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Cover Art: Christian Lenape (Delaware) Interpreter

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Cover Art

Christian Lenape (Delaware) Interpreter

Ada Liu '20

2017. Charcoal, white conté crayon, and metallic markers on paper.

Native American interpreters played a crucial role during the treaty-making process between colonies and Native American tribes. Many of them were bilingual converted Christians and friends with white settlers. During the treaty councils, they translated conversations between European settlers and native tribes and gathered information for each side. As more immigrants arrived in the American colonies, they occupied more lands which were home to many native tribes. Frontier conflicts between settlers and Indians were frequent, and many of them became open warfare.

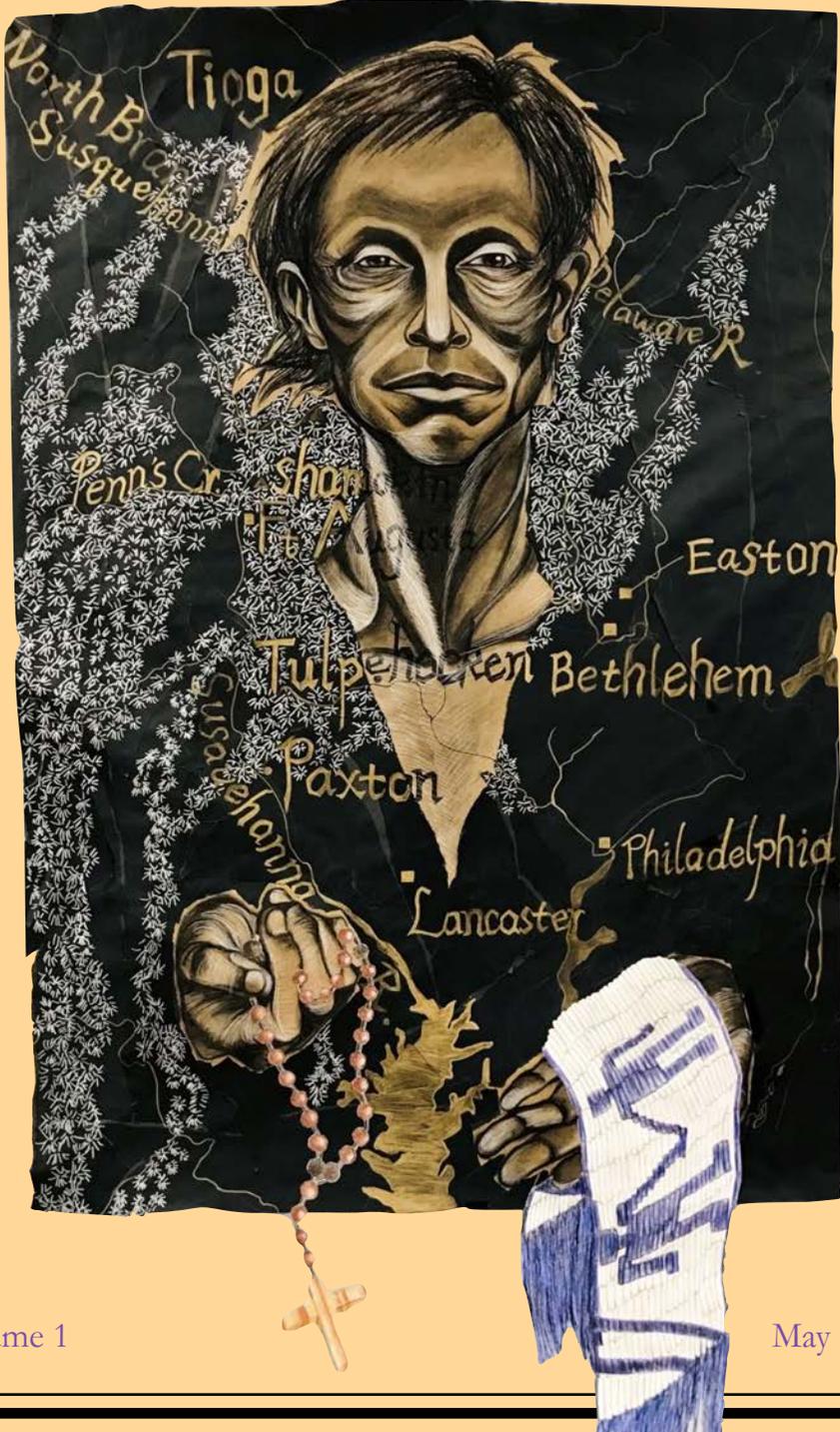
Disputes between Lenape Indians and Pennsylvanians over land ownership were part of the French-Indian war from 1754-1763. During a treaty council in Easton in 1758, Lenape Indians wanted to break away from Iroquois homogeny and regain sovereignty of the west bank of Delaware River, their homeland which was lost in the 1737 Walking Purchase. But the landowners from the powerful Penn family wanted to hold on the lands for profits which they purchased from Iroquois nations, and there were other Pennsylvania settlers and Indians who wanted to continue the war and to seek revenge for the loss of their families. The hostile and divided situation put this Christian Lenape Interpreter in desperate personal circumstances. On the one hand, he wanted to keep good personal relations with white settlers, who were his neighbors and church members; on the other hand, he did not wish Lenape kin to lose their home again and again. He believed peace was the best outcome for himself, the white settlers and the Lenape people, but it was also the hardest one to achieve.

I was inspired to create this work after taking "Native American History I" (before Manifest Destiny) with Professor Gwenn Miller in the Fall 2017 semester. In the class, we engaged in a multi-week game that mimicked a colonial frontier treaty council. Everyone played roles based on actual historical figures. My character was a Christian Lenape (Delaware) Interpreter who tried to achieve peace and accomplish some of his own goals. The game helped me realized how much personal struggle a cross-cultural historical minority group had to go through to survive. And how much the mainstream narrative on Native American had neglected their stories. So, I wanted to use the opportunity of my Life Drawing class, a studio art course taught

by Professor Susan Schmidt, to create a portrait of Christian Lenape. I wanted to commemorate his crucial role as interpreter who facilitated communication between Indians and white settlers. But, I also wanted to present the hidden struggles that many cross-cultural Natives Americans went through, and their expectations about the future of both natives and Euro-Americans.

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