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TOWARDS A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE OF ASTRONOMICAL COLLABORATIONS

Abstract

In this article, we argue that a well-rounded astronomy education must engage students to critically analyze the socio-technical impacts of their field. We highlight how indigenous peoples are working to recover their ancestral knowledge and rights to natural resources, including not only land but also water.

The portrayal of astronomy as an apolitical and neutral field is difficult to reconcile with reality. The continual usage of Native lands without proper land acknowledgments is compounded by the granting of exemption status from taxes, environmental regulations, and labour laws, or even extraterritorial governance rights to institutions in the Global North.

The allocation of grant and observing time to local astronomers often falls short of the expected level of 20 percent found on major observatories (e.g. on the Canary Island), and this information often fails to distinguish between host country born, Native and foreign astronomers. We find that some of the adverse effects of Western astronomy in the 21st century could be mitigated by not only memorializing the indigenous cultures and traditions by monuments, shrines and temples at and around telescope sites, but also acknowledging the land these telescopes reside on as Native, in mediums of scientific discovery. Providing robust platforms and channels of communication to indigenous peoples would respect indigenous history and traditions, as well as help shape a more equitable future of global astronomical collaborations and in preventing potential conflicts/tension over landuse.