

cameras, and I always played around with them as a kid. But it wasn't until I went to college and I was taking a course—it was on the history of journalism—and that's when I decided that I really wanted to make a career out of photography.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** What was your first professional job as a photographer?

**Tailyr Irvine:** The first job that I did—actually, I reached out to the tribal paper on the reservation and asked if I could work there for a summer. It took a little bit of begging. They finally agreed. So I worked there for a summer with a paper called the *Char-Koosta*, and then from there I bounced to the *Billings Gazette* and then the *Dallas Morning News* and then the *Tampa Bay Times*.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So, Tailyr, I would characterize you as being one of an emerging generation of very talented data photographers who are interested both in social issues and visual storytelling. Would you agree with that?

**Tailyr Irvine:** I think to an extent. I think when you get into journalism, by the nature of it, it's both with social issues and storytelling. Like, you're able to pair it with the social issues in your community and cover that with a news angle. So that's kind of why I'm interested in covering what I cover.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So when the *Developing Stories* team first started considering collaborating with you, we were looking over your portfolio and we were all immensely impressed by a series of images that you made at Texas's first domestic shelter for men. And so this is a series of images of a 36-year-old man and his 2-year-old son and the man's trying to get his life back together after having been through an abusive relationship and after having been homeless. And the setting that you image this father and son is, is pretty bare—it's pretty desolate—but you were able to capture a very tender father-son relationship. Would you tell us a little bit about that assignment?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Absolutely. So that assignment actually came from a daily assignment I received while I was working at the *Dallas Morning News*. For me, it was really important to show homelessness with a human side. I think often you

have this image in your head and, you know, it's not always great, and I think this really proved otherwise, where anyone can be homeless. Like this man with his partner—she abused him, he called the cops, and she kicked him out of his house with their 2-year-old son. So, he left, and then, like, just like that he was homeless. The car and everything they owned were in her name, and so he had to figure out how to get back on his feet after he went from a home with a car and all those things to having nothing but his son and like a bag of clothes. And so we really wanted to show the process of how difficult it was for him to get back on his feet. Because if you don't have a car, you have to take the bus to job interviews. And if you don't have job interview clothes, you have to go across town to get clothes from this other place, and it's just exhausting. Like, it took what would be a 20-minute car ride, it took several hours to get across the city, and so we rode with him for that. And then also how can you go for an interview for a job if you have a child? What does that look like? How do you afford childcare when you're homeless? And it's all these barriers that he had to go through to get to the other side. And so I think when me and Esteban decided to pursue that further, I think it really helped him tell his story to get out what happened to him.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Well, you really did seem to be able to enter his world and his life. So, are you intentionally bringing a sense of subjectivity to your work?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, I would say. I'd say I tried to show him as it is and let people decide on their own how they feel. I think I just tried to show the scene totally as it is. You know, he was in a very empty room, and that's something that you resonated with, Cécile, that the room was empty and bare and he's living there with his son, and what's that like? And, so, I think just showing the scene as it is and letting people come to their own conclusions is my goal with my work always.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Yeah, and yet his humanity and, as I say, his love for his son, really registers as well.

So, Tailyr, in our very first telephone conversation you told me that you found photographing athletes engaged in their sports gripping. I don't know why that surprised me at the time, but it did. And, as I recall, you said that you like

photographing those events because you're able to capture something intense that was at stake for the athletes. And that was something not just physical, but something psychological that was at stake. Would you talk a little bit about your fascination with photographing sporting events because you do it a lot, don't you?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. I actually love sports. As a kid and through high school, I played sports all four years, and so that's really where it started for me is playing the sports. And then, since I could no longer do that, I think that my next best thing was photographing, and I had an interest in photographing basketball and volleyball. And I think it's really fun, but my favorite thing about sports is that there is always something at stake. There's always a winner and a loser. And, no matter how minuscule the game might seem to somebody, to those people who are playing, nobody wants to lose. And so, I think, that's just my favorite part about sports.

And another thing is that, you know, as a journalist, we're storytellers and sports are just filled with stories from the athletes—like where the athletes come from, what's the story of the individuals that make up the team or, you know, just the basic who's going to win, who's going to lose, or even just the audience, you know. What does a team mean to the audience and what's at stake for the person watching it? What do they put into this? And I think, altogether, it's just, it's really exciting and it's fun to shoot.

And another thing that I really like is that it's really difficult to photograph. It's really hard to freeze frames in that way when players are moving really fast, actions happening, if they try to predict the action and try to know where the ball's going and what's the best part to shoot. And, you know, it's really difficult, and I think if you can shoot sports, you can shoot anything. And I think it really sharpens ... my tools as a photographer.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** That's fascinating because that's just what I was going to ask you. I would think that positioning yourself in the right place is much more challenging when you're photographing a sporting event than perhaps other situations.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Absolutely, because sports are all out of my control. I can't tell the athlete where to go, which is really frustrating, but you know, that's what makes it so fun. And you don't get to pick where you go. Most of the time you get sat in a spot and say, okay, you can shoot from here; make good photos. I think the challenge of that is what makes it a lot of fun for me to do.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Well, you do it really well. Tailyr, you traveled to North Dakota in 2016–2017 to photograph the Dakota Access Pipeline protest camp. Right?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yes.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So just in case anybody needed to be reminded, the Lakota living on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation were worried about the possibility of pipeline leaks and the very serious threat that these leaks could potentially pose for their tribal members' health. And during their protests, the Lakota were of course joined by thousands of Native American activists. Tailyr, what was that experience of being at the DAPL protest camp like for you?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, I think what's really cool to me about the Dakota Access Pipeline Standing Rock protest was it was the first time where I went out on my own as a journalist. And so I think my first experience of seeing that many Natives gathered in one spot, like outside a powwow, it was really intense. It was really interesting, and it was newsworthy, and I love that something that I knew about was in the news—it gave me an edge on how to cover it.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** And how important was it in shaping your sense of professional purpose?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, I think Standing Rock was huge for me. I didn't realize that at the time because, you know, I was just a kid, but it was the first time where I felt like a journalist. And it's the first time where I realized that my perspective mattered and that, as a Native journalist, I brought things to the table that other journalists didn't. And that was actually my first time, looking back right now,

seeing how the outsider perspective versus the insider perspective played out and what's the difference in coverage that like, too. I think it was the first time I really noticed why it mattered who told these stories. Because the nature of our industry is you don't have a lot of time to embed into the community. You kind of go in and go out, and get in by the deadline. And I think with stories this complicated and complex, with people who don't get a lot of news coverage, that's really a failure in our industry. And so watching how that played out versus how journalists who've stayed longer and were invested, how different their work was, was really, I think, crucial to my career to see how the right way to do journalism and how the wrong way to do it is. And I think it was, for me, the first time feeling like a journalist, because I remember I was standing next to, like, *New York Times* photographers and I remember feeling like my photos matter just as much as theirs do. And that was huge for me.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** I'm sure it had to have been amazing for you. So clearly, Tailyr, you've thought, you know, a lot about mainstream media's coverage of Native peoples and issues. And, personally, I do think that the media has been paying serious attention in recent years to subjects like the DAPL protest, the campaigns to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, suppression of voting rights, and, most recently of course, the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on reservations. But how do you, as a Native photojournalist, rate the media today in terms of their coverage of Native peoples and issues?

**Tailyr Irvine:** I don't know if I can really accurately rate them. I think it fluctuates, depending on the news cycle, and depending on the month. You know, during Native American Heritage Month in November, it's higher around Thanksgiving. It's higher. People care more about Native issues. For me, it's really important that it's not just during those times that it's accurate; it's all around the year. And it's not just tragedy that makes the news; it's everything. But I am really happy that I'm starting to see a lot more things that I haven't seen before. The MMIW movement has been huge. You know, it's like Native activists were screaming into a void for years. And it's not even activists. It's people saying, "Hey, we're going missing. We're getting murdered. Why isn't anyone caring?" And it's great that it's

happening now and that people are paying attention with that and also with the COVID-19 and with pipeline protests. But it's important to me that they also stick around after this happens. Like, what happens after the pipeline is built? And what happens with news and what happens after Standing Rock is over? You know, it's easy to cover these things that everyone talks about, but it's, for me, the most adequate coverage is not just those times, but it's times in between. And it's not really what they cover, but how they cover it, which I think is important to me.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So do you yourself have a strong sense that Native American voices are historically underrepresented in the media?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Absolutely. I don't think that's a secret for anyone. It's pretty evident in our society today that people have little to no knowledge on Native Americans. And that comes from not being taught or educated about them. That's where we really fail, our schools fail, and our journalism industry fails. Because if you're not reporting on society, if you're in charge of keeping the history, documenting history of the United States, and you're not reporting on a group of people, then that group of people fails to exist. And I think that's what we're seeing—that ignorance people have for Natives is directly correlated with [this] because they don't know [Native Americans] exist because they're not covered, because they're not in media at all. We're seeing a shift now. But, for a while, it was like people would ask me if I grew up in a tipi, if my whole tribe lived in one house, and that's because they don't know anything about Native people because no one's teaching them.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** And what is your sense of what the visual coverage of Native peoples has been in the media? I personally think maybe it's been actually lagging just a little bit behind the coverage of actual, you know, stories.

**Tailyr Irvine:** That's generous. I think the visual representation of Natives has just been horrendous. It's always in the past. And there's something that we call the 4 D's—you don't see Native Americans in mainstream media unless they are drinking, dancing, dead, or [on] drugs. ... That's something I was taught in journalism school, that that's a problem. And so if they're teaching of that in

school, you know, not very long ago, then it's still a problem. And I think when you only see Natives in a poverty sense or Natives in regalia or Natives dancing at powwows, and you don't get to really see them as a human, you don't relate to them in the same way you relate to someone else on a different page of paper. Like, you need, that stuff is important—covering that part of the community is important—but when that's all you see and that's all that's represented, it's a huge problem, because then they just see them as less than human.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Tailyr, we're recording this conversation at a time when there are nationwide Black Lives Matter protests. You and I know that in many U.S. towns and cities, Native Americans have their own history of racial injustices. So, what is your perspective on the current protests?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, I think what's happening around the country is really important right now. And I think that police brutality and Black Lives Matter is really the same issues that we deal with in the Native communities. And so I think Native protests and Black protests go hand in hand; it's two sides of the same coin. I think you can't have human rights without having rights for all minority groups in America. You know, it's not. I think in the past where the problem has lied is where, you know, Indigenous activists over here and Black activists over here, and they're working on their issue and we're working on our issue. And I think people fail to realize that it's the same issue. And I think this is a generation where we're all coming together and saying, you know, instead of fighting these causes individually, we're able to group together and join Black Lives Matter. And, you know, we have people from their protest joining Standing Rock. People are joining the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement. I think we're starting to realize that instead of fighting each other for these crumbs of justices, that we're trying to work together to change an entire system so that there's no favorites.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** You must feel very motivated to contribute to changing the field.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. That's kind of where my whole career has sprouted from. I think, as growing up, I didn't see Native coverage in the papers that cover

my reservation unless it was a stereotype, if at all, and it was rarely. And so I think growing up in that, growing up in that reality, it kind of pushed me towards, well, why aren't they being covered? Are there no stories? Which you know that's not true. And so I think it pushed me to fill that gap in coverage.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So, finally, before we turn to your photo essay, I have just a few more questions for you. One is who have been one or two of the strongest influences on your approach to photography or photojournalism?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, so like I said, growing up I didn't see a lot of Native coverage, and so I didn't know a lot of Native photographers. I actually didn't know of any besides Ken Blackbird. He worked for *National Geographic*. I didn't really—I wasn't familiar with his work. It wasn't until I started, like, really researching that I came across Matika Wilbur. She's Swinomish and Tulalip from Washington. She was doing this big project called Project 562 where she was going to every tribe in the country and documenting people. And it's kind of a reverse of the Edward Curtis' vanishing races. Like, we're not vanished; we're here. And so her project really showed Native life contemporary and in a beautiful way that I had not seen before. And so I think, as a student in college, seeing that really motivated me, and that was one of the big inspirations in the work that I do.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Yes, Matika Wilbur's Project 562 is impressive, but just to avoid any confusion for our listeners, there are currently 574 federally recognized tribes. Now, Tailyr, are there any single photographic images that have strongly influenced you?

**Tailyr Irvine:** I don't know if there's photographs specifically, but there is a project that really haunts me, I would say, because it's just, it's so well done. It's done by a photographer named Daniella Zalcmán. ... She's an independent photographer, and she works for *National Geographic*. Her project focused on covering Native survivors of Indigenous boarding schools. So she would interview and photograph survivors and then layer that photo with a photo from the boarding school, like a memory they had. And, you know, the boarding schools were very traumatic for Natives. A lot of Natives were raped and murdered and thrown in mass graves,

sexually assaulted. And so for her to interview these people that went through that and then talk about their experience and highlight that and then photograph that with a beautiful double exposure, it's just, it's my favorite work today. And she's not a Native photographer; she's Vietnamese and Jewish, but her approach ...

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Fascinating.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. Her approach to the whole project and how she went about it, I think, is just, it's amazing. And I think she's a good role model for other non-Native photographers who want to document in Indian Country and how they should do it.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** And raise their documentary work to an artistic level.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. And she, she's also been like my mentor. And so that's huge problem, too, with Native photographers is they don't really have an easy pipeline into covering national events or, you know, moving past their small community. I mean, you can have the best photographs in the world but, if no one sees them, it doesn't really matter. And so Daniella has reached out to me, and she kind of pulled me into the national publications, the national editors, and really highlighted my work and pushed me into where I am today.

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**Cécile Ganteaume:** You're listening to the *Developing Stories Native Photographers in the Field* podcast with photographer Tailyr Irvine.

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So, Tailyr, let's now jump into your photo essay, *Reservation Mathematics: Navigating Love in Native America*. So, to give credit where credit is due, this fabulous title is entirely yours. So maybe the place to start is with asking you what does this title allude to and how did you ever come up with it?

**Tailyr Irvine:** So “reservation mathematics” is not a term that I coined. It's just something you hear growing up. ... And I think adding the navigating love part to the mathematics part is just kind of funny because you don't think of math and love linking together. It almost feels kind of counterintuitive. And so, I think, just that being paired together makes people think. Like, what does love have to do with math? I don't understand. And I think asking that question just keeps interest. I think it covers exactly what I'm trying to say.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** How would you define what blood quantum requirements for tribal enrollment are all about?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. So, when you are born as a Native, you get assigned a number at birth. It's a fraction—how much Native you are—and that number comes from how much Native your parents are. So, if one parent's full blood and one parent is, let's say white, then you'll be half Native because you're half of your parents. And so they use that, those fractions, to come up with your fraction. And, so again, that pair is fractions of love. And, for most tribes, you have to have a minimum amount of blood to be enrolled in your tribe. So, you have to, with my tribe, you have to be a quarter Salish and Kootenai. So, the measurement of Indian blood is basically what quantum is.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Okay, and just to be clear for our listeners, the photo essay does make it very clear that this notion of blood quantum really springs from U.S. colonial and historical racial biases. It has nothing to do with Native American traditions for recognizing tribal citizenship. And it was, in fact, imposed upon tribes in the early 1900s.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. It was designed to be unsustainable, because you can't procreate in a pool for long periods of time without running out of suitable partners. So that was the point. The government basically decided in the 1900s who's Native and who's not Native, and from that original census is how we pool how Native we are.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So, Tailyr, do you see the issue of blood quantum requirements as being at least one of the dominant issues that young Native Americans of your generation are facing?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Absolutely. I would say blood quantum has always been an issue. I think Natives have always opposed it. It's not how we decide who's Native. It's not accurate. It's not even based on anything but what a government agent said 100 years ago. So, throughout history, it's been pretty controversial. People are like, that's not how we decide who we are. We decide because we know. But what's different about my generation is it's coming to a head now. So I told you earlier that it's unsustainable, and now we're starting to see that with my generation where, for example, myself, my dad is Salish and Kootenai and my mom is Crow—two different tribes—and when you're born Native, you can only pick one. So again, it's—they wanted to genocide—so you immediately lose half of who you are. And so my dad is not quite full blood, so I'm under half Native Salish and Kootenai, which means for my kid to be enrolled, I would need to date someone from my tribe. That's not unique anymore; a lot of kids my age need to have someone from their tribe to date or they won't be enrolled. And so you see that and how that plays out with being unsustainable and losing memberships, because it's not something you can keep up very long.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So your photo essay, then, it's all about bringing out into the open the issue of blood quantum requirements through its impact on tribal members. And your photo essay delves into the situations of seven different [stories of] individuals, couples, or families, and it demonstrates how these different folks, they're all dealing with it because it's posing different pressures on them.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. So, I think what I really wanted to get across in my work with this project is that everyone has different opinions. Like it doesn't—blood quantum doesn't affect Natives all the same way, and Natives don't have the same opinions of how it should be dealt. Some Natives don't care that—they don't mind blood quantum. Some Natives really hate it. Some Natives choose not to engage in it at all—like, disenroll from their own tribe. And I think the

importance to include different Native voices to show the diverse opinions and diverse perspectives they all bring to the table.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So you chose to address your topic in three ways: through two series of photographs of intimate family scenes involving two different families, through five portrait shots—I'd call them formal portraits—and then through imaging your sitters' tribal IDs. Why did you decide to build your photo essay's narrative by incorporating these three different kinds of shots? Because I believe you conceived your photo essay this way right from the beginning, did you not?

**Tailyr Irvine:** So this photo essay has been in my head for years, and it's one of those things where it just changes constantly. The more I think about it, the more there's a thousand different ways I can do this. And so when you guys approached me, and I was thinking about how to make this imaginary thing that doesn't exist visual, a lot of different things ran through my brain. And, originally, I came up with photographing just portraits—hundreds of portraits, you know, showing how different people look and how different quantum look and how it's just not accurate. And then, the more I thought about that, then I kind of pulled back from that a little bit because it seemed really impersonal. But my goal was to get as many voices as possible. And so then I pulled back with that and I went into one that had like a narrative flow. And so that's how I decided to have, like, the vignettes of those five and then do a deep dive into two families and what happens after you chose your partner, what happens, what life looks like when you choose a partner who's enrolled and when you choose a partner who's not enrolled and what are the consequences and benefits of both scenarios. And, with the tribal IDs, I just think they're so uniquely Native, and that's really interesting that, you know, other races don't need to have paperwork to prove who they are. And, I think, you know, you don't see someone saying like, “Oh, are you Black?” And then they're like, “Let me get my Black card out. Here it is. Here's how Black I am.” It doesn't exist. But, with Natives, it's like, “Oh, you're Native?” You're like, “Yeah”, and like “Prove it.” Oh, here's my card showing you how Native I am. It's such a unique thing, just strictly Native, that it would be impossible to not include.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So will you walk us through some of your photographs? And why don't you start with the first people that appear in your photo essay, Michael and Leah?

**Tailyr Irvine:** So Michael's actually my little brother, and when I was thinking about how to go about beginning this project, him and his partner, Leah, announced that they were expecting a child. And I just lit up because that's perfect. It's a real-live representation of how it plays out. So my brother is like me—he needed to find a partner from our tribe to have a kid with for a kid to be enrolled in our tribe—but, the thing is, he fell in love with Leah, and Leah's Navajo. And so what happens when they have a kid is that they had to enroll the child Navajo because there's not enough Native blood—not enough Salish and Kootenai blood—to be enrolled in the Salish and Kootenai tribes, which is where they live. So, they live on the Salish and Kootenai reservation. Michael's going to teach the child Salish and Kootenai culture and all those things, but the kid's going to be enrolled in Navajo. And so with them, I got to show how that impacted the way they live. And, for Michael and Leah, it means that Michael will never be able to go hunting with his daughter because she has to be [a] Salish and Kootenai tribal member to hunt on our land, and she's Navajo instead. Even though she's going to be raised as Salish and Kootenai, even though her dad is Salish and Kootenai, she'll never get to hunt with them, which is a big deal for my brother because that's a huge part of his life, and it's a huge part of his memories with our own dad. So just things like that, not only that, but you know, how it affects housing and healthcare when you're not enrolled in the tribe. So, they just kind of, that kind of came in perfectly where I got to document that for them.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Well, I thought your photographs of Michael and Leah and their family were just really remarkable. Also because they demonstrate not only how these requirements are impacting their present-day lives, but you demonstrate how these requirements are impacting about how they think about their future and how they think about the future of their family. And, presumably, that's why you also photographed them out in the woods as well as in their home.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. So, photographing Michael and Leah in the woods was really important for their story. Because Leah, she's Navajo, but she's never actually lived on a Navajo reservation. Her family moved a lot when Leah was a kid. They moved to Albuquerque, and then they moved to our reservation when she was in middle school; they moved away and came back again. So she never got to connect with her culture because a lot of Native culture is in connection with the land and the ceremonies are in a certain spot. And so if you're not raised on the reservation and that way it's really hard to connect with that culture. And so Leah really wanted her daughter—their daughter—to be connected and have one place and one home and show her what it's like to be part of that community. But, again, it limits—she's limited because she's not enrolled—and so that [puts] limits on what exactly she can experience culturally. Because how can you experience the culture if you're not allowed on the land? That's kind of why I chose to photograph the family in the woods a lot, because: the woods are important to Leah; the woods are important to Michael; and it's also this point of contention where their child won't be allowed in the woods without permits, won't be allowed to hunt ever, and just kind of shows why that's important.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Oh, it shows how these requirements can come up against people's most cherished desires and values for their whole family. You imaged a lot of different types of people for your essay: a high school student, young professionals, including a tribal councilwoman, people that live on reservation, people that live off reservation. How did you go about choosing your subjects?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. I chose my subjects with that in mind. You know, that's not an accident that they're diverse. I wanted to have as many voices as possible because when you talk about Native identity (which is what the core of my project focuses on), [it] is, you know, what makes someone Native and who says, and that's one [problem] of blood quantum. When you focus on that stuff, you got to include different voices because it's an impossible question to answer. Is someone who lives off the reservation less Native than someone who lives on? Is someone that knows the culture less Native than someone who doesn't? All those things came to my head. And so when I was thinking about who to interview, I wanted to get a diverse group, like a high school student who's super young. But

this is stuff that we think about since we're little, little, and show that. I wanted to show that it's always on their mind, no matter what age. And then I also wanted to include members from the LGBTI community because even though there are same-sex couples, they still think about blood quantum and they still think about what it's like to date or not date. Because if they were ever to adopt, for example, you have to be Native to adopt Native children. You don't have to be, but there's a thing called the Indian Child Welfare Act, which makes it where Native children go to Native families first. And so that's how blood quantum plays a part in same-sex couples: ... if they wanted to adopt a child—Native child—they would have to be enrolled, because they'd have higher chances of adopting, which I thought was really interesting. And then with other students, there are people that I've grown up with that I've talked about this multiple times with. And it felt natural when I began this project to start with them because we've had these conversations before. And so there are people that I grew up with that I've included as well.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So how much time do you spend with your sitters? Are you worried about taking up too much of their time or are you just trying to, you know, establish some kind of conversational flow with them? How do you go about getting, you know, a revealing portrait of your sitters? Which you do.

**Tailyr Irvine:** I think with this project it helps that I've known a lot of the people that I've photographed, so there's a sense of ease and lightness with the portraits. Some of them I didn't know that well though either, and so with that I'm really clear on the front end. Like, hey, I want to do this thing. I want to talk to you about it. It's going to be a long conversation, and I'm going to take a photo of you. And, you know, I make sure that they know ahead of time what they're getting into, that there are no surprises, so it's not like we're like watching the clock and they're trying to hurry up and get me out of there. Because it's something that takes time, especially when you're telling other people's stories and perspectives. You want to take the time to get it right and make sure they're understanding what they're getting into. Because, like, sure it's my project, but it's not really mine; it's theirs. Like, it's their stories I'm covering, so I want to make sure that they're happy with the outcome and happy conversating. And so I think it's really easy once you start

talking about the stuff to just fall into it, and, you know, I think I spent hours with a few of the subjects just talking about all the stuff.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** And are you recording these conversations?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, with their permission. I ask them if I can record, and that's for a number of reasons. One is I want my notes to be as accurate as possible, and so I record on my phone, but I also write in my notebook while I'm talking with them just so I can make sure that I have two, two things to compare with. Usually I try to get it all in my notebook, so I don't have to go back through and listen to the transcript audio. But when I get my quotes, I like to listen to my recording to make sure I got it accurate.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** And then you did photograph a tribal councilwoman— Ellie Bundy-McLeod. Will you talk a little bit about her?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Ellie is a tribal councilwoman that [took office] in January 2020. I chose her for a few reasons. One is that she was just elected, and so it's a fresh perspective. And, you know, people are more likely to talk when they, when they just get elected. I think, because they're more familiar with why they got elected, and they're coming off of a campaign trail, and so they have ideas in mind of how they want to pursue their career. The other thing is Ellie wasn't enrolled in our tribe until two years ago—so she didn't get enrolled until she was 45—and I wanted to talk about how that changed her identity. How going from someone who's not enrolled to enrolled, how that shifted her perspective. And it was really interesting to me because she said in high school, she wasn't sure. She felt unsure of herself as a Native woman. She wasn't sure if she could go join Indian clubs; she wasn't sure if she could dance at a powwow; she wasn't sure if she could participate in her culture because she wasn't “Native enough.” You know, air quotes. And that's super interesting because, you know, nothing changed. You know, her appearance, her blood, you know, nothing differed besides this imaginary fraction. Now it's up and now she's Native and now she feels more Native. And so that's really interesting to me and how that, how that plays with your mind kind of. And, the other thing is, I needed a professional to talk about how difficult it is to change

the system. Because you talk about this problem a lot. And they're like well, just change it. Don't do blood quantum then. Easy. And it's really not that easy, because you have to change the tribal constitution and you have to have everyone agree. And it's really expensive because you have to do research studies and, again, you have to have everyone agree. It has to be voted to the membership—which nobody agrees on anything—and so having your entire tribe agree is just impossible. And so she explores the complexities of dealing with that as well.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Well, I think what you've accomplished in your photo essay is that you've demonstrated how people, at least the people you've imaged, how they're really living their lives out against something that's bigger than themselves. And that something bigger—the blood quantum requirements. I don't think it's going too far to say it's a legacy of US colonialism. And here we are in 2020 and this is still going on.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. I think that's another thing I'd like to highlight with this project is, you know, people think of colonialism and they think of the Native genocide. And I think a lot of people's gut reaction is like “It happened forever ago. Get over it.” And, it's like, no, it didn't happen forever ago; it happened three generations ago, and it still plays [an] effect in everything we do today. You know, it's so politicized. Blood quantum is not only your identity, but it's a legal status. And how those regulations that people made in the 1900s affects members today, and we're seeing how that plays out. And I think it's really important to remind people that these big things in history happen and they don't just end. Like, the legacies move on and, like, infiltrate everything in our society today.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Tailyr, now that we've discussed your photo essay in some detail, tell us, are you advocating for something through your photo essay?

**Tailyr Irvine:** I wouldn't say advocating is the right word. I feel like, with my work, what I really want to do is educate and for the reasons we said earlier: because if people are educated, they're less likely to be ignorant or less likely to have those stereotypes in their mind. And so with the work that I do, I want to educate the world about Native people. And, you know, Natives are contemporary. They're real

people in 2020. They don't live in tipis; they don't wear regalia 24/7. And I really want people to connect and see themselves. And so I think what's so great about my project is like, yes, that's something that specifically happens to Natives—you know, a lot of people don't deal with blood quantum—but everyone dates, and everyone feels pressure, I would say no matter your race, to date within your race. You know, you have parents who are, like, Latino—they want you to have Latino children. You know, it's not unique to just Natives that people want their kids to date within their race. It's something that's felt across the board; that pressure is felt across the board. I think that's what's so great about this project. It's like you take something universal, you filter it down to a micro level, and then you back it up again to macro where people can relate to it. And when you can relate to somebody, that allows you to be empathetic with them. And when you have empathy for someone, you're able to put yourself in their shoes. I think that's what changes perspectives, and I think that's what makes people less likely to be ignorant.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So I very much notice that you're able to move fluidly from people who have either found or placed themselves in, say, a protest camp, a sporting arena, a city shelter, their family home. So you're moving—in your photography—you're moving back and forth in between very public spaces and very private spaces. Yet I'm guessing that there's something similar always in what it is that you're trying to capture about people's lives and about ordinary people's lives, still in these vastly different settings and, to some degree, whether they're Native or not. Is that true?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah, absolutely. I think race has very little to do with how I choose to photograph people in general. I think, in any situation, whether it's at a sporting event game or, you know, in someone's home or at a powwow or at whatever, a protest camp, I'm looking for moments, because that's what people relate to. That's what people want to see. They're able to see themselves in the photos, that they can see a moment they relate to. Someone's grieving—you know, everyone's felt that. You're able to put yourself in their shoes. I think it's a lot easier to do that when people are in big, public spaces because they are less aware of the camera, which is, you know, has benefits. And they're more comfortable being in a group

setting, being photographed that way. It's a lot different when I pull them aside and say hey, I think you're interesting. I want to photograph you, and I want to hear what you have to say, because that's a lot more scary, right? It's about you, and you have a camera in just your face and it's in your home and it's a lot more intimate. I think it's a lot more difficult to get them that way, but I think the results are much more relatable.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** So, Tailyr, even in light of everything you just said, there is a question that I do really want to ask you, and that's that, obviously, by exploring issues in your own community, you're bringing your intimate knowledge to the subject and you're bringing your insights, but how do you maintain a sense of balance in objectivity in your journalism while you're so deeply involved in the subject matter that you're photographing, such as in *Reservation Mathematics*?

**Tailyr Irvine:** Yeah. I actually get this question a lot, and it's interesting to me because it's a question that I think a lot of like Black and Indigenous people of color get who are journalists and not so much as I talk to my white colleagues. They don't get the question of, you know, hey, you're photographing something that's majority white. How do you navigate your biases? So, it's just one of the more interesting questions that I get because everyone has biases, and everyone has a way they lean, and it's not necessarily that we're all supposed to be robots and not have any feelings and not have any thoughts on subjects. I think the important parts or main objective is to know what that is, to know what your biases are and to lean heavily the other way, you know, to get that opposite voice. And, I think, with my work I don't want people who think like me because, if that were the case, I would just photograph myself and do this whole thing in the first person. I want to hear everyone's opinions. I want to challenge what I think, and I want to challenge what people think with my work. And I think the only way to challenge people, I think, is to get everyone's story out there in the way that they want it told, in the way someone wants themselves represented. I think that is what is interesting, and I think that's what makes my work matter.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Well, Tailyr, I haven't known a whole lot of photographers, but, nonetheless, I do get this feeling that you've been pretty successful in your career

thus far and certainly getting your images published in the mass media. So, do you feel as though you've arrived at a place where you're believing in your own visual voice, or do you think you're still trying to develop your voice and your personal vision of what's going on in the world?

**Tailyr Irvine:** I think I'm always trying to develop my voice. I don't think I'll arrive at a spot where I feel 100% comfortable on what I am, what I think, and what I say, or what my visuals look like. And I think that's important to the work that I do. I think it's important that I always want to learn and want to check the voice—make sure it's what I think I'm trying to say. Because what I think, sometimes what I want to say and what I do say, it doesn't line up to how I thought it sounded or what I think I'm saying, if that makes sense. ... Where I'm at in my career now is closer to where I want to be. But I'm also really aware that I have a lot to learn, and I'm looking forward to being challenged by editors and by other colleagues to make sure that I can hear my voice coming through in my work.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Tailyr, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this today. Thank you so much for joining us.

**Tailyr Irvine:** Thank you. It was a lot of fun.

**Cécile Ganteaume:** Folks, that was Salish and Kootenai photojournalist Tailyr Irvine. If you haven't yet heard our *Developing Stories* conversation with Russel Daniels, please look for it on the *Developing Stories* website at the end of his photo essay. And if you liked what you heard today, please tell your friends about it. From the National Museum of the American Indian, I'm curator Cécile Ganteaume. Thank you for listening.

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