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**Ashley Graham: An Interview by Madison Perez
Conducted on November 4, 2021**

Ashley Graham is an Afro-Indigenous Haliwa Saponi Youth Activist. Graham graduated from Meredith College and plans to attend law school in the fall of 2022. She gears her activism towards Black and Indigenous Solidarity particularly in the Haliwa-Saponi tribe.

Graham: How are you?

Perez: I'm good. How are you?

Graham: I'm good.

Perez: Do you have any questions for me before we start?

Graham:Nope.

Perez: Okay, so this interview will be going into the Duke Library that will be going into an archive that I create for Indigenous youth activists. You have complete control over this. If you decide that you want something removed from the interview, or from the transcript, that's completely up to you. Also, if you could give me as much detail as possible with your answers. That would be very helpful. If not, I'll probably be asking follow up questions. If you don't feel comfortable answering any questions, it's completely up to you.

Graham: Okay, sounds good.

Perez: My first question is who has been the biggest inspiration for your activism?

Graham: What has been the biggest inspiration for my activism? I have to say, it starts back all the way with my two times great grandfather, his name is Charlie Hedgepeth. Native Americans, we got the right to be considered citizens in our own country in 1924. He was born in 1890. During that time, we already had the Civil War. We had Jim Crow, it was not safe for Indigenous people to openly identify as Indigenous. Our indigeneity was often erased on census records. We were reclassified according to phenotype.

Some people were reclassified as Mulatto¹, and some were reclassified as white. Him and a couple other of our Hedgepeth cousins and Richardson cousins from the Haliwa Saponi Indian Tribe, formed the Haliwa Saponi Indian Club. My two times great grandfather, he was fully Haliwa Saponi, married a Black Indigenous woman. At that time, you were not allowed to join the club if you married a Black person. He got kicked out of the tribe, before it can even become state recognized, but he did help with it. Just that story alone and the rampant anti-blackness in the community is what drives me to restore that legacy. I come from the same line as the current chief of the Haliwa Saponi Indian Tribe right now, Dr. Ogletree Richardson, her uncle and my two times great grandfather were first cousins. It's the same family, the legacy is still alive, and it split the family. So because of that story, I'm determined to right the wrongs for myself and for other Afro-Indigenous people.

Perez: I know you talked about the anti-blackness in the Indigenous Community. Can you show what that looks like? Why do you think there is so much anti-blackness?

Graham: Yes, so there's a lot of anti-blackness because in North Carolina and the southeast, specifically, we're first contact tribes. For example, the Haliwa, we descend from the Nansemond, and the Nansemond lived in Virginia among the Powhatan Confederacy...We all know the story with John Smith, and the white colonists. We have been interacting with white people for a long time. Really, it's just a byproduct of colonialism. Prior to that, if you lived among the tribe, it didn't matter what color you were, you were part of the tribe. The concept of enrollment or how much Indian blood you have, I wrote my thesis last year on eugenics that comes from Walter Plecker. He started that in Virginia and it trickled its way down. Colonialism has us. Our criteria based on enrollment literally comes from colonialism. If you're dark skinned, you're not going to be enrolled. Unless you're from a specific surname. In my tribe, Richardsons are the dominant surname. I come from the Richardson, Hedgepeth, Lynch, Silver, Copeland and Hawkins family but my strongest blood line will be the Hedgepeth line. Now I am not enrolled because of what my one ancestor did. Even though my grandparents and my parents, my mom is Haliwa Saponi. It's very isolating, and it puts a lot of pressure on me. Okay, I have to conceive with a Native person, because you know, I'm half or I'm a quarter it's very damaging and very weird.

Perez: I know you talked about your eugenics thesis, I did read the blog post Aminah Ghaffar made and posted on her website. Can you talk a little bit about what you learned through that process?

¹ A person of mixed white and black ancestry, Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). *Mulatto definition & meaning*. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mulatto>.

Graham: What I learned from the process is that there's a huge overview. In the grand scheme of things, the United States and Germany, they mirrored each other. Hitler and the United States government were just mirroring each other. Hitler's inspiration came from the genocide of Native Americans. Prior to colonization in North Carolina, there were 30 Indigenous tribes. Now, according to the Commission of Indian Affairs, they say that there are eight. There are other Indigenous tribes in North Carolina that don't have state recognition. I'm going to say there's about nine or ten. People will hate me for my opinion, but it is not even an opinion, just for giving those folks legitimacy. Moving back to North Carolina because I focused on Indigenous women and Black women in North Carolina. Like I said, for classification, a lot of women had their indigeneity erased if they were not from the Cherokee tribe. So the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, they're federally recognized. Their sterilizations are well documented through the Indian Health Services Clinic, whereas I had to directly access primary sources from the Attorney General, because I needed those documents. For example, if I saw a Mulatto from Halifax County, and it was a Richardson, I knew the woman was Haliwa Saponi. If I saw Mulatto, from Robeson County, or Scotland County, I knew that that woman was Lumbee. The desire to sterilize women of color happened after World War II. Prior when a project started in 1929, it was mainly poor white women that were getting sterilized. In terms of reparations, if you were not sterilized in an institution, you did not get reparations which is very problematic because of segregation. People of color, women of color, specifically, were sterilized by County Welfare Offices, and social workers played a huge role in that. They were like, "Okay, well, do you want to eat? Or do you wanna have another kid?" Mother's often were faced with a very horrible ultimatum, and it was horrible. I've learned a lot and it took survivors years and multiple government administrations to try to get some reparations for that.

Perez: What are some of the difficulties you faced with your research on that project?

Graham: Honestly, just support from my research advisor because I graduated from Meredith College. I got my onyx on. It's a predominantly white institution. My body is racialized as black. I'm dark skinned, but I have a Lumbee surname because my dad is Black and Lumbee. Just lack of support and racism from my professor trying to tell me that I don't know what I'm doing. I had to reach out to Dr. Melinda Maynor Lowery. She used to work at UNC Chapel Hill, she's now in Georgia. I had to reach out to other Indigenous scholars to help me, because my department did not want me to talk about it at all. I was the only person of color in my department writing a thesis.

Perez: After you finished your thesis how was it perceived?

Graham: I have not published my thesis, but I got an A on it so that's good. Among people in the Indigenous community, they didn't know about it. I received a lot of praise for it. I am hesitant to publish it because I'm not enrolled. People feel like oh, well, you must be enrolled to be an Indian. I consider myself more Indigenous, then people that are enrolled. I know the history. I come from numerous chiefs, I can tell you back to my eleven times great grandmother. I am a historian, and I take it very seriously. I majored in history and Pre-Law with a minor in International Studies. This is a theme that we see as anti-blackness is global. It's not just in the United States. Even people trying to gate keep indigeneity, Black people are Indigenous just misplaced from Africa because of the transatlantic slave trade.

Perez: I know that you in the blog, it talked about getting reparations for the families, what is being done about that?

Graham: So in 2000, I don't exactly remember the governor at the time. In 2000, a group of folks went to the governor and said, "We want reparations", so you have to be born up until 1913. If you died, you basically had a 100 year cap to live. If you were before that they didn't really care. I think that's horrible. Indigenous women did not show up to the hearings. A good person to look up is Elaine Riddick. She's still alive. Angela Davis knew about this. It's a pretty huge deal. 70% of Black women were sterilized by the county welfare offices. I want to say only 30% got reparations. Let's say if my grandmother was sterilized, and she wasn't alive, my mom to go for that. You had to have a hearing and you had to testify. It's problematic, because a lot of these people are illiterate because of the times they grew up.

Perez: Since we are not talking about the eugenics because that's something that they tried to cover up. How would you encourage people to learn more about that?

Graham: I would google Elaine Riddick's story, because she is from North Carolina. She has oral, she has been on CNN to discuss this. There is a lot out there. If anyone wants to email me, they can email me, and I will be happy to share my thesis with some of the resources. If you go to the North Carolina archives online, they have biennial reports, and you can see the statistics over time.

Perez: You went to Meredith College for undergraduate and it is a predominantly white institution. I do have friends that are there currently, but what kind of resources were available to students of color or Indigenous students?

Graham: Lol. From going to Meredith I got a hormonal disorder and anxiety. They like to paint because let me tell you how involved I was. I started the Native American

Student Association. I was a senator. I was a senior rep. I was in choir. I was History and Politics Club President. Asian Studies, vice president I was in everything. I was always lobbying, and I was awarded Top 10 Outstanding Senior. I'm very outspoken because I believe that my ancestors were silenced. You're not going to silence me. If you are an outspoken person of color, you are Meredith's worst nightmare. Actually, before I wrote my thesis, I had threatened to take my department to court because of blatant racism. They don't care. The current president of Meredith now is a Meredith alum that graduated in 1975. We don't offer ethnic history. If it is, it's taught by white people, from the white gaze, and it's offered as an elective. I wanted to take Native American religion with my Cherokee Nation professor, and they would not give me American history credit for it. Which makes no sense because we are American history. It's very weird. I will say assistant dean, Tomecca Sloane, did help me a lot. As far as like Indigenous students, specifically, I would go to NC State to join their NASA. We would combine stuff and just reach out to other Indigenous students in college because we didn't have that support there at all, and it sucks. Now there's this page called Dear Mere Co, where people express their grievances. When George Floyd died, I had to write a Black Lives Matter statement for my department because they are children. I don't understand how treating people with fairness and kindness is political. No, you politicize my skin color because your ancestors built a fortune off of it.

Perez: Were there other students that identified as Indigenous while you were at Meredith?

Graham: There were a couple of Lumbee and Tuscarora, but they weren't as outspoken. When you think of Indigenous, they would put my name with it because I would always lump it together. Two years ago, I did an Indigenous Peoples' Day event instead of Columbus Day.

Perez: How was that perceived?

Graham: Honey, "what is that?." I'm like, "Y'all you are celebrating a mass murderer. He did not step foot in America." Why are we celebrating this? But we are historians, right? Or does historian mean, regurgitating what grandma and grandpa say at dinner? Our job should be to shed light, like this oral history interview. Our job should be to shed light on marginalized communities.

Perez: I know that you said that you were a history major on the pre-law track. Are you planning...

Graham: I was a double major so at Meredith the international studies and pre-law were all in the same department because we're small, I was able to do them all.

Perez: Do you plan on continuing into graduate school to pursue that?

Graham: Yeah. Right now I'm working from home. I have my own business. I'm running a spirituality business. I was working at a corporate job called Syneos Health as a policy analyst. It was very, very problematic, so I started my own business. I work from home, but I will be attending law school in the fall.

Perez: Next thing, would you say your activism is what kind of led you to want to go on that track?

Graham: I feel like honestly I was born to do this. I've been involved in history, and politics since I was a little girl. In 2019, I was the American Indian Heritage Assistant Director for the state's largest cultural event. I've always dabbled, I just hate injustice. I feel like it's time to decolonize the system because honestly, people are like, "Oh, slavery is outlawed." I'm like, nope, there's a loop in the 13th amendment. Look at mass incarceration rates. Somebody has got to do something. I know I'm just one person, but this current state of things I just feel like this is my life purpose, honestly.

Perez: What do you think that decolonizing the system would look like?

Graham: Tearing everything up from the root, right now states are debating critical race theory. Decolonizing would be telling the truth about the history of Thanksgiving. You have got to ruffle a little bit. We can't continue to whitewash history. It's annoying. We get tired of saying, "Oh my God, King George's cousin, when given his boat, he bombed it" it's annoying. Tell the truth. You can't just, because you don't like something does not mean that it did not happen. If I don't look at the sky, I know the sun is still shining. To me, decolonization is about returning to home, and just telling the truth. History is not meant to be politicized, but it is because there is a lot of overlap. It's like when you talk about the election of 1804 of Thomas Jefferson, you are going to talk about that in history class, and in your political class, because it was historic.

Perez: Yeah, I grew up in North Carolina as well. I know looking back on my history classes when I was in elementary school, if we did learn about Native people, it was very surface level and it did not really go into that. When you were younger, did you pick up on a lot of that as you were learning it?

Graham: Mhm and I'd call the teacher out every time because my best friend is from the tribe that helped the pilgrims. She is Mashpee Wampanoag. Just talking to her and she's like, "No, Thanksgiving was made a holiday during the Civil War, and it's celebrating the death of the Mashpee and Aquinnah Wampanoag history." A lot of people don't know that Martha's Vineyard is on Aquinnah Wampanoag land. Also North Carolina has the largest Indigenous population east of the Mississippi River. We don't talk about that. I have always been the kid to question. Just because you have letters or alphabet soup behind your name does mean you know more than me. As a white person, you cannot tell me about my culture based on what you read in a book. That's just period. Yeah, I did struggle with that growing up because I would challenge authority. "Oh, Natives were", "Not were, we are here." Don't do that, or they would talk about white passing Native people and would erase the Afro-Indigenous people. Coretta Scott King was Afro-Indigenous. She was Creek. Rosa Parks, her mother, was Poarch Creek. But back then you had white and Black it was a racial binary. Trying to submerge and create this Indigenous, they'd be like what the heck is that? Southeastern Indigenous folks in general are still treated like that by other Natives out west and other parts of the country because of our tri-racial history. We get it on both fronts.

Perez: Is there any movement right now with education in North Carolina and trying to change the history books a little bit?

Graham: I don't necessarily think by changing history books, but I am seeing a lot of Indigenous scholars write their own theses. Their own dissertations. I know UNC (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) has the American Indian Program. UNCP (University of North Carolina at Pembroke) does as well. I am seeing individual's take it out. I'm not really seeing it happen at the state level yet.

Perez: Growing up Afro-Indigenous and having that intersectionality, how has that impacted you as an individual?

Graham: There are a lot of similarities between Black people and Indigenous people. The colonialism, a lot of Natives eat soul food. We do have our specific foods like my tribe does saponi stew. A lot of Natives eat fry bread. I'm wearing my beaded earrings today that my cousin made, so jewelry. There are some similar things. I did notice, one thing in particular that bothered me is like when people hear Afro-Indigenous, they are like, "Oh, you think Black people were here first or Oh, you are a Hotep." I'm not one of those people that believe Black people were here first, no, that's not true. That erases people that were on the transatlantic slave trade. The only issue that I had growing up was I always felt like, Oh, I'm too dark to participate in powwow. My mom was like, the first Natives were dark Natives, they are only light skinned now because of intermixture

with white people. My grandpa is fair skinned with blue eyes, and I have a widow's peak. I don't know if you can see it. That's from colonialism. My surname is Scottish. That's the only thing that I had. Growing up, I felt like, maybe I should shrink myself or I'm not enrolled and I can't do this. Then one day, I woke up and I was like, "why am I limiting myself. My ancestors weren't enrolled." Like I said, they didn't become Native American until 1924 legally. My two times great grandpa, my great grandma, my grandma is still alive. My great grandmother and my two times great grandparents it said Mulatto. Then when they died, it said Native American or American Indian. That's really it. I've always been taught that I am sacred and Native Americans, most of us come from a matriarchal society. Some of us have transitioned to patriarchy because of colonialism. Colonialism is the root of a lot of this stuff. Same with homophobia. Homophobia is a huge problem in the Indigenous community. It's crazy.

Perez: So Joy, do you know Joy Hunt?

Graham: Yeah, I love her.

Perez: So, I interviewed her last week. She felt that a lot of the anti-blackness stemmed from it was easier for Indigenous people to side with the white man rather than work with the Black community to fight for the same things. The movements go together. Is there any push in the Haliwa Saponi tribe to bridge the gap between Afro-Indigenous...

Graham: No, my tribe is very racist. Absolutely not. No, there's absolutely no way. From the tribal government? No. From certain people in the community like the youth? Yes. I've noticed during our Native American Heritage Month, a lot of my cousins or a lot of my friends like Joy, they will incorporate Afro-Indigenous perspectives into it. The Haliwa Tribe, not only our tribe, but other tribes in North Carolina, would rather marry their cousin before they marry a Black person. That's why the Richardson family is so prominent, because of incest. That's been dated back to the 1700s. My family was Richardson for five generations, then Elizabeth Richardson married a Hedgepeth man. That's it. Yeah, there's nothing being done. I'm actually going to write the chief a letter. A lot of people have been enrolling in our sister tribe The Nansemond Indian Nation in Virginia. Even though enrollment is colonial, I recognize how important it is for Afro-Indigenous people to be enrolled. If you are not enrolled, some tribes will not allow you to participate in ceremonies and pass down traditions. Enrollment is a very political piece. To Joy's point, she is exactly right. White people were like, "All right, well, y'all are different, or, you know, 40 acres and a mule." It's not an oppression Olympics. I don't think we should sit here and talk about Indigenous duh duh duh Black people duh duh duh. No, we have the same Oppressor. We should be working together. It's easier to conquer when you have folks divided. She's absolutely right. I know a lot of Lumbee

people that were sharecroppers with Black people. I know Lumbee people, Native people as dark as me, that will swear they are full blood. I'm like you clearly have Black in you. You mean to tell me over the past 500 years, it's been straight Native up and down. No. Blackness does not invalidate indigeneity. They feel like you either got to be Black or Indigenous. We are like, no, both at the same time.

Perez: Seeing the blatant racism in the Haliwa Saponi tribe and you're not enrolled in it, do you feel like you are okay not being enrolled?

Graham: I am not okay with it at all. Point blank period, so let me just back up. Chief Ogletree, the current chief, her uncle founded the Mount Bethel Indian Baptist Church, because he did not want Indigenous people and Black people going to Pine Chapel Baptist Church, another church in the community. Like I said, they come from that same Hedgepeth family. We were kicked out. Our tribal seat is Hollister, North Carolina. My family was kicked out 10 minutes outside of that in Ringwood. I feel like if everybody knows what happened, they just don't like talking about it. There's a thesis by Dr. Marty Richardson called *Racial Choices*, that will be great to read up on and you can like physically see what I'm talking about. He's a historian. He got his PhD from UNC. He talks about how they kicked out over 3000 people. I'm not okay with that at all. It's not ethical. It's not morally right. On top of that, how are you trying to get federal recognition from the government when you do not even recognize your own people? That's my question. It's horrible. You are like, "well, it's colonial." Yeah, it's colonial, but oh well, we have to live with it. We say that we have sovereignty. Sovereignty is not synonymous with being anti black. The American Indian Movement got inspiration from where? The Civil Rights Movement. I noticed that Black women and just Black people in general, we are the backbone for social movements. Where does everybody look? To Black Lives Matter for how to organize. It doesn't bother me not being enrolled, because I have cousins that are enrolled. I'm always in the loop about stuff that's going on. I know a little bit about my language. My cousins that are enrolled, they didn't even know about the history of the tribe, but because I come from that particular patriarch, I do know about the history of the tribe. I'm constantly "oh, who are your people?" This that, and the third. I had to memorize my family tree so people would leave me alone. I have my hair in braids right now. People are like, "Oh, well, you are supposed to have your hair straight." I'm supposed to do what I want to do. That's what I'm supposed to do. I'm not supposed to look a certain way. Yet, if you're white. If you marry a white person, you can get enrolled. The problem is not mixing, the problem is mixing with Black people.

Perez: Whew, It's just so heavy.

Graham: It is. It is a lot. It'll make you not want to, I mean, I have people Indigenous people my age trying to tell me I'm not Native. I am like "child bye." I come from a lot of people. Okay, I come from Elizabeth the Nansemond. Okay, she is a well documented Nansemond woman. I come from the Hedgepeth. I come from the main people that you all are using for federal recognition. Those are my 3, 4, 5th times great grandparents. I come from that family, but you don't see me though. Because of my color. Look at these cheeks, like what? It's crazy, but they feel like I should be quiet. I'm just not going to do that. You telling me to be quiet makes me want to speak more. I've always been that person. I don't want to, so I'm not going to.

Perez: Where do you think they should start with trying to bridge the divide between the Afro-Indigenous and the Indigenous?

Graham: I think that it is gonna look different from tribe to tribe. I don't think that there is any universal answer for that. I think one, listen to genealogists. Every tribe has a genealogist. Just because you as the chief or you as tribal Councilman think that somebody is dark, color does not tell you bloodline. If you look at puppies, you can have a black lab, a yellow lab and get a chocolate lab. That's stupid. One listen to genealogists. Two, look at those roles that you try to sweep under the rug. That's where I would start because all my cousins are like, "We know you did this. You need to fix it." A big problem with tribes is they can disenroll you. For people that are enrolled, they are in a tough spot. We want to speak up, but we don't want to be isolated. It is not just Afro-Indigenous people. There are people that are fully Indigenous that were not able to enroll because they weren't anti-black. Now you have what I would consider a diaspora. Then when you are not enrolled, if you are not involved, you are not Indian. People don't want to be involved, because y'all act hateful that's what that is. You have generations trying, there's no one way to reconnect. I think it all starts with history and just stop being stupid. Honestly, and let the youth have a voice. I find that it's very hard in the Indigenous community. We talk about elders, but not every older person is an elder. You have people on Tribal Council, which would be our court, that are 90 years old. It's time for you to give your seat to somebody a little bit younger. I think it will start there, and just in education. They do not want to expand their mind because they grew up in that racial binary. You are either black, or you are Indigenous. It starts with the mind as well.

Perez: Do you feel like when it's youths time to take over those positions, then it will get better? Or do you feel like racism is being passed down?

Graham: It is being passed down. There are people my age that tell me...the first time I heard the N word was from a young, Indigenous person. The Lumbee Tribe, for

example, helped turn North Carolina red because they voted for Trump, who was clearly very problematic. I don't care if you are Republican, Democrat, he's very problematic. They want that federal recognition, and it's being passed down. We live in rural communities, so education is not the best anyway. On top of these views I feel like it's gonna be split 50/50.

Perez: Aminah and Joy, they're both Lumbee. They had talked about how Robeson County Education is not the best. Is it the same in Halifax County?

Graham: My dad is Black and Lumbee. I do not claim them. I do not claim his side because we are not close. Yes, it's like that because it is very rural communities. 30 to 40 minutes to your nearest Walmart. Underfunded. We have the Haliwa Saponi Indian Tribal School doesn't get as much funding. We are also not federally recognized. Majority of the money in North Carolina goes to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. It depends on, are you federally recognized? Are you state? Where do you live? If your representatives assigned to that area are willing to help you?

Perez: Do you feel if there were better school systems with correct history, and I know that just because there are better school systems doesn't necessarily mean correct history. Do you feel that would kind of go hand in hand and make the problem a little better?

Graham: Maybe, I'm just not very hopeful. Let me give you some numbers. In 1965 to now, they say that we only have 3800 people. Culturally, what most people do is most of them don't go to college because they can't afford it, or they don't want to. Depends on the person, and they have a lot of kids. One of my cousins has 10 kids. I'm not judging, but I'm saying, how do we only have 3000 people? We should be as big as the Lumbee Tribe, but we are not enrolling people. We are discriminating. Our roles have been closed. That's because they are trying to alter documents and hide stuff. We need ethical people. We need better teachers. Hire an Afro-Indigenous person. I think that would help. They do not want to because they are scared of being called out. I'm calling my tribe out, I'm getting emotional, because I love them. I want us to be better. I don't hate my tribe. I don't hate my people. I want us to be better because right now, I feel a lot of pressure to marry a full blood Indigenous man. I do. Which is fine, but I always get anxious in my head like, whoa, I'm the second generation that is not enrolled. It just stresses me out honestly.

Perez: I'm sorry.

Graham: I met with Joy three weeks ago. We had lunch and I was like, I don't know. A lot of our parents will be like, "Oh, marry an Indian boy from a federally recognized tribe." There's all these stipulations like, blood quantum. We always say culture over quantum because blood quantum essentially just comes down to who are you having sex with? That's what it is. We are the only group of people "I am half this." We are not a dog. Why are we quantifying? That's just weird to me. I don't have a lot of faith right now. It depends on the government, because the government, they do what they want to do. Just like our vice chief. He's not vice chief anymore because he abused loans from the state, but no one wants to talk about that. He's full blood though. That's okay, because he's fullblood. You see a lot of contradictions. It makes you ask a lot of questions. They do not like when people ask questions. One time on our Facebook page, they turned off comments. They're not open to receiving feedback because they are an elder, they know all. They keep the same families in power. I come from the Hedgepeth family. Chief Ogletree, her granddaddy is Gordon Solomon Hedgepeth, and my three times great grandpa was her brother. It comes from that same line. They are not letting other families have access. Elections are rigged. They kick people out when it's time to vote. Why are you kicking people out? Why can't you count the ballots in front of people? They don't want progressive people to get in there. I had a cousin, another cousin that ran for Afro-Indigenous people. Coincidentally, he lost. When we were counting it by rows, we were like, wait, that numerically is not adding up. Nobody said anything. Nobody did anything. They are scared. The culture is to be quiet. Go along with it. Only call out problematic non-Native people, but not your own.

Perez: Do you feel if they keep the same families in power, and they keep pushing out public comments on the community? Do you think that they are going to disrupt the balance?

Graham: We are shooting ourselves in the foot. A lot of people are tired of Haliwa being racist, and they are just going to go to our sister tribe. What I mean by sister tribe, so the first woman, the first matriarch of the tribe, her name was Mary Bass. She was Nansemond, and she married a Saponi man. That is how we became Saponi through that Saponi marriage with the first Richardson man. We could enroll Nansemond, which is Federal, so they are shooting themselves in the foot. What is going to happen is folks are either going to want to enroll in Nansemond, or choose not to enroll. I have cousins that choose not to be enrolled because they are crazy. Or either they are just gonna stop being involved. It's 2021. People can love who they love. It's not that serious. We have bigger fish to fry. We need better schools, and you are over here regulating who people lay down with. It's getting weird. They're going to end up hurting themselves. There's no reason why we should be the third largest tribe. We should be the second. The records don't lie. My great grandma has 68 great grandkids because she had 11

children. None of them are enrolled. Just from my set, that's just from one side alone. There is power in numbers, and the colonizer, they know that. That is why they feel the need to divide. When Juneteenth became a holiday, a lot of Indigenous people were like, "Oh my God, we were here first. Why is Juneteenth a thing?" I'm like, "oh my god, please." It's very stressful. I'm very thankful to people like Aminah, Joy. I like to shout out Jorden Revels. You should interview him. He is very cool. He is Lumbee as well. He does a lot with environmental work, protecting the land and water. He works with Aminah closely. He's a good person. I don't know. I don't have a lot of faith. I can only hope, but my goal is that I will have my family enrolled before I die. That's my goal.

Perez: This is more of a general question. What would you say are the biggest issues concerning the Indigenous movement?

Graham: Enrollment. People-pleasing. We can't decolonize and please white people. There is this movement called landback. People are like, "Oh, well, landback does not mean kicking white people off their land." It might. I don't know, it might. One of my ancestors, William Chavis. He owned over 52,000 acres of land. I'm working to buy the landback. Give it back. It was taken. A lot of people were tricked and deceived. Illiteracy is a problem in rural communities. You are being told one thing, but the paper you are signing is saying something else. I would definitely say people-pleasing. Really focused on landback, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two Spirit people. That is a big issue right now with the government going on to Indian Territory and under reporting missing Indigenous women. My cousin Faith Hedgepeth, I don't know if you are familiar with her story. We're from the same family. The big epidemics. COVID is affecting the community, going back to those backwards mindsets. Folks do not want to get vaccinated. They do not want to wear a mask because they do not want to be controlled by the government. They feel like if we assimilate to the prominent beliefs of the Republican Party, that they will give us our recognition. There is a lot.

Perez: Wow, I don't know if this is too touchy subject, but on the topic of Faith, she went to UNC Chapel Hill, right? I talked a little bit about this with Joy. We talked about, actually Aminah and Joy both talked about (how) law enforcement is not the best. Kind of how it is with the same as the Black Lives Matter movement. I know in the article, it talks about how the police never stopped looking. Do you think that was true?

Graham: That's not true, because I'm not going to name this professor, this professor that teaches at Meredith has friends in Chapel Hill PD. She walked up to me when I was a sophomore. This was 2018. She told me, "if they were to look better, and were to do certain things, (which I'm not going to list) they would have already found it." I feel like they didn't really look because she was a lighter girl, right? "Oh, she's not Indigenous."

Even when the Federal Indian News Outlet posted her we had other Natives saying, “Oh, she’s white.” The Indigenous people not wanting to look. She had just crossed over into the Native American sorority, Alpha Phi Omega. There were numerous thoughts, “Oh, she was drunk.” This, that and the third. A lot of problematic things that didn’t go along with it. At one point, they had declared the case cold. If they had kept looking, they would have never declared the case cold at all. It is true, they do not report especially state recognized, you have state recognized tribes not being reported. Afro-Indigenous women, especially not being reported. They just do not care. A lot of people go missing, especially in the Lumbee community on I-95 (Interstate 95). Human trafficking is a huge problem, but they do not care at all. Crystal Cavalier, she is Occaneechi Saponi. She is Afro-Indigenous. She takes it in her own hands, and Aminah does, to go through and look at those numbers. When we see statistics, we are always like, “Okay, think more.” Especially if they happen to be in college, they’re going to, the police, to use “Well, there’s probably this, this, this and this”, instead of actually analyzing the case facts for how they are.

Perez: How do you think specially with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous People's movement? How can you see changes in law enforcement being able to help?

Graham: Honestly, I don't know. I'm going to split this up. Federal tribes live on reservations. They were put there because of the whole Indian Removal Act. They have federal agents that are coming to reservations, federal police officers that are taking children. If federal people are taking children, I don't know if I have much faith in state agencies to fix the problem. It is very scary. If I leave my house I tell my mom “I'm going here, I'm doing this.” I always make sure to share my location. I try to be extra cautious, because I just don't trust that they would do anything. Number one, you got to have some of this (makes money sign) if anything. That's what the professor told me. If it would have been from a wealthier background or certain things, different tribes then maybe. There are just a lot of factors that are dependent on it.

Perez: Do you feel if more Indigenous members started to become law enforcement officers that could change? Or do you feel that there is just too much of a culture in law enforcement?

Graham: I think it's too much of a culture. Let's talk about the history of law enforcement. Law enforcement was never created to protect us. It emerged after slavery to capture people that were freed. Two, there is a weird relationship between Indigenous people and the police. We respect the police, but we are not buddy, buddy with them because of how we have been treated. It is actually very frowned upon. The

Indigenous police people that I do know, they're very conservative. The white net mindset. I don't know, maybe it depends on the person.

Perez: Do you feel like abolishing law enforcement would do anything? What is your stance on that?

Graham: Probably, because we have been keeping our community safe since before 1491. There is always gonna be crime, right. Typically, if someone committed a crime, back then we didn't have enrollment. You just isolate them from the community, or either they would go to war. I really don't know. I think if we abolish the police, we need more Indigenous social workers. People that are better equipped to deal with alcoholism. That's a problem in the Indigenous community. That is where the squaw stereotype came from, which I talked about in my thesis. If you want to read it, I can send it to you. It probably will help contextualize everything that I've talked about.

Perez: Alright, so I'm going to take us into our last question. What steps can youth activists take to support the Afro-Indigenous community?

Graham: Talk to Afro-Indigenous people. It's the same thing with how white allies are helping with BLM. You don't want to overstep your bounds, but you want to uplift Afro-Indigenous voices. Do not speak for us, but you can include us. Like today. Aminah was like "look reach out to Ashley." I love Aminah because even though she is Afro-Indigenous, she does acknowledge that she is white passing. Something as simple as that because while we are both Afro-Indigenous, our experiences are a little bit different. You have anti-blackness, and then you have colorism. Even though we are both Afro-Indigenous, she's going to get treated a little bit better, because she is lighter. She does have green eyes. Whereas I have braids, and I'm dark skinned. Just reaching out to folks like myself, Melanin Mvskoke, she has like over 40k. She is a great voice just listening in. We are all over Instagram. I think that is why we have people shook. They're like, "where was this five years ago? I don't know what happened. Something must have been in the air." You know what, we are tired of being silenced. Research and just listening to folks. I am in a couple of group chats that have an activist in it. Honestly, colleges. Going to the library, the archives will be a cool place. That's where I spend a lot of my time.

Perez: Great. Well, thank you for meeting with me today. This was very helpful. It is definitely interesting to see the different perspectives of the three people. You definitely offered a lot of information. I was really excited about that. If you are willing to share your thesis with me, I would love to read it!

Graham: Honey I will send it to you right now. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to interview me and allowing this to flow with all the emotions because it is very heavy. I appreciate you, and I'm very grateful for this. Thank you so much.

Perez: Now of course thank you have a good rest of your day!

Graham: You too.

Perez: Bye bye