



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 27 with Darla Antoine

Anti-Racist Genealogy Research (For Everyone)

September 17, 2018

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(Excerpt from today's show by Darla Antoine)

But then you can really get deeper into that and find out more that would fulfill this desire to know who your ancestors are, meaning, like, where did they come from? What do they value? What were their rituals? All of those things. That's where I think it goes from genealogy to more of like ancestral reverence and ancestral connection.

(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Intro]

[0:00:26]

Amber: Hello friends, and welcome again to Medicine Stories. I'm Amber Magnolia Hill. This is Episode 27. And we've got Darla Antoine back to talk about anti-racist genealogical research.

So if you're a White person, the very fact that you can access genealogical records as far back as 700 years ago or more, is because of racism and White supremacy, settler colonialism, slavery. The White privilege of owning homes, getting education, and intergenerational wealth have all left paper trails; trails that you can follow to piece together your ancestry in ways that people of color cannot.

So how do you honor, celebrate, and become excited about finding your ancestors while reconciling the racism that makes it possible? That is, in part what we talked about. And if you are a person of color, you have some very real hurdles to cross in your genealogical research, including White bias and intergenerational trauma triggers, knowing where to look for information, and how to take care of yourself when you find those triggers is a must when considering beginning genealogical research. So that's the other part of what we talked about today and what Darla is webinar, Anti-racist Genealogical Research, is all about.

What I just read is Darla's writing and those are her words. And so, yeah, what we talked about today, this conversation is based on a webinar that Darla put together that I watched, followed up on a lot of the resources from, took action on, and as a part of this podcast release, Darla and I really wanted to make this webinar accessible to everyone, especially people of color who are going to have a harder time with genealogical research, and maybe, you know, living in intergenerational poverty and not have the resources to access awesome webinars like this one that Darla put together. And it's just so, so phenomenal and thorough. So we decided to make this available for free for everyone, not just patrons of the podcast, although it does live at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. You can go there and you will find a post related to this episode. It's not behind a paywall.

And thank you so much to Darla for making this work. She put so much into this, into this webinar available for free. It's such a awesome gift. So you know, if you're... if you want to go deeper, go much, much deeper and have over 40 different resources available to you, as well to continue going even deeper, beyond just what we can talk about in an hour long interview, then check that out Patreon.com/MedicineStories, free for everyone.

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Amber: So the webinar is also a part of a larger online course that Darla has put together called *The Discovery and Reverence Course*, all about connecting with your ancestors, you know, both through genealogical research and fact finding, and through larger ancestral practices that can, you know, tune you in and give you the foundation from which to build an actual living relationship with your forebearers, with the people who made you who you are.

So as part of Darla and my desire to make this more accessible, Darla created a special link that will also be in that same Patreon post to access the entire online course at half-off. So if you're into that, if that works for you, you can do that there. But you can definitely also download the whole anti-racist genealogical webinar entirely for free.

So today we're going to talk about:

- How genealogy is America's favorite form of ancestral reverence (and the difference between genealogy and ancestry)
- The story of Darla's maternal Indigenous grandmother and White grandfather and their union and the legacy that it left.
- The construction of Whiteness in early America and how European people lost their ancestral cultures in order to become "White"
- White bias in DNA tests and considerations for people of color interested in taking a test
- The history of the One Drop rule for Black folk and blood quantum for Native Americans
- Ideas for people with settler ancestry who wish to make cultural reparations
- Manifest Destiny & how oppressors need to make up myths for why they deserve to oppress people
- Genealogy research self care ideas for people of color
- Putting our personal family stories in a larger socio-historical context and why that's so important
- Project ideas for making something tangible out of your genealogical research
- Breaking down autosomal, mitochondrial, and Y chromosomal DNA and what those tests can reveal for you

- And the importance of forming a research question when engaging in genealogical research

[0:05:51]

Amber: So I'll give you Darla's bio real quick and then we'll just get right into it.

Darla Antoine is a mixed race, Okanagan tribal member, ancestral activist and healer, mother and accidental homesteader in the high mountains of Costa Rica. Darla helps mixed race and mixed culture seekers become rooted into place and lineage by combining her Master's degree in Food and Culture, ancestral healing and her own experiences as a mixed race woman and expat. And Darla studied under Daniel Foor, who was the guest and the most recent episode, number 26. And she is now I don't think "licensed" is the word but, you know, she has Daniel's blessing to continue the work that he has brought into the world and, you know, working through his framework with, of course, her own spin on it, her own perspective, her real focus on food, which is amazing.

And so I just mentioned that because so many people loved, **loved** the episode with Daniel, and it's just been really cool just in the last week, like a few days before I'm recording this, that Darla — Again, it's not a license. I don't know what... I don't know what you got there, Darla — but like her photo is now on Daniel's website as someone with the official blessing to carry this work forth, who's gone through the entire program.

And, you know, as Daniel mentioned at the end, in case you didn't make it all the way to the end of that episode — which happens a lot when you look at the stats you see, you know, of course, people just drop off the longer an episode goes — but there's a lot of people working using Daniel's framework. A lot of different types of people of different backgrounds so that, you know, anyone who's wishing to find a safe person, a person who feels safe for them, who they resonate with, maybe someone with a similar background, has faced similar life circumstances or challenges, can find the right ancestral practitioner for themselves.

And of course, you can also read Daniel's book, *Ancestral Medicine*, if you don't want to work with someone, or check out Darla's online course and this free webinar, as, you know, beginning steps to take along the path of ancestral discovery.

All right, let's check out this conversation with Darla Antoine. Thank you so much Darla, for doing this work and for talking to me about it on the show.

(Transitional Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Interview Begins]

[0:08:31]

Amber: Okay, hey, Darla, welcome back.

Darla: Hi, Amber. Thanks so much for having me.

Amber: Yeah, you are the first guest who's come back for a second interview.

Darla: Yay! I feel really honored. *(both laugh)*

Amber: Yeah, it's... I didn't think that would happen for a while, not that I had any set plan about it. But then I saw that you released this webinar, Anti-racist Genealogical Research, and I was really interested in what you had to say about that because, you know, the more I do this work, and the more I write and speak and teach about ancestry, the more I've realized that genealogy, as it's set up in this country and the major resources that people use, really works best for White people. And that is something I didn't really realize as a, you know, White person with almost 100% European background. It was working for me, and I didn't realize it wasn't working for other people until that was pointed out to me. And I felt really poorly resourced as far as helping people of color to get through these roadblocks. So your webinar is fantastic. And I'm very grateful to you for talking to me about it today.

Darla: Thank you. Yeah, me too.

Amber: So maybe we can start by having you explain why genealogy works better for White people and what sort of obstacles people of color face.

Darla: Sure. And I realized this because I am part Native and part White, and I wanted to learn more about my Indigenous ancestry, and I am an enrolled Indigenous tribal member, but I... And I've been interested in ancestry since I was a teenager, really, and I dabbled in some ancestral research then. And I just knew then that it was a lot easier to find information about the White side of my family versus the native side of my family. And then it's really just been the last couple of years that I've been able to name why that is.

And so genealogy research works for those with White ancestry because it works because of White supremacy and racism. Because White people had the right to vote, White people had the right to own land, White people were able to, through the Homestead Act when the United States was first being founded, they were able to get parcels of land that were taken from Indigenous peoples in order to create a homestead and create a family and start claiming the land for the US government. The US government gave them allotments of land, and all of these things have left paper trails.

And even as recently as modern times, there are communities and cities and in suburbs that have clauses — I'm not sure that's the right word — but housing acts that are specifically developed to get White people into housing into areas without leaving room for people of color. And so all of that leaves a paper trail. And then it also allows people who have those benefits to gather wealth, wealth that they can't use in one lifetime, and so that becomes intergenerational wealth, and then that gets passed on to their descendants and that also creates a paper trail.

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Darla: White people have also been historically given preference, especially White males, for higher education. And again, all of that leaves a paper trail all of that feeds into access to more resources, access to more wealth, and it just, you know, self-perpetuates a paper trail that you can now follow to find out who your ancestors were and what they're up to and what they did.

Newspapers have largely been White men, again, running the newspapers and writing the articles and framing the stories. And so it would be other White men who get written about in these articles that you can now go find. And yeah, so it's all just a system that works because of the racism and the White supremacy that the country has been founded on.

And there are ways that you can, as a person of color, that you can work around as well. And there are ways as a White person who you can take advantage of this while at the same time recognizing the imbalance that's created and making cultural reparations, doing things to help sort of right the wrong, if that, you know, like, bring a little more balance back the other way.

Amber: Mmhmm. I love that. We'll talk about all of that.

[0:13:02]

Amber: I was really struck by this thing you said that genealogy is America's favorite form of ancestral reverence. And so this is somewhat in contrast to, as we spoke about when you were on the podcast before, other cultures, people besides Westerners, and Americans and people in the past, of course, ancestral reverence was a foundation of their lives. And we've really lost that in the West now, but we're into genealogy. We do genealogy.

So maybe we can define like, the difference, as you see it, between ancestry and genealogy.

Darla: Yeah, that's like a difference. And I think I'm not the first person to say that. I think, actually, my mentor, Daniel Foor, I might have heard him say that, and I've heard a couple other people say that genealogy is America's favorite form of ancestral reference, but it is because we're hungry for this connection. We're hungry to know who we are and where we come from.

And those same benefits that most White people have inherited, that I was just talking about, they came at a cost, they came at a price, and that price was losing your culture, your culture and your language, and your rituals and ceremonies from the old world. Those sort of had to be left at the shores in order for your ancestors to fully assimilate and become American and claim those rights as the "first Americans." So it came at a price and that was the price.

And I think that this whole genealogical research is, when people get interested in that, what they're really hungry for is to understand who are we, where did we come from, what's important to us, what are our values, in a way that goes deeper than the more superficial veneer of recent Americana because... And we all have a sense I think inside that this dominant American culture is pretty shallow. And I mean that like it doesn't go back. It doesn't go very deep. It doesn't go back very far. It's not really nourishing to our souls in a lot of ways because in the grand scheme of things, it is so new in the world, this American culture.

Yeah, so your question was the difference between ancestry and genealogy? Is that right?

Amber: Mm hmm.

Darla: Yeah. So for me that's that ancestry, that need to know who we are and where we come from, drives genealogy. Whereas genealogy, like in technical terms, would be more of just like a pedigree, or, you know, being able to list off some names and dates like your great great

grandparents their dates of birth and death and their names. Those very basic facts sort of make up the genealogy and are what people look for. But then you can really get deeper into that and find out more that would fulfill this desire to know who your ancestors are, meaning like, where did they come from? What do they value? What were their rituals? All of those things. That's where I think it goes from genealogy to more of like ancestral reverence and ancestral connection.

Amber: Yeah, I think, you know, of ancestry as just being much wider than genealogy. Genealogy is one path into ancestry, but it's a very specific, like, yeah, paper trails, facts, dates, names. And it's awesome, and you want to do that to know who the people actually were, but then you can step into a much wider way of relating through other ancestral practices.

Darla: You can put more emotion in it beyond that.

[0:16:46]

Amber: Perhaps, too, we could kind of start by you telling us about your grandparents.

Darla: Sure, which ones?

Amber: Your, well, I think they're your mother's people, I would assume, that you speak about in this webinar.

Darla: Yes, yes. Okay, so yeah, this was interesting. I think I realized something in this webinar as I was recording it, I realized something live and on air, which is kind of funny to hear myself on the replay, but my...

So my maternal grandfather was a White man, and he was 32 years older than my grandmother, who was an Indigenous woman, and so this was in the 1950s. They fell in love. I believe he owned, like, an apple orchard that she worked in, and they fell in love, but then they had four children together, and they had a large cattle ranch that they work together. And I'm told they love each other very much, but because he was so much older than my grandmother, he died when my mom was, like, around 12 years old. And he died living with my grandmother and my mom and her siblings of a heart attack, I believe. He was in his late 70s at that time.

And he had a White wife, a White legal wife, who he was estranged from, but divorce was frowned upon in the 1950s. And even today, sometimes it's easier just to be estranged than actually getting a divorce. But it was absolutely illegal for a White man to marry a brown woman and vice versa.

Amber: It was literally illegal?

Darla: It was literally illegal. Loving v. Virginia hadn't happened yet, so they couldn't get married. And this is where I feel like a little bit like he had all the power here. Why didn't he do better by my grandmother and their children?

Because when he died his White wife and their White children, who were young adults at that time, like, probably in their 20s, they came and took everything from my grandmother, and from my grandmother and my mom and her siblings, and left them like dirt, dirt, dirt, poor, you know. Nothing to their name so no tools, no nothing because they could. They had a legal right to, but

also it was an extreme deep act of racism that caused them to do that, too, without any empathy or without any sort of sympathy.

[0:19:13]

Darla: And what I realized in the webinar, though, was that my grandfather was born in like the late 1800s, which I thought was just amazing, actually. Like, I have a grandfather who was born in the 1800s like, 1890 somewhere around there, and I was just that's really, really something to think about. Like, whoa 1800s.

Amber: Yeah. Because I think, as you said, most people your age, our generation, our grandparents were born in like the 20s or 30s.

Darla: Mm-hmm, a whole different life experience, a whole different generation, and I just didn't realize it was that close to me until I saw it there. Through the genealogical research I found on paper.

And so in the webinar I'm going through that line because of those, because of that dynamic. All I knew was his name because my uncle had that name, and my cousin also has that name, which is a really cool name. It's Royal Caesar.

Amber: Wow. (*Amber laughs*)

Darla: Yeah, my uncle goes by Caesar, and my cousin goes by Roy. So I wanted to learn more about that, because that stuff was obviously the line I knew least about. So I went into genealogy trying to find more about that. And since it's a White man, a White man's lineage, I was very quickly able to trace it back to the 1630s in Massachusetts, before I got into any sort of a brick wall. And I mean, like, I spent two hours, and I got back down back to the 1600s.

Amber: Wow. And is that the farthest you've been able to go back in any of your lines?

Darla: So far, yes, but I also haven't put as much effort into it. I think the other lines I've gotten my other White grandparents I've gotten to 1700s. And then... But my Indigenous grandparents, I can only get to my great great. Yeah, my great, great grandparents. So my grandmother's grandparents is as far back as I can get. And all I can get is names. I can't even get dates for them.

Amber: Mmhmm. I'm curious because you knew your grandmother, right?

Darla: Oh, yes. We're very close. Yeah.

Amber: I'm curious if you were raised being told this story, or if it was something that was told to you when you were older and maybe asked about it.

Darla: I think it was something I was told when I was older and asked about it. Yeah.

[0:21:25]

Amber: So something that I found so interesting that you talked about, and I took your suggestion and listened to the podcast series *Seeing White* on the podcast called Scene on Radio is the creation of Whiteness.

Darla: Yeah, what did you think that's incredible, right?

Amber: I just... Yeah, I mean... So what was so interesting to me listening to that — and I ordered the two books that the two people that he's mostly interviewed at least in the first few episodes — is that we tend to think of racism in this country as sort of growing out of slavery, of course, and colonization. But the idea that people truly thought that people of color were lesser than them, that that's what White people thought.

But really what these books prove is that it was — and it just I feel somewhat shameful that I didn't realize this before, that I didn't already know this — that it was really just a power play. And it was all... it was, like, laws being passed so that White people — and White men, especially — had more power, more opportunity for economic growth, and more opportunity for moving forward in the world by oppressing peoples who they thought would get in their way and take a slice of their pie.

Darla: Yeah, and I didn't know that either until I heard this podcast, and then you think back on the education we got as kids in the public education system, and maybe even if you went to a private, you had a private education, that's totally the story we were told. Or it was implied heavily enough that that's the story we created was that, yeah, people just thought that White people were better, and now we don't think that way anymore, or we shouldn't think that way anymore, blah, blah, blah, but no, yeah, you're right. It was the exact opposite.

And what I found really interesting in this podcast series was that it, because it's so true today, is that the White politicians who were in power created this racial divide in order to get White common men, because women didn't have the right to vote then, to vote for the White men's interests, the powerful man's interests.

Up until when people first started coming to the US, anyone could be a slave. It didn't matter what color skin you had, you could be stolen and put into slavery. You could be an indentured servant. And then it very, very clearly became something that people of color were slaves, and White people were not slaves. Some White people might have been indentured servants because of whatever reasons or because they had high debt or something, but it wasn't because they were inferior, deemed inferior by their skin color.

And so the White men in power, according to this podcast, they realize that the minority were going to rise up against them. And the minority was made up of people of all colors. And so what they did was they created this racial divide so that White folk, the normal common White folk, would be like, "Oh, well, I look like this man in power, and I can have these things that this White man in power has, because he cares about me, and he cares about my interest and we're the same, and these other people are other. They're different. They're lesser."

And so it created this lie, and it got the White majority, who were not powerful and rich, to vote against their own interests, to vote for the interests of the White powerful men, just so that they would not vote for the interests of other minorities who were seemed different and lesser than

Does that make sense? And we see that happening today, too.

Amber: Yeah, exactly. When you were talking about it, I was like, oh my gosh, that's exactly what happened with the Trump election. And then you said that a minute later.

Darla: Yes.

Amber: Yeah, so what these two books... one is called *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* by Ibram X Kendi. And the other one is called *The History of White People* by Neil Irvin Painter.

[0:25:35]

Amber: And yeah, just to try to simplify it even more basically people in the beginning of America were identified more by class and by economic opportunity, and poor people were identified more with each other; they were in the same situation. And these rich White men were like, "Oh, we got to get them to identify as races so that we can get more White men to vote for us and just continue resourcing ourselves..."

Darla: — Exactly.

Amber: "... by oppressing other people."

Darla: And it's still happening today. That's why we have a whole bunch of White men in power in the US, even though they are really the minority, race-wise.

Amber: Right, and don't give a shit about the poor, White people who voted them into power.

Darla: Not at all. They do not at all, and I grew up in blue-collar America. I know that they don't give a shit about the blue collar White people.

Amber: Right. There's so much to talk about. But as I will have already said in the intro to this, you are giving away this webinar for free. So we're not going to be able at all to get into every amazing thing that you reveal here.

[0:26:40]

Amber: But let's talk about DNA tests and the White bias in DNA tests.

Darla: Sure. So just like genealogy has been formed to... is more available to White people, DNA tests are more available to White people. However, it's for different reasons. It's reasons that aren't as well-founded. It's just because White is so common and dominant. That's the main reason why genealogy tests are available to White people.

Because what they do when they take your DNA is they test it against other people who've taken the DNA, and they see what you have in common with what they have in common. So how I think it works, the way I understand it, is that they've got, you know, a database of people who've taken DNA tests, and they've studied this DNA, and they know that this comes from here, this comes from there, and that comes from there.

So instead of doing all of that research on your DNA, breaking it down, studying it carefully, they just put your DNA in the database and see where it matches with the other DNA that's already been collected, and they pull out your information according to that.

So — and I'm assuming that most geneticists are probably White, and most of the population that they have tested are White, and so that's the largest database they have to pull from. So when you get your DNA test — and I believe the ethnic percentages that you get is based on your autosomal DNA — so it can get really specific for people with European roots, because they have a lot of data from that.

So even though Europe is a very small portion of the world, they can really zoom in and be like, “You've got this percent from here, this percent from over here, and then 200 miles over here in this other country, you've got this percentage.”

Whereas you get large areas of land that are not White, such as the Americas, such as Africa, even though these have huge populations, and they're huge areas of land, the DNA results are very vague. It'll be like, “You've got a little bit of North American, Indigenous blood, and it's from over here, and you've got a little South American blood.” And that's it. South American. It's not like Colombian, Brazilian, Peruvian, whatever. It's just South American. Um, so that's where the White bias comes into the DNA test.

And the DNA tests aren't as accurate for people of color. So whether it's skewed too high or too low, whatever percentages are giving you for this or that it's, it's probably not accurate.

Amber: And that's because people of color, people from those land masses, people with ancestry from those land masses, have less resources to be able to take these DNA tests, and therefore aren't adding to this larger pool of information from which these percentage breakdowns are taken when people take the test.

Darla: Exactly.

[0:29:36]

Darla: And then me, as someone who's an enrolled tribal member, I took a DNA test, and then I did it all, like, confidentially, but I heard about someone, a friend of a friend who did a DNA test, but she like made up a fake name and a fake email address to get the results, and I was like “Why didn't I do that?”

Because I... literally, the US government is hoping that I will breed out, and I have. My kids aren't eligible for tribal enrollment, and that's exactly what the US government wants. They want, in another hundred years, for there not to be enough Okanagan people to have claim to their land and to their resources anymore.

So what have I done by taking a DNA test? Could that be used against me or used against my descendants in the future? Or maybe it could be used in a way to support their claim? I don't know.

But the possibility of it being used for harm against me exists because of the political and socio-economical interests of the US and Canadian governments over my racial identity.

Amber: Right. And so this is something else White people don't have to think about, you know.

[0:30:38]

Amber: When I had Lola Venado on the podcast and asked if she had done a DNA test, she was like, "No, that's not safe for me, you know." And I was like, "Wow."

So can you just — I mean, this country is so insane, and I just... this country is racism. That's like, that's just all equate America with at this point.

Can you tell us about the one-drop rule and blood quantum?

Darla: Sure, yeah. So the one-drop rule is the rule that was stated way back in the day that if you had one drop of African blood in you, you were Black. And that's why we think of Obama as the first Black president. And he was, but he was also half White, and he was raised by a White mother, I'm sure, culturally, he probably felt more White than Black. And that's just a reality that mixed race and mixed black people have to deal with.

But yeah, the point is one drop of African blood makes you Black. One drop. Whereas the other way, the opposite was true for Native Americans, and that's because the US government wanted native land. They wanted Native resources. They wanted us to just disappear and never be there and never have any claims to anything, so they could do whatever they want.

Like you see that now with Bears Ears National Park, with all of the pipelines. It would be really convenient for corporate America and for the US government iff native people weren't there saying, "Wait a minute, this is my land. We're a sovereign nation. We say no. You can't do this."

So that means blood quantum was created, and now it's a form of internalized oppression that is being perpetuated in tribes. And so what blood quantum is, is you have to have so much Indigenous blood in order to be Indigenous. So as where one drop of African blood made you Black, you need to have X amount of drops to be Native. And if you don't have enough, then you're not Native, and you have no claim over the resources or the territory of the Native people.

And that is becoming a problem because Native Americans are the highest racial minority that are marrying outside of their own race. So more Native Americans marry White people or Asian people or Black people than they marry other Native Americans.

And now tribal enrollments are dropping, and tribes are scrambling to figure out what qualifies someone as Native American. What, how do we get around this blood quantum? How do we repair this wound? What blood quantum is left? Because if we keep this up pretty soon, we're not going to have any members in our tribes. And that's exactly what the US government wants.

[0:33:24]

Amber: Hmm. And that's gotten quite contentious in some tribes, right? These rules that are set around what percentage of DNA you have, and who's in and who's out, and it's like torn families apart.

Darla: Oh, absolutely. It tears families apart because you could be 1/16th but have lived in your tribal homelands and know ceremonies and be involved in rituals, but not get that status of actually being a tribal member.

Or you could be three-quarters or full-blooded Native American but you're growing up in the middle of New York City, and you're so separated, and you don't know anything about your ceremony and your culture because of forced assimilation. Who's more Indigenous? Who has the right to be enrolled, and who doesn't? Or vote, you know, how do you make that call?

It can get very, very sticky, and very messy, very quickly.

[0:34:18]

Amber: Mm-hmm. So the... what I, aside from the 40 resources that you give that I followed up on many of them to dig more deeply into everything that you talked about here, my favorite part of this webinar was the cultural reparation actions to take.

So can you tell us some? Tell some of your ideas for the ways that White people and people with settler ancestry can begin to make cultural reparations.

Darla: Yes, so cultural reparations are a great thing to do.

So if you're a White person, and you're listening to this one, I don't think it's necessary to feel, like, horribly ashamed and depressed about your ancestry. You don't know what you don't know. You didn't choose all of the privilege that comes with being White. You were born into it, and you're probably just waking up to it because you've been surrounded in it your whole life, and that's okay. But once you know, it's time to do better.

So cultural reparations are a great way to do that and some forms of cultural reparation that you'll see these days are such as people asking one another, "What are your preferred pronouns?" Asking, saying, "I am living and working from such and such territory that belongs to such and such tribal nations, you know, honoring the fact that I'm on this land that is unceded, or that was stolen from these people. And I just want to take a second and acknowledge that." That's a form of cultural reparation.

Other forms of cultural reparation can be like if you found out that you had slaveholders in your family, you can donate money to ACLU.

I found out, through this research for this webinar, that the cemeteries of slaves are endangered because there's no money to support the upkeep. And so the cemeteries are just crumbling, and so a lot of information is being lost when those cemeteries crumble. And also, you know, just honoring those ancestors, the slaves and the life, the hard lives they had and the difficulties they experienced, we want to keep... We don't want to be for nothing. We don't want them to just disappear. So the fact that the cemeteries are disappearing is a real problem.

And you could, as a form of culture reparation, volunteer to clean up one of these cemeteries, you could donate some money to help others clean up the cemetery. Acts like that are forms of cultural reparations that can seem really simple, but that actually can make a really large step to bringing balance back in between the races.

Amber: I really, really love that idea specifically, just as someone who loves cemeteries very much and very much values their place in our ancestor reverence.

[0:37:10]

Amber: So I was remembering that when my little one was sick a couple months ago, and she was just falling asleep on me, nursing all the time, that I just spent a lot of time on the ancestry.com app on my phone during those hours and hours of being stuck under a baby.

And I found a... so my dad's people are all from the South, both of his parents. His dad was born in South Carolina, his mom was born in Arkansas. They're all really poor. And as far as I know, there haven't been any, you know, no plantation owners or big things like that, but during one of those nursing, nursing sessions, I did find a last will and testament in which one of my ancestors gave a woman to his daughter. Yes.

And so after listening to your webinar, I was like, "Okay, I'm going to find that person again. And I'm going to see where they live. And I'm going to look for a slave cemetery to donate money to in that state." And I was not able to find them. I spent two hours looking back, but I'm sure I will, you know. I'll keep looking, and it's there somewhere, obviously. And if I don't find them soon, then I'll find another cemetery to donate to, but I just really, that feels like very meaningful action to me. So I really thank you for giving me that idea.

And I'm also going to just get more involved with the local Nisenan population here, where I live in the foothills of the Sierras in Nevada County, and really, you know, honor the people who were almost, almost entirely wiped out when the Gold Rush hit, and when people came from all over the world to try and extract all the resources they could from the lands of these people.

[0:39:05]

Amber: So you have some other ideas here, too, like advocating for humane immigration policies?

Darla: Yes, I think that's a great idea, especially because it can be really complacent to be an American, or a North American. And with all of these immigration things happening, and it can, on the one hand, it's like this is horrible, and I'm going to vote against this, or I'm going to donate money to make sure families get reunited. And that's all really good.

But then when you stop and think about how your ancestors came here, and what they did when they got here, and that's a whole 'nother level of we really owe a debt to the people, the Indigenous people of this continent, to make sure that they are safe, and they are welcomed.

Indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America have immigrated across boundaries, across territorial boundaries, for thousands of years. It's really only the last 100 years where this has become problematic and illegal, and it's all xenophobia.

It's all about White men trying to control the populace, which they can't do if they're getting a bunch of Indigenous people, or just brown people from Central and South America. That makes the White men in power really uncomfortable, because they don't like... they know that very quickly the majority of the interests of their populace is not going to reflect their interests.

And so it's just a grab for power. It's just more power, trying to steal more power. And when you steal more power from other people, which White people have been doing forever, and I really, like, I'm interested in spiritually exploring this. Like what was it? What was the wound created and why, in White people, that made them want to steal power from other people?

Which never works, right? When you steal power. You don't get any more power. You actually lose even more power.

So what is the wound that happened there? What is the root of that story?

Amber: This reminds me of something that a friend posted on the Fourth of July it's like, so your people came to America in one of four ways. They were either Indigenous, they were slaves, they were immigrants, or they were refugees. That's it. This is how America came to be populated: one of those four ways.

That just made me think of that, and how I would just like to shove that in the face of all the, you know, America loving, patriotic people who aren't looking at the real roots of how the Americas were populated.

[0:41:55]

Darla: Yeah, and I think this goes back to manifest destiny, and I really have a problem with Manifest Destiny as an adult. And I remember having been uncomfortable with it as a child learning about it, but, of course, not having the world experience or the vocabulary to name what it is.

This whole idea of manifest destiny is that basically that God deemed these White people so holy and worthy, that it was his will that they come over here and create a new wonderful democracy, that would be the best country in the world, and would have so much freedom for everyone. And aren't we so lucky that we were that we were born here, and that this is the life we get to have because our forefathers were so worthy and perfect?

And it's like, oh my God, it's actually the exact opposite of all that.

Amber: Yeah, isn't that insane? One of those authors, when she was being interviewed on the Seeing White podcasters, I think it was Nell Irvin Painter talks about yeah, that these White people had to believe that the reason they "deserved" all of this was because they were special. They were worthy of it. And so they came up with these ideas like manifest destiny to justify what they knew were atrocious actions.

[0:43:12]

Amber: So you also give ideas for people of color for genealogy self-care.

Darla: Yes. So when you're doing genealogy research, if you decide to go down this route, and you're a person of color, and this applies to White people, too, but White people experience less of this overall. So I'm not really concerned with their self-care as much. I'm speaking for myself, too, because I identify as a mixed race person. So like when I'm researching my Indigenous lineage, it's very painful to only be able to get back three generations and to not even see more than that. Not even see the dates that go with those names.

And like for other people, if they go back far enough they gonna run into slavery, and they might even run into advertisements for their ancestors in newspapers where their ancestors are being advertised as slaves for sale. Or where they're they see, we can find an article or a story where their ancestors were ripped away from their family as part of the slave trade or as part of whatever.

And that can be really painful. That can be really visceral. That can be heartbreaking.

And so, when you're going back looking for these names, and these dates, and these stories, you just, I really want people of color to exercise self-care, make sure they're in a good emotional state before they even try to do it, be prepared to find something really upsetting and heart wrenching.

And the benefit of doing that is to remember those ancestors, to know their stories, to not let them be forgotten, too, in the sands of time. But also, it can help pieces sort of click together. Like all of a sudden you can be like, "Oh, that makes sense. That's why this part of my family has always had trauma or struggles around this," you know. Whatever, that this story, this heartbreaking story, sort of explains that, and that can be really healing, as painful as it is to find, too.

Amber: Yeah, I like that you give the idea if, if they're feeling resourced enough to do this, to really always put your personal family stories into a larger historical context to give you perspective on you know, the bigger picture and how this was playing out in your individual ancestor's life.

Darla: Absolutely, yeah, we can't forget that context because it's really easy to just look back from where we are today and and see how painful and hurtful it is, of course. But then put a little context in that, and it can be a lot easier for you to understand how it happened or just take some of the weight of the trauma off of you and your family, and put it on the shoulders of the collective culture a little bit. Because it really is that collective culture's issues that created these other specific forms of trauma that each of us have in our families.

[0:46:14]

Amber: Mm hmm. And I like this, you say, "Have a plan to do something with the information you find and collect."

What do you suggest? What do you mean by that?

Darla: Well, I think for two reasons, one, having a plan of what to do with this research will help you find what you're looking for, will help you form your research questions. It will give you an end goal, and it will even keep you going when the trail gets cold, or when it becomes tedious. It can keep you going even if it's, you know, keeping you going over several months or years.

But then also when you're talking about looking into genealogy and finding trauma that's really hard to look at or to bring to the surface, having a bigger goal, a bigger reason, of what you're going to do with this information can be really helpful, and it can give you a sense of purpose.

And I think just as humans, we always like to assign meaning to something. Even when it's not really there we like to. And I'm not saying it's not... but you know, like, even when small things happen, we're like, "Well, this happened for a reason. This happened because this." We want to know that something meant something.

And so one by doing this research and finding the — and even coming up with the traumatic things that have happened in your family — that means something.

Their name hasn't been forgotten. Their story hasn't been forgotten, but don't keep it to yourself. Don't let it tear your heart apart and your emotions apart. Think about what you're going to do with it.

So are you going to advocate for the rights of immigrants? Are you going to donate money to that slavery cemetery? You know, let it be something bigger than just yourself, to honor their memory to honor their story, and then to help take that energy of that shock and grief that you might feel when you come across information, find something to put that energy into so that it doesn't just have to sit in your body.

Amber: Like creating a book about your ancestors? Or... So, okay, I'm kind of getting into what you talk about later with ways to organize your genealogy.

Darla: Yeah. So there's so many things you can do. Yeah, you can create a book, you can write a story, likem you can write a novel about it, a historical novel. You can just create a book with all of the information and share it with your family.

And one suggestion is — because genealogy can get pricey and putting together these books can get pricey — so you can even like crowdfund a genealogical project, like, amongst your family members. Let your family members know this is what you're up to, this how much time it's taking, this much money you're estimating it's going to take. Would you like to donate 50 bucks to crowdfund this genealogical project? You can create memory books to give to your family at family reunions or holidays.

Or you can just be the genealogical memory keeper of the family and have this information, and you'd probably be surprised which family members start coming to you, asking you questions and asking for a little bit more information, or some stories about this or that.

So memory books, like I said, you can create novels of other stories. These are all really good ideas.

[0:49:25]

Amber: I really appreciate all your practical suggestions for genealogy research, and what to do with it in here, because I've kind of realized this over the years, but doing this webinar really made me realize that I am so sloppy in my genealogical research.

Like the story I told earlier about finding this ancestor who gave a human to another human, and then I just lost it after that, you know. The baby woke up. I closed the app and was like, "Wait, who was that? I don't even remember what line that was in."

And I do that a lot as I get like, you know, that feeling of, like, excitement when you're finding new people, and you're going back and like, "Oh, they lived here, I didn't know this. This is so exciting." You call it "ancestor-collecting". I have absolutely done that, especially in the beginning when I was on ancestry.com. And, you know, you can just, like, fill in your family tree with how other people's family trees say are the ancestors of your ancestors.

And it's only about in the last few years that I've been like, whoa, I have to dial it back so hard and, like, make sure there's actual documentation and paper trails saying yes, these people are the parents of these people, you know, and making sure that everything matches up, and not just getting really excited and diving down one rabbit hole and then kind of forgetting about it when I sign off, and not doing anything with what I've learned or discovered during that, like, hour-long, excited, session of ancestry.com.

Darla: Yeah, yeah, it's really important to kind of keep a paper trail for yourself.

And then also, if you don't go any deeper, and you only do the ancestor-collecting of names and dates, then you don't get all these other stories such as one ancestor giving a slave to their daughter or whatever. You don't get those stories, and then you miss a chance to do some reparation work.

Amber: Exactly. And you know, that's the first thing that you have listed under here on cultural reparation ideas is "Confront slavery in your lineage."

And that made me think of, you know, the fact that I did lose that thread as soon as I found it, and that I remember hearing years ago that when Ben Affleck did, like, one of those genealogy shows on TV, that they found slave owners in his ancestry, and that he wouldn't let them say that on air. They didn't go into that in the final show that aired.

Darla: Oh my goodness. Yeah, he missed a huge opportunity right there.

Amber: Exactly. Yeah, and I don't want to miss those opportunities myself. So I'm glad it's being brought up. And yeah, I'm going to take some actual time, not just sitting on my app, you know, getting on the computer, set some time aside to try to retrace that and find that person again and find that document again, and understand more about what happened there. And to put it into the larger context of this freakin country,

[0:52:24]

Amber: I'm just noticing now. So I'm looking at your, the PDF that goes along with the webinar and getting back to DNA tests.

So I was wondering when we were talking about this, what would be the best test for people of color to take?

And it looks like perhaps you're recommending Ancestry. You say, "Most geographic regions for ethnicity." Am I right?

Darla: Yeah, they have — I haven't taken ancestry. I took a 23andme test — but according to what I found online that I could, they could have the most diverse representation of ethnicities. So you might get more information.

However, I just heard earlier today, and I haven't done any follow up research to verify this, but I just heard that Ancestry and 23andme are being merged. So look into that.

Amber: Oh, wow.

Darla: Yeah. So if you're thinking about an ancestry test, and you're a person of color, you might want to see how that changes either one of those tests, I'm not sure.

Amber: Wow, okay. Yeah, you break down like the five big DNA companies here and what sort of their strengths are. Okay.

Darla: If you are a person of color, and you're interested in getting an Ancestry test, I think they can be kind of fun, and there can be some really valuable information. Like I also said in the webinar, a second cousin found me through the DNA test that we both did through 23andme. He found me through the back end social network they have on the 23andme. 23andme matched us as relatives, and that was kind of fun and interesting. And so things like that can happen.

But I also really loved the idea of creating a fake email account, creating a fake name, and assigning that to your DNA, so that, especially as a personal color, like, that can just be another protection.

Amber: Right. And I think you talk about, too, that there are different privacy settings that you can enact or ask for.

Darla: Yeah, I think most of them, like my DNA is totally private, but they can... they can match me with relatives like they did with my cousin. They just sent him a note that said, "Hey, we think we found your second cousin," and then he sent me a note and he was like, "Yeah, we're second cousins."

[0:54:42]

Amber: Yeah, and something else that you talked about — and one of my best friends had a very real experience with this recently — is that surprising things can happen when you take these DNA tests and find people that you are related to.

Darla: Yeah, and find people that you didn't know you were so closely related to, like sharing grandparents or sharing even parents.

So family skeletons can be released through these DNA tests. And everyone probably thinks, "Oh, that won't happen to me." But I would say don't take a DNA test unless you're willing to let that information happen to you.

Amber: Yeah, a dear friend of mine found out that her father was not her father, and it was shocking to her and her sisters, and they would not have known if they hadn't done that. Their parents were planning on never telling them. Yeah. So yeah, be prepared before you before you take these tests that it might reveal things you're completely unprepared for.

Darla: And that you would rather not know. So if there's even a small chance that you might not have a parent or grandparent that you think you have, genetically-wise, then I'd say stay away from the DNA test.

There's so much... you don't need to do a DNA test to find out who your ancestors were. The genealogical research can help you. Even ancestral healing, ancestral journey work can help bring a lot of information to light, too. You can totally skip the DNA test.

I probably, if I could go back a year, I probably would not have done the DNA test. I did it on a whim. It didn't tell me anything I didn't already know, and now I'm like, oh shit, what have I done? Can this be used against me in the future or used against my descendants?

[0:56:29]

Amber: Right. And I am so glad that I did the DNA test because, as a White person, my ancestral culture is gone from me. It's, you know, I feel like... I talked about this in the first ever episode, interview episode, of this podcast. So it was Episode Two with Milla Prince, how so many White people feel like "I have no cultural identity. I have nothing. It's just like... I'm just America and hamburgers and TV." (*Amber laughs*)

So, for me, doing the autosomal DNA test and seeing like the, you know, inaccurate, but still somewhat reflective of reality, percentage breakdown of exactly where in Europe my ancestors came from was, like, super-heartening. It made me feel grounded in something, grounded somewhere, grounded in my people, and in the past, and it really opened up some fun avenues of research for me around who these people were. And like the plants, you know, as an herbalist, the plants that are native to those areas. And so I'm really glad that I did it.

[0:57:37]

Amber: Let's talk a little bit about, too — so that's the autosomal DNA test, where you get a rough percentage breakdown of ethnicity where your people are from — but then there's also mitochondrial DNA and Y chromosome tests.

What are those, and what is the difference between them?

Darla: Yeah, so we, to take you back to high school biology, we all have X, and X or Y chromosomes as possibilities.

And when we're fetuses, we're all females up until about 20 weeks, four months, of gestation. And then one of the... So we have two X chromosomes that makes a biologically female-gendered human. And then at around 20 weeks, one of those X chromosomes might break off and become a Y chromosome. So when you have an X and a Y chromosome that creates a male.

So all of us, any human, can find out their mitochondrial DNA because the X chromosome comes from the mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's mother's line. It's handed down. It doesn't really change much at all over thousands of years.

And so we can find out our haplogroup, which is where scientists believe we, where our lineage originated from, like 10,000 years ago.

Amber: So this is the mitochondria that you're talking about. Right?

Darla: Yeah, this is the mitochondria. It's also the X chromosome. Yeah, the X chromosome.

But only men have the Y chromosome. And so Y chromosome, the Y-DNA, is used to do paternity tests. It's used to go down your father's father's father's father's father's line and to way back when. You follow it back to where scientists believe that original man originated 10,000 years ago, as far back as they can go or something like that.

So you, as a woman, if you want to find your paternal haplogroup, you want to find out where your father, your paternal line, originated from thousands of years ago, you would need a paternal male relative to take that test for you because you don't have any Y-DNA. Yeah.

Amber: Right. So I had my own mitochondrial DNA tested years and years ago through the Genographic Project, which is a project I really love. And then I got my pure maternal haplogroup, which is V. And then I had my dad do a test a few years later. And so I got my paternal Y-line through him. And then I also got his mother's mitochondrial DNA haplogroup through him.

Darla: Oh, yeah. Nice. Great.

And that's often, too, where the family surprises can happen is when you're asking, or when someone gets their Y-DNA tested, because, you know, it's... we're always pretty sure who the mother of a child is, but the father of a child can not be who it's supposed to be or whatever. So that's where those surprises come, too, is getting that Y-DNA tested.

But yeah, I've been thinking about getting, having, asking my dad to take a test just to see what he's got going on, too, because my DNA test, I only got the autosomes from his line in there because my maternal line's Indigenous. So two X chromosomes take me back to North America.

[1:01:01]

Amber: I'm just gonna reiterate it because I find that this is really confusing for people.

So we all inherit mitochondrial DNA from our mothers. But only boys inherit the Y-DNA from their fathers.

So that's why a female taking this test is only going to show the mother line. But if you can have a male who you're closely related to take the test, it will show your father line, as well, through his DNA.

Darla: And the father's mother's X-DNA.

Amber: Yeah, I also want to clarify, this is something people are confused about as well, and I just don't want to put this idea in people's heads, that mitochondrial DNA is not X chromosome DNA, they're completely different things.

Darla: Oh good, 'cause I was calling them the same thing, so what's what's the nuance there?

Amber: Right? Because you would think they are the same thing, right? You kind of think of it as like the opposite of the Y-chromosome, the mother and father, but so I'm reading this. I just looked it up because I was like, I'm pretty that's not right. This is on yourgeneticgenealogist.com.

“Mitochondrial DNA is outside the nucleus of the cell as opposed to the 46 chromosomes, 23 pairs, which are located inside the cell nucleus. Inside the cell nucleus. There are 22 pairs of autosomal chromosomes plus the sex chromosomes, the X and the Y. In addition to the other 22 pairs of chromosomes, females inherit two X chromosomes, one from each parent, and males inherit one X from their mother and one Y chromosome from their father.”

It goes a little longer than that, but yeah.

Darla: Okay, good to know. I'll update my thing. I thought they were the same thing. So the mitochondrial is outside the nucleus, and we still inherited from our mothers, but it's not the same thing that we inherit as our sex gene or a sex chromosome.

Amber: Exactly. Yeah. It's really it's... mitochondria, it's so interesting. I love learning about it.

[1:03:00]

Amber: Okay, one, one more thing that I would like to touch on, and again, there's so much here, and the resources you give are incredible! Incredible. The books, the podcasts, other PDFs, and like courses and things that people have online.

I really like this idea — and obviously, it's something I need to do — of forming a research question.

Can you tell us more about that?

Darla: Yeah, so — and this isn't my idea. I found it on another genealogical tips website, but I really thought it was a good idea. So like we mentioned earlier, you can really get lost down rabbit holes when you're doing genealogical research. You can just start adding names and dates and collecting ancestors, and that can actually eat up a lot of time really quickly.

But if you go in there with a research question, it's going to help you get the information that you want without getting distracted. And I really like that idea. The same was true like when I was in grad school, and I had to write my master's thesis, the whole first two years of grad school were like, what's your research question? What's your research question? Because that really is going to inform what you get out of the research.

And so it seems simple, and you can easily overlook it. But really, it's just really great intention. It's an intention setting for your research.

So for me, like I was using in the webinar was, “I want to know more about my mother's father's line,” because I didn't know anything about it for the reasons we talked about earlier in this conversation. And so even though I was on ancestry.com, and I was getting all sorts of alerts for my other lineages, it helped me, like, come back and be like, “Okay, no, wait. I want to focus on this line. This is my goal.” And I was able to get back to, like I said, the 1630s with that line.

And again, that's just collecting names and dates, and that's not doing any deeper research than that yet, but that is my first research question for genealogical research. And that's going to keep me focused, and it's going to keep me returning back to that lineage looking for more answers until I get them, instead of dropping it or getting overwhelmed or getting distracted with other lineages.

[1:05:10]

Amber: Mm hmm. Yep. Which is exactly what I do. You also give ideas for organizing your research. These recommended resources I think are so incredible, and I can't wait to come back to while I am on ancestry looking back farther to broaden my scope when I'm looking for records and things. And the recommended resources will be really helpful for people of color, as well because you name some specific websites and books and ideas like discoverfreedman.com, Mexicangenealogy.info. You talk about heritage societies, such a great idea. I know there's a ton of those out there. There's all sorts of things that maybe I didn't know. We've been doing this for eight years. I really haven't gone beyond whatever ancestry.com is going to give me, and, of course, there's so much more out there.

Darla: There really is so much more, and that was one of the reasons why I wanted to put this webinar together, especially for people of color.

But even for White people, because ancestry.com and other genealogical websites, they've got some advertising power. They're all, like, on the forefront of our minds when we think about genealogy, and when we think about ancestors. Those are the first resources we think about, and they're great, and they're a good place to start, but they... and they're they're getting more information all of the time. But there are also other resources that might actually get you there quicker, that get you, depending on your research question, might get you the information you want more.

So even as a White person, if you find out that your great great grandfather came from the Netherlands, well, what sort of immigration records do they have in the Netherlands? Can you find his name in the Netherlands, when he left the Netherlands, versus just looking for him when he got to the US, for example. And so there might be, in the Netherlands, a whole bunch more information about his life before he came to America that you bet is what you're really looking for. Or that might just really satisfy your desire to know who he was better.

Amber: Thank you, Darla. You've just opened my mind in so many ways and helped me to see my own roots and the roots of this country in such a larger way. And I think that you've done an incredible thing here in giving these resources to, as you say, both people of color and White people, and all of us who have been affected by colonization and the beginnings of — we're speaking in America — so America.

Darla: Yeah, thank you. I'm glad it was valuable. I'm glad you got so much out of it. That makes me really happy.

Amber: Yeah. And I'm going to form my research question around finding that document again, and that ancestor and learning more about that story.

Darla: Good. Well, I can't wait to hear about it.

Amber: Yeah. Okay. Thanks so much, Darla.

Darla: Thank you, Amber.

(Exit Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Closing]

[1:08:13]

Amber: Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find my blog, handmade herbal medicines, past podcast episodes, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, I invite you to click the purple banner to take my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Plant Familiar?](#)" It's a fun and lighthearted quiz, but the results are really in depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with the medicine you are in need of.

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For a little more, you can access my herbal e-book or my small online course, and that's all there as a thank you, a HUGE thank you from me and from my guests for listening, for supporting this work. I love figuring out what I can gift to people on Patreon. It's so fun. And I love that Patreon makes it so that you can contribute for such a small amount each month.

I'm a crazy busy and overwhelmed mom and adding this project into my life has been a questionable move, for sure, but I love doing it, and I love the feedback I get from you all. And I just pray that Patreon allows me the financial wiggle room to keep on doing it while giving back to everyone who is listening.

If you're unable to do that, or if you'd like to support further, I would love it if you would subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. And if you would review the podcasts on iTunes, too, it really helps getting it into other ears. It means so much to me when I read those reviews. It's, like, the highlight of my week when I check them and see new ones.

People are amazing. You guys are wonderful. Thank you so much.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her song "Wild Eyes." It's one of my favorite songs of all time.

Thank you and I look forward to next time!