

OPENING REMARKS Tayna Denckla Cobb

Okay, hello, everyone. Hello. Good afternoon. We know everybody's hungry and we're going to have a great lunch. And I am beyond excited to open this incredibly special lunch, maybe a first for the University of Virginia, maybe for Charlottesville, maybe for Virginia, but it's a first for us for sure. In a few moments, what we're going to do is we're going to have a little bit of an introduction to the I-collective and then we'll have you get lunch two tables at a time because there's two rows of food. And then we're going to come back. During lunch is when we'll have the presentation by the I-collective. So, before we do that, while we have a full house, I want all of the planning sustainable food task force in the room to stand. Everybody who has helped put this event together, if you could please stand. Maybe they're all outside. It's because they're all working. Yes, please, thank you! They're all behind the doors working right now. Okay. All right.

And with that, without further ado, I'm going to welcome Lilia Fuquen, who is a project director for the food and community in Virginia at Virginia Humanities. She has been the person responsible for bringing this idea to us and responsible for organizing with the I-Collective and making this incredible meal a reality here. Thank you.

LILIA FUQUEN

Good afternoon. So, we have had the incredible honor of inviting not only the I-Collective but also members of the local Native American communities to join us for today's lunch symposium today, but also for a series of workshops that we're leading up to today to prepare for the meal. I would like to give a quick overview. We have Rufus Elliott, our representative, he was with us the past two days out foraging and building an outdoor kitchen to create and cook all the food you'll be eating today. And we also have several members of the I-Collective, which is seed keepers, knowledge keepers, chefs, activists around food sovereignty specifically in indigenous communities. We're incredibly honored to have Karlos Bacca, I will introduce him in just a moment, because we're also going to have two more join us while you are all eating. So, after you've gotten your food and come and sit down, we'll have a panel discussion with Rufus Elliott and the three I-Collective members. I would like to turn it over to Karlos Bacca.

KARLOS BACCA

I grew up in the Southern Ute Nation between Colorado and New Mexico in the Southwest corner. I am one of the founding members of the I-Collective, which you've had a brief overview, we'll talk about it later but I know they're running a touch late so I'll run through the menu with you guys. Starting with wild rice salad. Wild rice is from Spear Lake, Minnesota, hand-harvested in a canoe by the tribal people there. We have some Virginia maple vinaigrette going with that. I have some cranberries in there and some chickweed that we foraged yesterday – day before yesterday, sorry. We have a corn soup. White corn that I brought back from the pueblos in New Mexico. We have some Seminole pumpkins that were donated by the Monacan tribe. We have some beans from the Sonoran Desert, so Southern Arizona into Mexico. It's a very special bean, it only grows with monsoon rain. It's pretty hardy. It also has fire roasted hen of the woods, that I found as soon as the sun came up when I got here. With some luck and garlic chive in there. We have some smoked KellyBronze turkeys that we did

hanging off of a tripod, just with wood coal. And it's going to have a wild persimmon gravy. We have some ground roasted rockfish, locally caught rockfish that we did underground, in between layers of coal, earth, corn husk, fish, and back up again. It was in there for about three hours. That's going to be topped with some local wood sorrel that we foraged. Then we have some blue corn mush, an indigenous staple with most nations. The blue corn some from the same tribe that the beans came from. And that's mixed with paw-paws, covered with blueberries and raspberries that were just harvested. With that being said, thank you guys very much for being here and we'll continue this conversation later. But let's get some food in your bellies. Thank you.

LILIA FUQUEN

Hi, everybody. I'm going to interrupt your conversations for – well, for a few minutes. But first I would like to run down some thank you's. First of all, I'm thanking Virginia Humanities for having funded bringing in the I-Collective and gathering the materials and foods and things necessary to make this meal possible. Second of all, we were hosted the past couple of days by a farm in Afton, Virginia, Farfields Farm. They were incredibly generous in giving us the space, helping to dig the fire pit, and providing support in a million ways. They are a regenerative agriculture farm and they're doing amazing work there. I would like our Farfields representatives to please stand. We have Charlie Oller. If you haven't heard his name, he's a local mushroom expert. And then we have Ben Kessler. There are a few Ben's at Farfields. Who runs the native garden there. Is it the garden or the food house? The nursery. And then we have David Perry, who is a local expert, a very well-seasoned forager. He helped us in a lot of our foraging to gather materials for our meals today. Thank you to the Farfield folks. If you have any questions, please reach out to them about Farfield.

Thank you to all of them and also to Eze Amos, our photographer, he's in the back, you saw him taking pictures. He also took the pictures you're seeing on the screen from just the past couple of days. He put together this slide presentation for everybody to get a sense of what went into the food you're eating now. The experience, the full experiences through the workshopping to prepare the foods, that's where a lot of incredible conversations happened around food sovereignty. Next, I would like to introduce the I-Collective's Rufus Elliot I would like them to have a discussion to tell you what it is that the I-Collective does, why they decided to come here when invited, why they choose Charlottesville, because they do this kind of work all over North and central America. I think they have members from Mexico and Canada. So, to tell us a little bit about what the I-collective is, and what food sovereignty means to all of them. I'm turning it over to all of them.

I-COLLECTIVE

DAVID RICO: So, I think we should start off by introducing ourselves. My name is David Rico. I live in DC. I work for Jose Andres and I'm one of the members of the I-collective.

HILLEL ECHO HAWK: Nawa kitakoka. I am Pawnee. I grew up in Alaska. My people are originally from Nebraska, Kansas area. We currently live in Oklahoma. I live in

Seattle right now. I have a small catering company called Bridge Basket where I focus on precolonial foods. And I am also a member of the I-collective.

RUFUS ELLIOT: Rufus Elliott. I'm here representing the Monacan Indian nation. You're welcome to the Monacan nation today. To get out in front of myself a little bit, I wanted to catch you while you were still eating a little bit. It was taught to us that food is medicine, right? Not just bed for your body because you literally need food to eat but medicine for your spirit, the way we talk about it, or your soul. The food was made and prepared and gathered in a good way. Know that it was made in a good way. When you guys take it, I want you to think of it as medicine and leave here not only more educated to indigenous food ways but maybe more connected to one another and to the food and to the land that this food came from.

KARLOS BACA: I already talked to you guys. A little background on myself, I have a company called 'Taste of Native Cuisine,' which is coming up on a decade of food sovereignty and precolonial and indigenous food works. I'm one of the co-founders of the I-Collective, which, as I said, and which you guys heard a couple of times already, is knowledge keepers, seed keepers, food elders, farmers. A lot of activist works. And I'm going to address, before I pass down to David, I wanted you guys to hear why we chose to come to Charlottesville. Everybody knows the events the last year, and Charlottesville is a very polarized, racially divided place to be. Our work is centered on activism. We go into spaces and have the most difficult conversations everywhere we go. I'm sure if you get with anybody from the farms that we worked at in the last couple of days, they know where we're coming from. But we come here because, as he said, food is medicine. Food is also information. You know, and you have to be careful what you feed in yourselves. Just like all the negativity and all of the stuff that's going on in such a concentrated amount here, you know, we come because places need healing. We try to come and have these conversations through food. That is why we are here. So, with that being said, I would love anyone that wants to engage with us about that and the indigenous lands and indigenous perspective of the whole scenario to please reach out. With that being said, I'm going to hand it over to David to talk a little bit.

>> What were the questions? Do we have any questions? Is anybody wondering anything? No questions? Oh, yes.

Question: Can you explain more about what the i-Collective is?

Response:

DAVID RICO: Yeah, yeah. So, I-collective is pretty new. Like we've said, it's a collective. So that means there's several people from different walks of life, different levels in their careers, coming together over a united goal of activism and revitalizing indigenous food pathways. So, to create this food and to make it in this way and to present it and to gift it, it's in a tradition that's very old, that goes back to as old as this land is. And, you know, Indians, we've been feeding indigenous people, native peoples, we've been feeding and thriving and dreaming and loving and existing on this land, with these ingredients, in these ways, for longer than any one of us can remember, longer

than science really knows. It goes so far back, it's just inaccurate to say. You can't even give a real guess, that's how ancient this practice is. We speak to the issues, and I think the food is a great way to understand the land. What you're eating remind, is the land around you. That's probably not an experience you may have had. Some of you haven't eaten food from this land, from this city, from this land, from these farms. Let me tell you, there's some beautiful land surrounding this city. These ancient mountains -- are these the Blue Ridge? Yes. These mountains are old. They have a lot of story and a lot of history. This is what they taste like. That's what food is.

Food is what the world tastes like. Food is, you're taking pieces of existence, things you have no control over, things that you couldn't even begin to create or understand as a human, as an animal. We in no way, shape food. Food is just there, we take it and consume it and live. That's a relationship. Our bodies, literally what we are made out of, our minds are made from food. As you grow, as you go from the womb, from the very first instance of life, you are being fed pieces of this world. It's collecting in you. That's how culture develops in you, that's how regions develop their foodways, their distinctiveness. Their own relationship with life is based off the land we exist upon. This land we exist upon is very old. If we're talking about food sovereignty, the reason it looks the way it does today is because genocide and atrocity removed Indians, have removed indigenous peoples from the picture, right? This food that you're eating right now shouldn't be the exception to your meals, right? There is maybe another universe where this is what you ate five nights a week, because the indigenous people were allowed to stay on this land, and allowed to thrive off this land. And this food isn't just, when we talk about going out and foraging. We get this idea that native people were just foragers of and hunter/gatherers. A lot of the foods we're eating with cultivated, by generations of brown hands. These hands are from the tip of Alaska down to Tierra del Fuego. I work in the food industry. The people that work in the food industry, especially in this day and age, are largely brown. And they're largely native, you know? They're largely native to this land. And so, if we're talking about food justice, you know, where is the justice in that? Having all these people come over in horrible conditions, giving them mediocre jobs for low pay, being stuck in low wage situations for long periods of time at phases in their life. You work alongside 50-year-old women when you're in a kitchen, 50-year-old Latino women. And you see these people as, we visually see them as janitors and food workers and industry and service workers. And that's created. That wasn't what was naturally happening. We're creating the system, the system that removed native peoples, that enslaved and brought over African peoples, that is currently bringing in South American, Latin American peoples. It's a system. It was created for an intended effect. And this intended effect where we're developing Uber Eats and grocery stores and whole foods is distancing us from the land that we eat on, which is why it's important to eat this kind of food, because this is real. This is centering. This is from this land. This is what it's supposed to taste like. And it minds us, and it binds us in a way that maybe we don't even have the ability to understand to the place that we're at. So, I'll pass it on to whoever wants to take it.

HILLEL ECHO HAWK: I'm going to approach the rest of that question about what the I-Collective is.

The I-collective is 19 individuals currently, 17 different tribes represented all the way to Cree first nations in Canada. We have tasked ourselves with feeding revolution and being able to feed our people, when you think of indigenous food sovereignty. We're trying to recreate our systems that we flourished in at home. So that's where we are.

>> I guess it's my turn. Next question?

Question: Did you all nixtamalize the corn yourselves?

Response:

HILLEL ECHO HAWK: Yes. Yes. So, Karlos brought the corn. Oh, has the corn been -- so we did that at the farm. Karlos brought the corn from -- I can't remember where he brought it from, sorry.

KARLOS BACA: I brought it from San Ana, New Mexico.

HILLEL ECHO HAWK: It's a white dense corn. We used ash. You can use -- if you don't know -- ash, hardwood ash, lye, or calcium. And it's like an insanely old process. The first recorded is 1200 BC, but it for sure was used way before then. And so, we did that at the farm. And it took, I don't know, probably three hours or so. And it turned a bright, bright orange, when the reaction happened. And then we continued cooking it until you are eating what you are eating now. Oh, I think a hand shot up over here first.

Question: What is the role of the I-Collective in advancing food justice?

Response: It creates the conversation. People -- when you get a plate of this food in front of you, and we start talking, it is -- I mean, just the plate of food of the squash, of this corn, of the wild rice, of real wild rice, not the kind that you buy at the bulk bin at whole foods, it just automatically makes you think and makes you realize and creates this conversation that we're having now about genocide, about colonialism, but the past 500 years of what has happened on this land, and to the people on this land. And it's really an amazing thing to see people's eyes open and to see their minds opened. And to see how they change after. And to see that change change other people, and to see that conversation continue.

Question: Do you all have prayers that you say when preparing the food and what are they?

Response:

KARLOS BACA: I would say prayer within my people's way is very individualistic. But we don't walk and pray the same way that some religions walk and pray, right? For myself, personally, I have an intimacy with the land that I engage with. For myself, I don't like the terminology "chef" because I have no control over what I do. So, the second that I set foot on the land, I'm in prayer. And that's the whole basis of it, the whole time, is making offerings and having these connections that have been passed down to me through a very long lineage of people that work with plants. So, my prayer starts with my ancestors, and it's going to finish with my future generations. It's a tough question to really answer. I don't know. Prayer is a way of walking for me.

RUFUS ELLIOT: Just to kind of piggyback on that, I think I can help a little bit, is that the giving thanks part of it is not at the end of the process. And I think in some ways that's the way it is for a lot of people, right? This food came to be here, someone harvested it, someone processed it, someone cooked it, someone set it at your table, now you're about to eat it. It's the end of that process for that food. And now we want to, you know, say prayer, right? That's I think a lot of world, that's sometimes how it works. Our perspective is almost the opposite – I won't say the opposite, but it's more of a hand-holding throughout the process. So, some of the corn soup you're eating, some of that is a squash that we grew in our tribal garden. I run the tribal garden for the Monacan nation, right? It's not just planting the indigenous seed so we have this indigenous food that's better for us and all the benefits that these guys are much better at articulating than I am. It's also about bringing back -- There's a part of our culture connected to the seeds. There are prayers and ceremonies and stories that go with the acts of planting. So, there's not a -- as much of a responsibility for us to stop what we're doing and say prayers when we're about to eat, because we've done that 16,000 times to it to the eating. So, you know, the idea of reciprocity with the land itself that if we take something, we give it back. So, we've given thanks for this over and over again. When we have seeds, we have a ceremony for that, and we have songs and dances and ceremonies that go with that. When there's the time for the corn to turn green there's a milk stage ceremony. At the end of the harvest, there's a harvest ceremony and there's prayers and dances for that. By the time we get to eating, we've kind of done it. And we live it every day. Not to pick on Christianity in any way, it's not just a Sunday thing, it's a Monday through Sunday, sunrise through sunset thing. So, can you find a way to be thoughtful and give thanks and give something back throughout the whole process so that you don't feel guilty when you're about to eat it.

LILIA FUQUEN: We have five minutes, I think, before the next session. I'm sorry that this has run a little bit over. But you're welcome to stay seated and continue the conversation.

We can take two more questions -- I'm sorry, I interrupted, pardon me. Just so you all know, you're welcome to get up and have your break before your next session in five minutes. Thank you all for being here.

HILLEL ECHO-HAWK: I'll make it quick. To piggyback off of what they said, yes, it is very much so a relationship that I also have with the plants and with the land. It's definitely a prayer, singing songs, the whole time, whether out loud or to myself, and making offerings. Then with my tribe, the Pawnees, it's ceremony the whole time. Probably just with every tribe, it's ceremony the whole time. You know, I can't speak for every tribe, but with Pawnees, from the time we start tilling the ground to planting, to when the corn turns, to every step of the way, there is song, there is ceremony, there is dancing, there is prayer. And so -- you know, I hope I'm answering your question.

DAVID RICO: I guess I would echo everything. For me personally, I like to listen more than I like to speak. That's something I decided a long time ago, that I was tired of praying, just talking to creator, god, whatever I believed in. When I go out there I like to shut up and listen, and that's my style.

CLOSING REMARKS – Tanya Denckla Cobb

This is pretty amazing. I would like for all of us, I think you have opened, I hope, eyes and hearts to a different way of relating to our food, being present with our food, not just from eating. What you're really talking about is from the moment of interacting with our earth. So, thank you. Can we all thank the I-collective for this amazing meal.

This is an amazing meal. Thank you. So, thank you. I have the -- I wish we could spend another hour with these amazing -- even if you don't like to be called chefs, you clearly are in our language chefs, amazing chefs. So, I wish we had more time to spend with you. We're going to move into the next set of panels. Let me just pull out my notes here. And before I do that, I want to give recognition while everybody's here to -- I want to give -- yeah, that's fine, thanks -- I want to give recognition to two people who really were the force behind this. And one is Kristina Weaver, if you would just stand. Really, we owe her a debt because she's really the person who conceived of this. We had people lined up, and she's really the force who moved us to start thinking about food sovereignty as opposed to just food justice. Thank you, Kristina, for moving us in that direction. And Alexandra cook. Alexandra? So, she is like a single-handed force that just made this all happen. I don't know where she is, but -- she's working, okay. So, we have flowers for Alexandra. Maybe if you can hold them for her, that would be great.

Can somebody grab her for a second? While she's coming, I want to remind you all to, if you can, at least go at least once down into the Kaleidoscope Room and put an idea up on the wall. There's lots of things I'm sure you have heard today that have triggered ideas for you. So, the panels that we're moving into are 2A, in the South Meeting room is the UVa founding food system panel. And in the Commonwealth room is transforming legacies of harm in today's food system. So, founding food system for UVa, and transforming legacies of harm in the Commonwealth, which is down at the end of that hallway. And has Alexandra been found yet? Oh, okay. Alexandra? Yes. Can we please, please -- We have flowers and we have a special bag for you. But flowers of appreciation. This is the woman that made this happen, let me tell you. Okay. All right. Thank you. And we have gifts for our I-Collective as well. Thank you. Thank you all, and please continue to interact and speak with our I-Collective chefs if you want to stay. Thank you.