

# The Power of Ordinary People

Friday, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026

9am-1pm

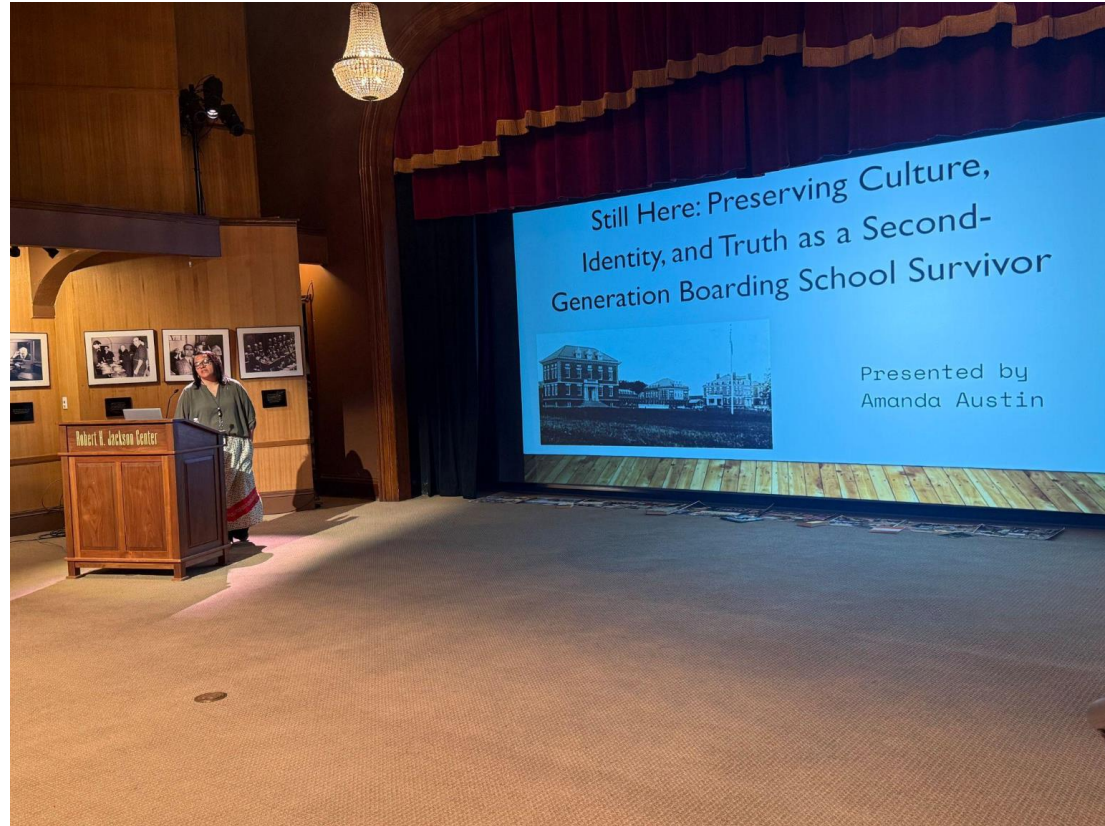
Jackson Center

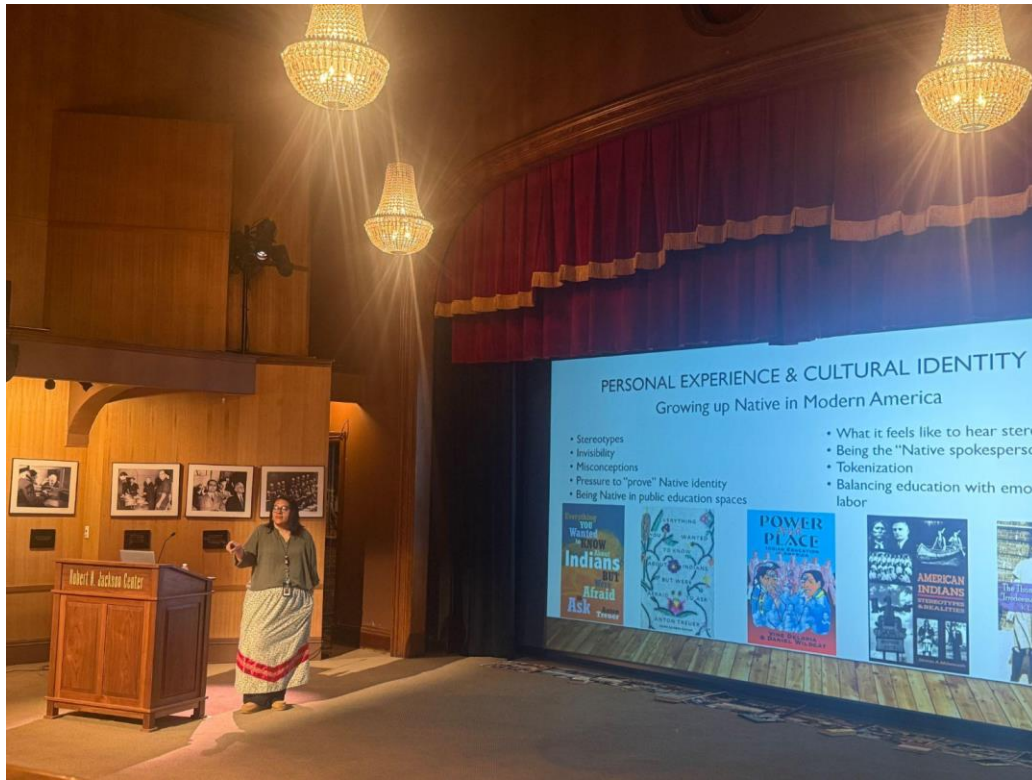


**Almost 100 students & teachers from 6 Chautauqua county schools had the opportunity to share in an incredible day of learning at our annual student leadership symposium at the Robert H Jackson Center. The students had the opportunity to learn about the "Power of Ordinary People" attending 3 breakout sessions in the morning. The first breakout session was with the Mobile Museum of Tolerance teaching the students about the power of standing up and using your voice by using a painting depicting the early rise of Nazism but focusing on who is highlighted in the picture and what the various roles of people were in society. Aaron Pieri, the educator from the MMOT led a thorough course on the power that each person holds in that breakout session and then after the attendees finished all 3 breakout sessions led us into another thoughtful discussion and workshop on Combating Hate and Social and Digital media literacy.**



**The second session was with Mrs. Amanda Austin, Silver Creek's Native American Education coordinator who is also a 2nd generation boarding school survivor leading our students in a thought provoking discourse about Native American boarding schools and the work to preserve culture and language in our society. Amanda used her own personal story as a catalyst for inspiring her passion for the work that she does and teaching the students about their individual rights, freedoms and how easily those things can be taken away but also how powerful their voices are.**





**The majority of students who left the symposium said that Amanda inspired them with her passion, personal storytelling and that they can each make a difference using their voice. “You do belong there, you belong wherever it is you want to be,” left our students feeling just that. She also covered the preservation of Native languages and culture and how that is something being fought for every day to ensure the new generations know and understand their culture and ancestry and that it isn't lost.**

**Our 3rd breakout session was with Mrs. Jessica Cowan who was part of our programs “Legacy Fellowship” last summer which traveled to Montgomery, Alabama to experience the Civil Rights movement’s rich history and impact in our world today. Jess gave the students each sample literacy tests and challenged them to earn the right to vote based of of basic knowledge that no one truly has. She talked about jelly beans in a jar as a guessing game, the amount of bubbles a soap bar holds and the amount of watermelon seeds a watermelon has as a way for people to earn their right to vote during the Civil Rights movement. She used pictures of famous moments in Civil Rights history to inspire our students to use their voice even when its hard. It was a really proud moment for us having experienced the trip with her and watching her take that knowledge and share it with our students. The Legacy Fellowship inspired a new Generation of students to use their voice at the symposium which was extraordinary.**



**The students had the opportunity to also hear from Dr. Rumiz Haq, Associate Director of Student Engagement at the University at Buffalo, about voter data in our area, Get Out the Vote and different organizations he is working with to help students register to vote and give them the necessary information to become civically engaged and informed citizens. The students all had the opportunity to play a role in the work that will inspire Get Out the Vote coalitions in Chautauqua County through working on activities to identify areas where the impact could be greater including local events, outreach points and areas of interest.**



**All attendees of the day left feeling inspired, informed and empowered about the difference they can make. In multiple students reflections they described feeling “Ready” to use their voices and make a difference. The event provided our students the opportunities to reflect on their role in society. “ I watched our students engage, reflect and examine both the positive and negative impacts that ordinary people can have on society. The event left many of our students ready to use their voice for a greater good and left so many of us with so much hope. The greatest reward of sharing these experiences with our kids is that they realize their voice matters and that they have a great responsibility to speak up for themselves and for others and what that can look like. The event was inspired by the idea that we are ordinary people doing ordinary things until together they become extraordinary and Friday’s symposium proved just that.”**



