

# Seeds of Rebellion: Indigenous Food Sovereignty Project

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## Introduction

Over the past year Indigenous students at the University of California have been building toward a Food Sovereignty Project. Food Sovereignty was initially defined by *la via capesina* in 1996 which worked to challenge the neoliberalization of food systems and seeds. Placing the power back into the hands of the people rather than major corporations dictating what people can grow and eat and where they can grow food. According to Elizabeth Hoover (2017), Food Sovereignty challenges dominant conversations of food security that simply aim to address an “adequacy” of food supply without thinking of the larger food system. There is no analysis of “how, where and by whom the food that all people should have access to is produced” (p. 32). Food Sovereignty is then, “the focus from the right to access food, to the right to produce it” (Hoover, 2017, p. 33.)

Indigenous peoples have taken up the conversation to propose an Indigenous Food Sovereignty that not only looks at the production of food but also at the responsibility we have to the land and all life. Furthermore, this framework recognizes that “food is sacred” (p.39). Indigenous food sovereignty also takes into account the ways that colonialism altered and continues to alter our ways of relating to land and food. Indigenous communities thus not only a systemically placed in food apartheid, where they have no access to fresh produce but also have often been removed from their lands into urban centers where growing food becomes more difficult.

The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Project at UCLA aimed to address some of these disparities around food access but was also a space to learn about building autonomous food systems and (re)learning how to grow our own food. Over the course of the year we grew food together and held workshops on seed keeping and traditional food systems.



## Project Goals

This project's goals were to create a space on campus where Indigenous students could begin to continue their traditional food growing practices while they were away from home. Our goal was to (re)build relationships to the land and food of our ancestors. We aimed to learn how to grow traditional foods, cook with traditional foods, and save the seeds from the food we grew. In this way our over all goal was to address food access for Indigenous students on campus but more importantly to teach them skills that would help them develop their own food sovereignty projects in their own homes or where they may go next.

## Materials and Methods

We were able to carry out this work by both building relationships with other Indigenous communities who shared resources and knowledge with us and then we put it into practice.

Materials:

- Received seeds from Native SEED Search and other tribal communities
- Got allocated a garden plot in the UCLA sunset recreation center at the Semel HCI Garden

Methods:

- Grow our own Indigenous foods at UCLA (have seasonal ceremonies)
- Hosting workshops on seed keeping and growing traditional foods
- Hosting speakers to share on their Indigenous food sovereignty projects
- Interview participants

## Results and Outcomes

The Indigenous food sovereignty project spanned over the course of the year with a variety of workshops, planting ceremonies, and food gatherings being held. We were able to host Indigenous speakers from a small-scale farm who shared with us the importance and process of keeping for native seeds. We also held an event for cooking with traditional foods that we grew such as tomatoes and chilis. We also held seasonal planting ceremonies which were inter-tribal gatherings held at our garden plot, where we planted corn in the early summer and then harvested it in the late fall. We also met weekly at the garden plot to have informal conversations about food sovereignty and care for our plants.

I was able to interview some of the students who participated in the project and ask them about what they learned and what they plan to do with this knowledge in the future. One of the students shared their thoughts on why this project was significant:

*"Food sovereignty is a form of healing and in these times where climate change is already beginning to disproportionately affect indigenous, black, and POC lives, it is also a form of survival. It allows us to depend on our communities and the land without having to depend completely on settler-colonial structures and corporations."*

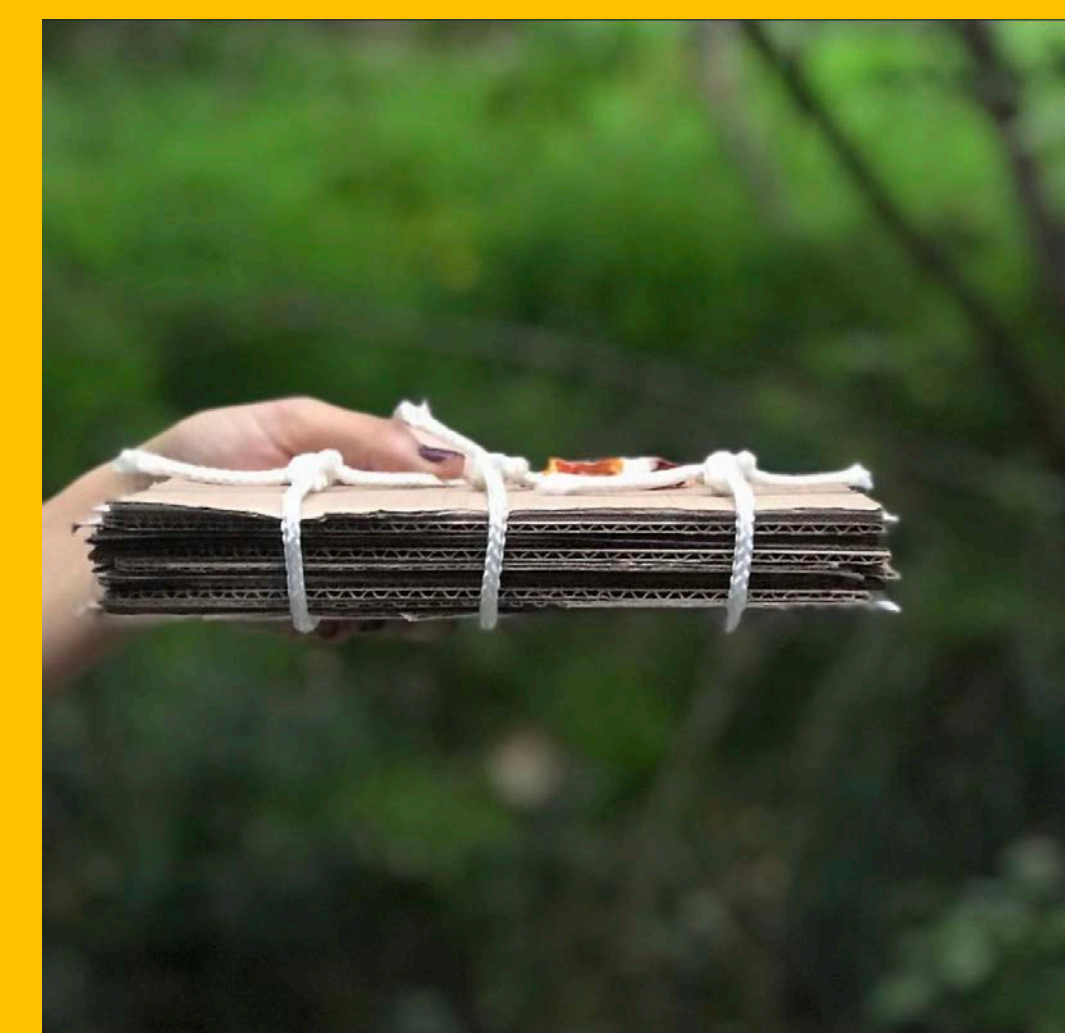
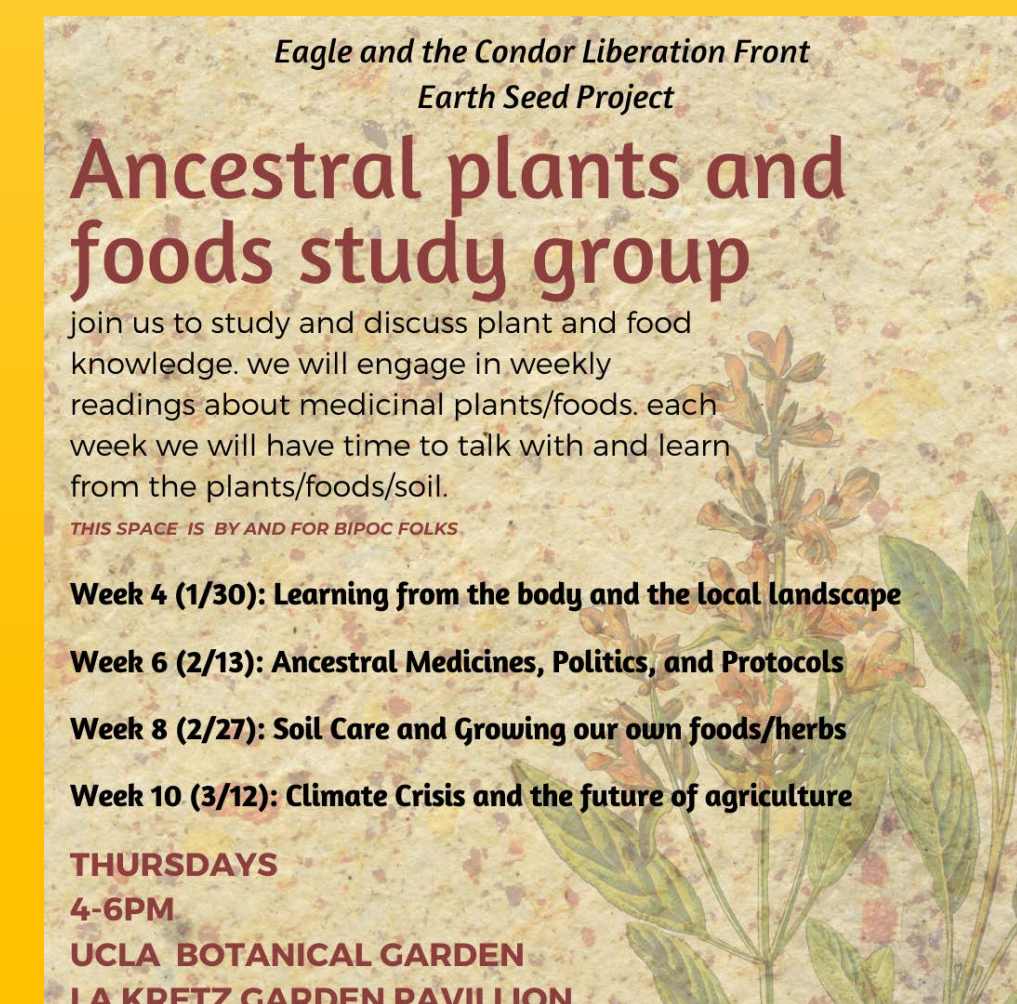
This quote shows the significance that this project had beyond the scope of UCLA, and how food sovereignty is valuable for Indigenous students to engage in order to learn about the structures of power that have limited our own autonomy. The student also notes that climate change is another reason to learn about growing our own food. This student went on to create and Indigenous climate crisis workshop for the project, which has now become a project of its own.

The workshops have resulted in the establishment of an ancestral Food/Plant Study group, Native Seed Library, and has led to building new relationships with Indigenous food sovereignty projects in the greater Los Angeles area. The ancestral food and plant study group came to fruition after one of our workshops where Indigenous students wanted to spend time together learning more about the medicinal properties of the foods and plants we were growing. The participants in the project have also went on to create their own Native seed library



## Conclusions

The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Project planted seeds of rebellion in and beyond UCLA. Students who engaged in the project have recognized the importance of autonomy, self-determination, and liberation. Our food, foodways, and food systems are central to our political struggles because they not only sustain us but also will lead us to our future. We will continue to do this work that is for life and against the neoliberal machines of death. This project was/is to heal the past seven generations which were disconnected from the land due to colonialism, and is also for the next seven generations to thrive.



## Future Goals

The future goals of this project are to create an Indigenous garden at UCLA where Indigenous and Students of Color can continue to learn how to grow their own food and reconnect to the land. The project will continue to establish relationships with community members and food sovereignty projects across the globe.

## Literature Cited

Hoover, E. (2017). You can't say you're sovereign if you can't feed yourself: Defining and Enacting Food Sovereignty in American Indian Community Gardening. *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, 41 (3): 31-70. <https://doi.org/10.17953/aicrj.41.3.hoover>

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