

**REFLECTIONS ON 500 YEARS OF INVASION, OCCUPATION AND  
RESISTANCE IN AMERICA**

**MICHAEL BIRD**

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>>RINGA HĀPAI: Kia ora everyone, we're just going to go wait a minute or two and let everybody join us. But we welcome you.

>>MR BIRD: Again, Kem, thank you very much for all your wonderful work and your assistance.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Thank you Michael, this will be very fun.

>>MR BIRD: Yes.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Kia ora, welcome, welcome, welcome everyone, kia ora. Can we have intro slide whenever we get a moment here. We'll welcome everybody in and we'll get started. Wonderful, thank you very much. Kia ora, esques(?), welcome. My name's Kem Gambrell, I come to you from Spokane Washington in the United States, and it is my great pleasure to be with you here today, tonight, depending on where you are in the world, and to join you in the presentation with Michael Bird and the reflections of 500 years of invasion, occupation and resistance in the Americas. We're very much looking forward to hearing from Michael Bird, he's an absolute treasure.

Let me tell you just a little bit about him. Again, I know that we're coming towards the tail end of the conference, but just to remind you of the community agreements that it feels like we've been practising so well, that we are being video recorded and these postings will be available soon enough so you can go back and watch these amazing presentations.

So again, it is my great pleasure to introduce to you Michael Bird. Michael is a Kewa Pueblo Indian from new Mexico, he lives in beautiful Albuquerque, New Mexico currently. He's the first American Indian social worker to serve as President of the American Public Health Association in the organisation's history. He's got more than 30 years of public health experience with Native American populations; and he's served in a large number of capacities and in roles across the United States, everything from the United States Public Health Service, Indian Health Service, to the Executive Director of the National Native American AIDS Prevention Centre; and he was the first native member of the National Policy Council at AARP. And you'll know very soon from Michael that he has a wonderful rich experience, wonderful insights and not only brings a long tenure in

health policy, but two masters degrees and a whole lot of just wisdom. So my great pleasure to introduce to all of you Michael Bird.

>>MR BIRD: Thank you Kem, I appreciate the introduction. And greetings to all of you out there in the rest of the world, in the global community. I'll just mention that I live in New Mexico and New Mexico is the home of 23 tribes, Pueblos, Navajos, and Apaches as well as an urban, sizable urban population. I also would say that we -- in New Mexico our community constitutes about 11% of the population in New Mexico, and with a rich history that, dare I say, starts with Pueblo people.

Most recently, about two months ago, the National Park Service in White Sands, New Mexico, archaeologists and anthropologists made a discovery of footsteps that have been preserved that go back over 21,000 years. And some of you may or may not be aware that some of the findings, the archaeological findings, and it's also in New Mexico where the coldest point which established a date of occupation of about 10,000 years; and now with these recent findings, that appear to be solid findings, we now know that there was indigenous occupation over 21,000 years ago. And I think it's safe to say that they were Pueblo people, people who occupied Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon, both of them -- Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, Mesa Verde in southern Colorado but who are attributable to Pueblo people. So we have a long history of occupation in this area.

But I also want to just sort of mention that my presentation in and of itself, you know, it's been -- Kem has mentioned 30 years in the arena of public health. I also would say I guess I feel like, given the recent findings, I think there's my individual experience, there's my family's experience and there's the community and the people that I come from. So there's -- I would say that my 70 years of age plus 30 years of professional experience and lived experience sort of -- sometimes I feel like -- I would like to think that maybe I have at least a head start on some folks and maybe about 100 years of experience in this world and, dare I say, it's only felt like probably in the past 10 years that I actually figured out that I actually knew something. So I hope to share some of that with you today.

I guess I'd also have to say I feel like I'm an expert in terms of having grown up in this country, United States of America, but I will also say that I am a self-proclaimed Anglo American expert on lifestyles, morals and the cultural traditions of Anglo-Saxon culture in the Americas. That was lived experience and it is my own experience. In the United States of America there are 574 federally recognised tribes, let me just say that to get started on.

What I'm attempting to do, with Kem's assistance, is -- there's no way that I can do a 500-year presentation to you. So what I will attempt to do is give you an overview of the US federal policy as it relates to native populations in this country. And there basically are nine policy periods that have impacted indigenous or American Indian/Alaska native communities in the United States.

But before I go into that presentation, I would also have to say to you that there is in fact a very sad and tragic history and legacy in this nation. And it really is still largely unknown and not taught in this nation. And the legacy, the real framework, the foundation to this nation's beginning starts first and foremost with native people, with indigenous people here in the Americas. And the foundation of this nation was built upon the genocide and theft of native land. That was the first element.

The second foundational element in this nation's history was the enslavement of African Americans. Those are two fundamental foundations which this nation is still grappling with. And its manifestation of racism and hate is still playing out in this nation to this day.

So I think I need to just -- but it did start with native people. And the genocide Dr David Stannard in his book American Holocaust wrote of, that it is the largest holocaust in the history of the world, that 80 to 100 million native people died as a result of contact. And although many people would like to attribute that to diseases which were significant in terms of foreign introduction, the fact of the matter is that there was a systematic genocide that was carried out in terms of warfare and in terms of atrocities that were committed all across the Americas, not just in North America but also South America.

So I just need to state that, because it is something that is very real and it explains why there are so few of us in this country, and why there's so many others, and why our populations have been so adversely historically, as well as to this day, negatively and adversely impacted; be it health, education, income, you name any area today we have been negatively impacted and are still living through what has been commonly referred to as historical trauma. It is very real.

I'll just now go into the overview of the policy pieces. I'm going to try and keep it somewhat brief so that we can have an opportunity for some conversation and so we can go ahead and go into that.

I'll give you a minute to go ahead and read this quote. In terms of the quote I want to say it was not just limited to native people and indigenous people in the US. It is something that has played out for many indigenous people across the globe.

In terms of federal policy, I'll let you go ahead and read that. There have been, in terms of United States federal Indian policy, primarily basically nine periods, and these periods start in 1492 and with the whole concept of discovery, and of course it really was not a discovery, I think it really could be more -- should be more appropriately described as a mutual contact. Christopher Columbus in fact, who is credited with discovering the America, the United States and the American territory, in fact was in the Caribbean and his ship never actually did land in anything farther north than the Caribbean. But yet he is given credit for discovering America. That myth is in fact being contradicted now and being corrected, because he never did even touch North America, it was the Caribbean islands. But let me go ahead and get into this, just a minute.

The whole concept of discovery is also based on a false idea, because how can you discover something when people have occupied the Americas for over 21,000 years, at least as a point of discussion.

The other point I think to be made is that there really is a need to better understand some of the concepts that came into play in this point -- at this point in time. Concepts of manifest destiny, concepts of discovery and sort of a framework that evolved around the papal bull that was issued by the Vatican that allowed people to discover and claim land that was already previously occupied by non-Christian people, and this was the basis for the concept of discovery in the Americas and the fact of the matter is that also is a false claim and a false position. Because one of the things that -- that, in fact, did impact native and indigenous people all over the globe, but particularly in this case in this country, was it limited the Indians' right to dispose of their own land, because it nullified their right even though they had previous occupation for thousands of years.

The second period of time really was referred to as the confederation period. It was the point at which United States colonial government established, tried to establish relations with Indian nations which at that time were numerous and powerful. You had the English, the French, the Spanish, and the newly growing United States, all competing for positive relationships with tribes who then held the balance of power and they attempted to establish neutrality with native nations, the confederation. But out of this period also came the fact that the congressional congress was attempting to establish relationships, government to

government relationships in a sense, so that they would be able to control and regulate trade and relationships and the affairs of Indian tribes, Indian nations.

In terms of trade and intercourse, again, what it was really about was the control of the relationships with native tribes, it was about the control of trade and diplomatic relationships and land transfers. So it always has been about control in resources, controlling diplomatic relationships, and control of land and the transfer of land. So that's another significant area.

In terms of -- following that particular period, we come across the removal period. And basically this was a result of the outcome of the war of 1812 and where there was a general policy to remove all tribal Indians from their lands within states and territories. This really was marked by one of the most notable events in the history of native people, was the trail of tears and the removal of many of the southeastern tribes from their original homelands in Georgia and the southern states.

This was typified and represented most significantly by Andrew Jackson, and again, his forced removal of the Cherokee Indians to Oklahoma as well as a number of other tribes, Osage, Choctaws and Chickasaw. And the whole framework again was then the taking and the theft of native land. So that is an element that is part and parcel of the whole history of this nation and its relationship with native people.

This was then followed by the reservation period, where Indians were forcibly restrained geographically and isolated politically. They were forced on reservations, isolated, and even though treaties had been made with them, to exchange, provide healthcare, to provide food, often times this was not carried out by the United States, and land and food was not provided to those native communities, those native populations who were forced on to reservations.

This was then followed by what I would describe as forced assimilation policy and/or cultural annihilation. There was an act of congress referred to as the Dawse Act in which native people were forced, if they wanted to become citizens, to give up their land, and the surplus land was then ceded to the federal government. This resulted in the loss of 100 million acres of native land and reduced the native land holdings by two-thirds. You can clearly understand this was not something that native people would have been in favour with, but it was forced upon them.

The other aspect of this in terms of forced assimilation, was the establishment of boarding schools, and assimilation was the goal, cultural annihilation was the goal. The

native students were taken from their families, from their home communities, Carlisle Indian school is noted for its history. They were forced, they lost their, in many cases their language, their identity, and impacted family histories and really resulted in cultural genocide. Many children were taken away from their families and families were disrupted and to this day there are still the results of that action by the United States government.

Part of -- one of the things that came out of this action in terms of forced assimilation also was there was a report in 1928 that was a positive note, and it was a Meriam Report which was a report on the conditions of American Indians in the United States and it found -- needless to say it found that the United States had failed to protect American Indians and adversely impacted any kind of land, holdings, any kind of opportunities for education and health.

The reorganisation period, or the Indian reorganisation period, was a move built in a positive direction finally as a result of the Meriam Report. It pointed out that allotment had failed, and it also recognised that there was a need to move and begin to recognise tribal governments and respect tribal governance.

In terms of also the termination period, which again was theft, was a major theft, and it resulted in assimilation policies and impacted tribal self-governance. There was -- there are 109 tribes were terminated or lost their legal status as tribal governments who benefitted in terms of receiving tribal recognition and the government to government relationship and any sort of potential benefits that they may receive as tribal citizens of their respective tribes. And that was just -- it resulted in Indian lands being also sold and really impacted tribal sovereignty.

It also allowed, when they lost their status as federally recognised tribes, it opened the door for State jurisdiction and intervention into tribal government's authority and impacted just their whole legal status and the government to government relationship that they had had with the federal government.

The newest period that is represented started in 1962 and was finally an affirmation of tribal sovereignty. Out of this, and this, interestingly enough, was during the Richard Nixon administration, there was more and more action, as some of you may recall in terms of history, in terms of civil rights activity from across the country, African American communities and many communities, including American Indian populations, were pushing for greater recognition and civil rights.

There was also a significant event on the West Coast in San Francisco. The Alcatraz occupation, the American Indian movement developed and evolved in Minneapolis, Minnesota in response to Police violence directed at urban Indian community members, and of course most notably, in 1973 was the Wounded Knee takeover and occupation which resulted in significant attention, both in this country as well as nationally. Richard Nixon's policies promoted self-determination and a recognition of tribal sovereignty and a number of legislative bills occurred during that period under his direction. Interestingly enough, the Indian Civil Rights Act was passed, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement was passed, the Indian Health Service, Healthcare Improvement Act was passed, and the Indian Child Welfare Act protecting Indian children was passed as well as something that still has benefitted many tribes who were able to take advantage of the Indian gaming regulation passed.

Those pieces, those activities and pieces, I think there's a couple of things I want to mention before I end this particular part of the presentation. One was what Indian people have seen historically is sort of a swing from the right to the left, a pendulum sort of swing in terms of at times the United States government has done the appropriate and just things, response, and at other times it has been very unjust and promoted injustice and taken actions that significantly have damaged native communities and established -- created conditions that native people are still having to address and still struggling with to this day.

Two examples I can give you that highlight this present day circumstance. One is that prior to Covid, American Indians in this country have had the highest mortality and morbidity rates of any population in the country, according to CDC. American Indians have had the highest Covid rates of any population in the country, according to CDC.

But also, interestingly enough, and this is something that we really need to look at more closely, the fact of the matter is Indian communities also had the highest immunisation rates of any community. And I believe that's in response to the fact that they, number one, have had to deal with infectious diseases that were introduced historically, there's more a sense of community, there's more a sense of duty and obligation to the tribe, to the group versus the whole notion in this country, is extremely prevalent and in play of the individual, the rugged individual, the person being responsible just for themselves and no-one else.

What we see, Indian nations, Indian communities, Indian tribes responding in this unique situation is they recognise the interconnectedness and the relationship that is critical,

that it has to be about all of us or it is about none of us. And their response has been life-saving and affirming.

I will now -- I'll just run through this bibliography very quickly. This will be shared with you. This tells you how long I've been around. 1969, it's chronological. These are a few of the references and books that I have read over the years that have made a difference in shaping my understanding and my base of knowledge in terms of the indigenous experience in the US, and there's one I want to mention that is new in 1992, this -- excuse me, 1990, "Exterminate All the Brutes" by Sven Lindqvist who was behind the last noted film here, "Exterminate All the Brutes", which was produced by Raoul Peck, it's an HBO documentary that came out just last year, in 2001(sic). It's a four part documentary, I'll just give a brief synopsis of it.

What I think, in my opinion, it is the best synopsis of racism and its impact on the global community, and specifically Africa, but a major portion of it also delves into what happened here in the Americas with indigenous populations, with native populations. And in the Americas, as Dr Martin Luther King pointed out, there were two foundational elements that occurred. One was the genocide and theft of Indian land, the other was the enslavement of African Americans.

And I think the failure, or the unfortunate circumstances that we're dealing with to this day in terms of racism, in terms of the exploitation of indigenous people, the exploitation of all people, and coupled with the exploitation of the land and the earth and our mother which gives us life has brought us, to my way of thinking, in my opinion, to this very point in time. That we have not valued humanity, we have not been respectful, we have not -- and we also -- and we have exploited man, we have exploited people in the world. We've also exploited nature to the point where everything is in play and our future is in jeopardy.

I'll just leave it at that and I appreciate your time and attention and I appreciate all of you and the work that you're doing. Thank you.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Beautiful Michael, thank you so much. I've really appreciated how you broke Indian policy periods up. I think that continued to show a mindset of, let's say, the US Government and dominant society about how we make sense of our relationship with Native Americans in the United States.

One of the questions I have and then I'll get to a few we have going on, is when you see these different periods, especially someone who's been involved in healthcare for so

long, first of all how do you see those different periods impacting native health? And I think it's pretty easy to say when the policy is genocide, that's pretty clear, but, you know, when we continue to go through the time periods, how do you see healthcare policy with native tribes being impacted? And then if you'd also speak a little bit to the historical trauma and how that plays into the whole dimension of where, let's say, Native American health is today.

>>MR BIRD: Right, thank you. Well, first of all, I mean one stark reminder in addition to the fact that the first people of the Americas have government to government relationship which is supposed to be based on treaty, it's not a racial -- we are a racial population but we also have a political relationship under treaties and executive orders.

What's stark is that in spite of this history that we still have the worst health disparities, you know, highest mortality rates; I mean so something's not right here. And you can either look at the United States government and how they've dealt with things, which the -- I mean the Indian Health Service has never been funded adequately. 40 to 50% of the level of need. More care -- US Commission on Civil Rights did a study, more care goes per capita to the -- per capita funding is -- there's more funding for the care of federal prisoners than there are American Indians for healthcare.

The system has never been adequately resourced. And it is only within this new administration, the Biden administration, that there was a significant increase in resources. One -- how many, he's been in office two years now; two years of funding is never going to make up for that history of lack of resources. Having worked in the Indian Health Service for 20 years in my past I recognise the lack of resources.

The other part of this that is significant and profound is that you have communities to this day, particularly the Navajo reservation, where there is -- they still lack running water, still lack connectivity, still don't have adequate roads and transportation, and you overlay that with Covid and it's -- I mean it's just so tragic on the one hand, but on the other hand I will say about the Navajo nation and President Nez of the Navajo nation responded in the most professional, adapting public health measures to protect the community. I mean that community really rallied based on traditional values, based on the history of infectious disease, based on the fact that they still are community and have a tribal identity, they really came together and responded, as many native communities have.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: So one of the other things that really was speaking to me, and I'm sort of weaving in some of the questions in the Q&A as well, is it seems like the Native

Americans, let's say much like other indigenous groups across the world, have really had to strongly advocate for -- I'll try to use politically correct language here -- for any sort of support or resources from the government. So you were talking a little bit, say, about Nixon's policies. But that was also coming about, as you really well mentioned, AIM, civil rights movements and all of that energy that we saw in the late 50s, early 60s etc in the United States, is that what it's going to take do you think? Or do you think that we can actually have more of a dominant narrative shift in how we think about, let's say, providing resources to Native Americans?

>>MR BIRD: If we are to survive as a species on this planet, there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way we view each others, in the way we value each others, and there needs to be a shift in the economic system so that it is not exploitive, so that it is more in line, I think, with some traditional concepts that come out of indigenous communities.

The fact that you don't just take, you have to give back. The fact that you recognise the balance that is essential to all life, I mean -- and we're living in a world that is just driven by -- I mean fundamentally it's an issue of greed. I mean it's capitalism, it could be socialism, it could be any number of things. But if it's driven by greed and exploitation, there's a problem. And right now the primary economic models seem to be based on that exploitation of people, exploitation of nature. And it's a dead-end street.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Yeah, I agree. Where do you think that kind of mindset rises from though? I think there's all sorts of evidence that supports that's not a really great way of being and yet here we are.

>>MR BIRD: Well, it's the dominant -- it's become the dominant model. I mean I think that any cultures and indigenous cultures understood that there had to be some balance, that there had to be an acknowledgment and recognition of you can't just be taking, you have to give, and the importance of reciprocity; not only with human beings, but with the environment.

And the predominant model, I think part of it is sort of Christian, I think part of it is Christian, some people would say this is not, you know, my reward, I'll get my reward in heaven. So this is like not real, so we don't have to be respectful of what we have here because I think there is some Christian philosophy that is predicated on that.

And if you think that this is just a weigh station and that you're going to go to something better, well good luck, maybe. But I'm more concerned with what's happening here and the blessings that we have. And everything that sustains us comes from nature, and if we're not respectful, if we don't, which we're not in many cases, if we're not

respectful of nature, I mean the earth -- we're biological beings, the earth is a biological, in my version, is a biological being. When we get a temperature -- we get an infection, we get a temperature, our body heats up to fight the infection. I'm not a doctor. But the earth is heating up. Maybe human beings are the infection.

The earth is producing antibodies, anti-human bodies to fight back to balance things out, to protect herself. And the earth is heating up. We know that, global warming, it's called global warming, maybe because we have been disrespectful, or out of -- we have failed to understand and to really fully understand where our life, that that is the source of our life, there can be no life if the earth is not whole.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: It's a really interesting way to think of what's going on with the pandemic and, you know, global warming and all of that, it's really fun. A question from the chat. "Do you believe that intergenerational trauma has an impact on genetic make-up and disposition or susceptibility in the health outcomes that you talked about earlier for Native Americans using those CDC stats?"

>>MR BIRD: That's an interesting question. I'm not sure I can answer, but I can -- you know, I can tell you now, I can share my own story. It's very personal but it's very real. My father was an alcoholic, he died of cirrhosis. He spent his life killing himself. And the family of his origin all -- his brothers and many people were impacted by substance abuse.

I can say as an Indian man at this point in my life, my biggest fear was that I would be my father. I have been successful professionally, but I also would say that in terms of my own life, trying to get out from under -- two things have impacted my life significantly. One was that family of origin, what I saw, what I experienced. I never learned how to really be -- I didn't want to -- I knew one thing, I didn't want to be my father. I knew but I didn't know how to be a man, I didn't know how to be in relationships, and I didn't really come to understand myself without some failures and a whole lot of counselling.

And it has been -- so I think that anyone who grows up facing -- having a dysfunctional environment, be it a father, be it a mother, be it that kind of environment, it is so challenging just to get through that. And I can say that because I know that. And I also know that many people don't get through it. Many people face -- if you have an alcoholic father, if you come out of a broken home, if you have an environment that is not conducive, that is not loving, supportive and encouraging, or you don't get it from somewhere, you're significantly at risk. And the studies have been there, I mean CDC's ACEs, you know, programmes point out -- I took the score, I went through there and said let's see how am

I going to do. And it was rather revealing. Yeah, so I don't know about the -- I didn't answer the genetic case because that's going into an area I'm not that knowledgeable of.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Do you want to tell everybody real quickly what ACEs stands for?

>>MR BIRD: Adverse childhood experiences. And CDC has done some really interesting work in recent years. And I think it's helpful to children that grow up at risk to have a sense of what, you know, what their level of risk might be and what they -- counselling therapy, loving people, grandparents, aunts, uncles, you know, I mean I've lost a lot of good friends.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: You know, you spoke to the high rates, exceptionally high rates of Native Americans in this country in terms of morbidity. And we know things like diabetes, alcoholism, there's all sorts of manifestations of all of these different periods and policy periods that you talked about, and I think the impact on native communities.

This is another question from the chat and I'll bounce it a little bit forward. "You might be aware that the New Zealand government is developing the Māori Health Authority which is in essence responsible for ensuring that the New Zealand health system meets the needs of the Māori. Can you speak to the role of the Indian Health Service here in the US and any impact there, or do we have something similar in the US", and then the bounce that I would also give is what things could we learn in the United States in, say, the Indian Health Service that our brothers and sisters say in New Zealand Canada etc are doing that could actually be beneficial that we could learn from?

>>MR BIRD: Well, I guess I'd have to say -- I spent 20 years in the Indian Health Service; I was a failed bureaucrat. There are good things in the Indian Health Service, but there are also some challenge -- in inherent in any bureaucratic system that's within an established government, first of all, you know, if you don't have adequate resources, I mean the Indian Health Service is sort of set up to fail. Not to say that people -- there were not good people, not to say that there weren't compassionate people, but if -- it goes back to adequate resources and real leadership, and leadership that has the freedom to really do the things that the community needs, not just meet the needs of the bureaucratic system, otherwise it just becomes another bureaucratic system and bureaucratic systems can kind of take on a life of their own.

In my experience, just my limited experience I would say, I only speak for me, in some cases it was "go along get along, don't rock the boat, don't make me look bad, and don't raise up these issues that tribes may have concerns about."

One of the best things that came out of the Richard Nixon administration in fact was Indian Self-Determination Act, which allowed tribes to contract education and in what I'm knowledgeable about, their healthcare, to take over their own healthcare systems. My tribe did that and we went -- we had miniscule -- we were getting miniscule respect, miniscule attention from the bureaucratic system in our area and went on to take our tribal shares that were allocated to us, build a new health facility, remodel it a couple of times; so that more tribes have now gone 638 or self-governance than ever in the history of and more of the dollar -- a greater percentage, I think the largest percentage of the Indian Health Service budget now are going to tribes that are taking over and running and managing their own healthcare systems.

That I would say if -- for Māoris, if they in fact -- you want your own people, you want trained people from your own communities with adequate resources and the flexibility. I think looking at Self-Determination Act, under Richard Nixon and the newest evolution legislatively, to look at how that came about. Because it has produced more resources for those communities that have taken over their system, they also have an investment, they're training their own people. And one of the issues for the Indian health services was docs and other providers coming and going because they didn't have a commitment, they didn't have an attachment to the community, and so it's been hard to retain providers. Whereas if you train your own, grow your own, those people often times will want to stay in the community of origin.

So 638 is something to look at, but you need to be in control of your own system. It can't just be stuck in a bureaucratic -- it will become -- there's a tendency, there's a danger of it just becoming another bureaucratic system, and if you have a good government and those systems work for people, then maybe it's not an issue. But in some cases it doesn't.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: I think that's a really interesting point. When I look back at the question and say what's going on in New Zealand, I wonder if you're hitting on maybe one of the key differences is that -- so I'll throw this back at you. I'm very appreciative that the New Zealand government is realising that they need Māori at the table to make decisions for the Māori. But you also said it early on, the United States has 576 or whatever federally recognised tribes, that's not talking about the State tribes as well, right, so we have a lot of different diversity even in our Native American populations. And so to take it back to a local level might exactly be the need. So I'm wondering how do you feel about that in

terms of a difference, say, between what is going on in New Zealand and what is going on in the US?

>>MR BIRD: I think one of the things that can be helpful I guess as a suggestion, because, you know, I've had the opportunity to be in some different environments, is really -- is looking, it would be -- my suggestion would be to look across the board at other, you know, United States in terms of the Indian Health Service, if there are other comparable operational units that deal with health for other indigenous populations and looking at what their experience has been, you know, what has worked for them, what do they find has worked, can it be replicated with different cultural communities, you know, because just one size doesn't fit all and you don't want to say well, it worked with the Indians so it should work with everybody else. Well maybe, maybe not.

But I think looking out and doing an assessment of okay, what are they doing, what's working, what's not, and then pulling people together to say well, what really is going to work best for us, what is going on some place that we can adapt and that will work for us. There is some benefit from looking broadly at other people's experiences and learning from other people's experiences.

I think that, you know, I don't regret the 20 years I was in the Indian Health Service, but for me in terms of what I needed, in my vision in my spirit, it was killing me, it was crushing me because it wasn't doing what I thought -- it wasn't doing what they said they wanted to do for native communities. And I would have been a second rate bureaucrat. As things have turned out I've had the opportunity to do things that many people in the Indian Health Service has never done, including serve as President of the American Public Health Association and have -- I guess I felt like I jumped in the deep end of the pool and I didn't drown so I know how to swim really well. And that's the risk that some of us need to take in terms of -- all of us need to take actually if we're going to change any kind of system. If we're going to improve something you need to -- sometimes you just need a leap of faith.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Amen. And it's hard work, I don't think it's ever going to be done. I'm cognizant we have about a minute left, so before I wrap up, Michael, is there anything else that you would like to say to folks?

>>MR BIRD: Well, first of all I just want to say I appreciate this opportunity to share with you -- share some thoughts and feelings. And I recognise on a very personal level, because of my family of origin, the challenges that indigenous -- that my community faces and that many other indigenous communities face. I think there are more similars than different. Again,

two things I would say that impacted my life was my father and his alcoholism and the family dynamic that played out, and racism.

Because racism still is very much a part, a challenge for many of us in this country and other countries, and it's very real. It is not -- it still plays out, some people have an -- for some people the door is open and for some of us it's closed, and even to this day I still have those kinds of experiences. But you can't -- you can never quit, you can never give up, the door is shut then find a window. You know, you figure out how to get in there. And I guess I'm very adept at going through the backdoor windows, because thus far it's worked out.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Well, Michael, it has been so fun to be in conversation with you, to learn from you, to hear your wisdom and your experiences. I'm very grateful for your vulnerability and transparency, so thank you so very much.

I've got a quick quote to read and then we've got to do a little bit of housekeeping, but grateful again for all of your words. I'm going to read from Bessel van der Kolk:

"As human beings we belong to an extremely resilient species. Since time immemorial we have rebounded from our relentless wars, countless disasters (both natural and manmade) and the violence and betrayal in our own lives. But traumatic experiences do leave traces, whether on a large scale, say on our histories and cultures, or close to home on our families with dark secrets being imperceptibly passed down through generations. They also leave traces on our minds and emotions, on our capacity for joy and intimacy and even on our biology and immune systems. Trauma affects not only those who are directly exposed to it but on those around them."

So again, Michael, thank you so much, thanks to everybody who stayed with us that was with Michael and I during this time. We're very grateful for all of the amazing folks that put this conference on and all of the amazing presenters. You can see that there are over 40 partners and support organisations as part of this conference too. You'll see that things will be posted on Facebook and YouTube soon. So please again, continue to show up, we're grateful for everybody, and you see a couple more slides coming through, but keep doing the great work and again, Michael Bird, such a pleasure.

>>MR BIRD: Thank you, appreciate you all.

>>RINGA HĀPAI: Thank you.