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# Forever Crossing Over: At the Intersection of John T. Williams's Life and Memorial

*Thomas Michael Swensen*

He was not a violent person. I don't think he had a malicious bone in his body. . . . The only thing that could be threatened by John would be a piece of yellow cedar, maybe?

—Randy Lewis, The United Indians of All Tribes Foundation

Somewhere between a nation of immigrants and a noble savage John T. fell, splintered.

—Storme Webber, *untitled performance*

In Seattle, Washington, on August 30, 2010, at approximately 4:15 p.m., the partially deaf Nuu-Chah-Nulth artist John T. Williams walked through the intersection of Boren and Howell in the direction of Victor Steinbrueck Park.<sup>1</sup> Arriving on the scene perpendicular to the street that Williams crossed, Police Officer Ian Birk approached the intersection in a patrol car and pulled to the curb. In a matter of moments Birk left the car and killed Williams with four shots from his department-issued handgun. When fired upon, John T. Williams was carrying a thin piece of yellow cedar approximately a foot and a half long as well as a small pocketknife.<sup>2</sup> He was a lifelong traditional woodcarver who for years normally handled such materials in public, as do many other Native artists in downtown Seattle.

An instant before the confrontation, Birk's dashboard camera documented Williams crossing the intersection until he left the camera's sight line. Exiting the car,

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**FIGURE 1.** *Police presence at drum circle beneath the John T. Williams Memorial Pole, September 7, 2013. Photo by the author.*



Birk took up full pursuit of Williams with his gun drawn. Beyond the view of the camera, the officer repeatedly commanded Williams to “put the knife down.” Within only seven seconds of exiting the patrol car Officer Birk discharged his weapon at the artist. The patrol car’s footage documented pedestrian Deanna Sebring approaching from the adjacent side of the street, towards the camera, the moment Birk—out of sight—fired the gun. Jolting at the sound of gunfire, she appeared to nearly lose her balance as she walked towards the men. She immediately questioned Officer Birk’s motivations, yelling, “What happened? He didn’t do anything!” Sebring confronted the officer while John T. Williams bled out on the sidewalk and the sound of sirens filled the Seattle air.<sup>3</sup> A full investigation would prove that the blade of the three-inch pocketknife Williams carried was unopened at the moment Birk fired at him.

In the tragedy’s aftermath many suspected that Williams was a fatal victim of racial profiling, contrary to law enforcement’s initial reports. In American history profiling has long been a successful public tactic of racial oppression against indigenous people and other people of color. Since the founding of the United States and its expansion across what is now the contiguous part of the nation, law enforcement agencies have targeted Native people as criminals of the state to justify the occupation of indigenous territories. For example, in the nineteenth century the United States deemed Native defense of homelands against its encroachment as criminal acts against the state. Luana Ross identifies this historical portrayal of indigenous criminality as the construction of Native “deviance.”<sup>4</sup> The assertion of Native people as less human and undeserving of

rights, necropolitics applied to them, involved creating the myth of the Indian savage that sanctified violent efforts to appropriate indigenous lands under the aegis of the law.<sup>5</sup> As someone seemingly dispossessed of social value, Williams lived unprotected on the streets with a physical impairment, making him susceptible to violent assault, even in a city that has celebrated art made by such carvers for well over a century. This essay, drawing from the history of outlawing Native people and culture in public life, contends that the artist John T. Williams became falsely legible as a criminal, and his small knife, the tool of his craft, was seen as a weapon against the state.

Following the shooting, indigenous artists produced work that intervened in the necropolitics of colonial mythology by memorializing his humanity. This essay further argues that the artwork formed an aesthetic that recognized the connection between Native art's formalistic attributes and Native individuals' social lives, thereby contravening the myth of savagery that shapes Natives as being contrary to civic life.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Alutiiq/Choctaw artist Storme Webber's 2010 Seattle Art Festival performance, in which she read an untitled poem about the killing that compares Birk to a nineteenth-century cavalry officer, makes visible the dramatic parallels between Officer Birk's actions and the history of North American conquest.<sup>7</sup> The frustration expressed in Webber's performance dovetails with the indigenous music group A Tribe Called Red's release, "Woodcarver."<sup>8</sup> This song and accompanying video compose an auditory visual collage constructed from Birk's police radio and news broadcasts that mourn Williams's passing while also interpolating his life and death into the long history of violence against Native people.

After examining these two pieces, this essay then turns to the crest pole Rick L. Williams carved to honor his brother John, which when placed at the Seattle Center between the Space Needle and the Experience Music Project Museum, distinguishes John T. Williams's life through an art form often revered by city residents for its materiality alone. This essay asserts that just as the song "Woodcarver" and Webber's performance/poem mourn the artist's wrongful death by critiquing the campaign to mythologize Native people as illicit to civic life, the John T. Williams memorial pole elevated at a civic venue recuperates Seattle as an indigenous space that recognizes Williams's social value as a member of the city's community.

## SEATTLE'S NATIVE ART HISTORY AND THE WILLIAMS FAMILY

Charged with protecting Seattle's residents from harm's way, Officer Birk inflicted a grave injustice on a person who very much needed community attention to help him stay safe. Homeless people like Williams require the protection provided by police officers more than people with their own private quarters because living outside or in public spaces makes one more vulnerable to violent crime. The National Coalition for the Homeless reports that violence against the homeless is a growing problem that is difficult to tally since many crimes go unreported to authorities.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Officer Birk took the artist's life without investigating whether or not Williams could hear his commands.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the killing presents an example of the perils people with disabilities—whether physical, developmental, or psychological—can face on a daily

basis in public or private spaces. Research proves that people with disabilities are more susceptible to and defenseless against violent crimes than other members of society. Their rates of victimization are almost twice as high as offenses committed against people without disabilities.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the year of Williams's death, violent crimes against people with accessibility issues ranged three times higher per capita than in any other population.<sup>12</sup>

Though Williams lacked a permanent address, Seattle was his home. His family was part of a regional Native art community that had practiced their craft in the city for well over a century. Once a Native village, Seattle developed around the region's indigenous people as the Northwest transformed into a region with a population of millions. Throughout its history, Seattle has demonstrated a reverence for indigenous art, which is a crucial factor in understanding Williams's death and the artwork produced in response to his untimely passing. Williams's family, indigenous to Vancouver Island, had practiced their art in Seattle for generations, as Seattle's non-Native residents came to use Northwest indigenous art as emblems of identity. By the late-nineteenth century the Seattle area's new residents cultivated a fascination with indigenous artwork, from monumental plank houses to more easily collectible masks and small crest poles. Many pieces of Native art adorn the civic spaces of the Seattle metropolitan region today.<sup>13</sup>

Seattle residents favorably recognized their city's indigenous origins, yet originally did so without considering how the city came to dispossess Native people of their territorial authority. Historian Coll Thrush, in *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place*, recounts how city fathers founded Seattle upon the Native village called, in the Coast Salish language, "dzee-dzee-LAH-letch," which translates as, "The Little Crossing-Over Place," in English. The historical center of The Little Crossing-Over Place lies directly in the location of Seattle's Pioneer Square, where there once stood beautiful cedar houses whose residents sustained themselves with the local fish and berries, interring their family members "on a bluff overlooking Elliot Bay."<sup>14</sup> The city's name originated from Si'ahl, the name of a man commonly known as Chief Seattle, a leader of the regional Duwamish and Suquamish people in the mid-nineteenth century. Settler David Swinson "Doc" Maynard proposed that the original settlement be named after the chief and by 1853 the new name Seattle was widely employed in official documents.

In the late-nineteenth century and into the mid-twentieth, settlers traveled into Northwest villages and stole crest poles, masks, and even entire sets of community architecture for private collections, museums, or public display outside of their indigenous contexts, such as when Seattle first publicly embraced a crest pole in the midst of the Yukon-Alaska gold rush. The sixty-foot Chief-of-All-Women pole displayed in Seattle was pilfered from Fort Tongass in the Alaska Territory.<sup>15</sup> A group of Seattle businessmen and artists known as the Goodwill Committee toured the Alaska Territory and took property from the Tlingit village when its residents were on a hunting trip. The goodwill tour returned with the pole and erected it on October 18, 1899 in Pioneer Square, the indigenous site of The Little Crossing-Over Place.

The crest pole was originally a memorial to a Tlingit woman who drowned in the Nass River after visiting a sick relative.<sup>16</sup> The top raven figure on the pole represented

the Raven of the Nass who stole back the moon from a greedy chief in Tlingit stories. Kate Duncan notes that once in Seattle, the indigenous meaning of the pole found little purchase with the town's residents. She writes,

The transformations in the meaning of the pole were . . . profound. In Tongass the pole had reminded village members daily of the ancestor whom it memorialized, of the power and the prestige of the family who had raised it, and of the family's inherited and owned stories about myth-time ancestors whose activities were cited on the pole. In Seattle, however, few people held any knowledge about these meanings.<sup>17</sup>

The city placed the pole in Pioneer Square at First Avenue and Yesler Street, and from then on, Duncan writes, "misinformation about the pole's meaning was common place."<sup>18</sup> The Raven perched on top of the pole held great significance for the Raven clan, but to Seattleites the pole was a finely crafted reminder of some mythical culture that existed previous to the nation's arrival.

Those residents pleased with the craftwork of the Chief-of-All-Women pole represented a larger non-Native cultural movement that valued artistic form over a piece's contextual meanings. The newcomers ignored the burdens they placed on Native culture and chose to study traditional, precontact-styled work. In response to this strong demand for local art, such as cedar carvings of masks and small, easily carried crest poles, Native artists began vending their creations in galleries and shops to interested buyers, and even on the streets. For many artists this was a strategic act of survival to keep their artforms in existence during a time of great upheaval. Artists proved to be savvy in using market forces to continue their heritage. Many Natives without previous training also took to art practice as a much-needed means of employment. Artists worked with the developing arts economy while also continuing to trade and barter their arts with one another outside of it.

John T. Williams came from a line of Nuu-Chah-Nulth artists who lived in the Seattle area and specialized in woodcarving as a means to support themselves. The first of the Williams family artists to make a significant impact on Seattle's Native arts scene was John's grandfather, Samuel Williams. In 1901 Samuel first started carving for Joseph "Daddy" Standly at the Ye Olde Curiosity Shop when he was twenty-one years old. Many Nuu-chah-nulth carvers, like Williams, developed techniques demanded by the economy. Samuel Williams's statue *Potlatch Man* appeared in Standly's Curiosity Shop—a store that exoticized Native cultures for consumption by residents and tourists alike.<sup>19</sup> Samuel had many children who trained to carve, and his son Ray, like the others, continued the craft as a working artist in Seattle. Ray's three sons, Eric, John, and Rick, all practiced carving and sold their wares widely from Seattle to Vancouver. Importantly, the Williams brothers' extended family members trained as artists as well.<sup>20</sup> The family's artistic profundity helped disseminate pole carving designs and to circulate and popularize this art across the Northwest. Their activity also contributed to the transformation of these poles' cultural value: the small poles they created, based on the emergent economy, were frequently sold to buyers interested in the pole's form, and the poles' petite sizes made for more affordable prices.<sup>21</sup> Collectors came

to associate the Williams family name with the quality Native artwork available for purchase in Seattle.

The city's interest in Native art increased, but the Chief-of All-Women pole standing in Pioneer Square degraded until a fire in 1938 burned the artwork beyond repair. Later the city purchased a replica from Tlingit Saxman Village. After long discussions between the city of Seattle and the village—the Tlingit carvers demanded payment for the stolen first pole in addition to the one they reproduced for the city—the new pole was dedicated in Pioneer Square on April 14, 1940.<sup>22</sup> Like the old, the new pole also served as a symbol of non-Native admiration for indigenous artistic forms over and apart from their social context. In fact, to recognize the cultural and social context of these artworks would require non-Natives to see how their actions were contributing to the deprivation of Native peoples. In the critical setting of art studies the fault line between the appreciation of aesthetic form and social life deepened. Bill Holm's 1965 publication, *Northwest Coast Indian Art, an Analysis of Form*, championed the craftsmanship of regional Native art and its traditional meanings, bypassing the colonial realities that Native communities endured within the United States and Canada. The publication provided evidence of an enormous disconnect between the veneration shown Native artistic technique, such as formline carving, and the disregard of the social lives of Native artists—many of whom, like John T. Williams, lived on the Seattle streets. Social realities were perceived to be without value and separate from the artwork. The popularity of formalized Native art encouraged many Native and non-Native people alike to take up sculpture, painting, and carving in the regional indigenous style.

While Native art forms flourished, Native people faced a society that rendered them socially dead, “dismembered” of social value through “normative criteria” that publicly form one as fundamentally rightless.<sup>23</sup> Over the course of the twentieth century, Native peoples lost land and federal tribal recognition, faced high rates of unemployment, and became victims of violent crimes. Non-Natives grew fond of collecting Native craftwork but did not offer recompense for ongoing indigenous dispossession by returning property to Native people to fully restore the recognition of Native sovereignty. Many state and federal governments held fast to lands gained from encroachment that left local tribes without land or legal recognition; for instance, the government failed to live up to promises to the local Duwamish for reservation land as spelled out in the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliott.<sup>24</sup> The growing asymmetric Native arts economy also positioned these disadvantaged Native communities in a seemingly inescapable modern/traditional dialectic. Marcia Crosby refers to this situation as the creation of an “imaginary Indian” who served as a negative space, a necropolitical subject, to the affirmative spaces and selfhoods of the West's project in the Americas.<sup>25</sup> To be identified as Native, and perhaps even more so as a Native artist, meant being read through the lens of formalized premodern aesthetics. This aesthetic distinguished a contemporary Native person as a premodern individual whose cultural traditions ceased developing when European settlers arrived in the region.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Northwest's influx of newcomers, with their false conceptions of Native individuals as “imaginary,” devastated the indigenous

sociocultural landscape. Ironically, indigenous peoples were evaluated from this nadir of dispossession, forcing them into a dialectical situation in which, as Paige Raibmon writes, in order for Natives to be valued as artists, or even as people, they must choose to remain what the newcomers deemed to be authentic.<sup>26</sup> In other words, what Raibmon calls the “colonial cosmology” views Native/non-Native relations as resolutely binary and mutually exclusive, situating Native peoples apart from non-Natives and their ways of living.<sup>27</sup>

Native people remained an integral part of Northwestern culture even though the dominant society believed the calculus of their cultures remained cast in a premodern time. There is no better example of this phenomenon than the replacing of the Chief-of-all-Women pole in Pioneer Square in 1938. The city considered asking two local Suquamish artists, Richard Temple and Lawrence Webster, to create a replica, but for those in charge of finding a replacement, the men proved too modern and civilized for such a job because they drove automobiles and played sports.<sup>28</sup> Even though non-Natives held little respect for the contextual meaning of the pole to Tlingit culture, those in power saw the two men as lacking the authenticity needed to work on the project.

## CRIMINALITY AND THE MYTH OF NATIVE SAVAGERY

The modern/traditional dialectic developed alongside the wholesale removal of Native land holdings. The success of Native art ran contrary to the criminalization Natives faced in daily life. Throughout the Northwest, Native art was idealized while the state criminalized other aspects of Native culture. In the nineteenth century manifest destiny positioned Natives as “savages” external to the United States. These supposedly savage outsiders, without the right to personhood, would have to either be reeducated or exterminated for the sake of the nation’s integral prosperity.<sup>29</sup> This was a way for non-Natives to excuse their rampant discrimination against indigenous people—a form of prejudice that lingers on today, even with Native art becoming esteemed in the Northwest.

Though underreported in the media, Native Americans are assaulted and murdered to a tremendous degree. The Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice reports that Native Americans are killed by law enforcement at a higher rate than any other group in the United States.<sup>30</sup> Although the actual numbers of Native casualties fall well below those of other groups, such as African Americans, the percentage of deaths in relation to the Native population is staggering. A study by the Centers on Disease Control and Prevention National Center for Health Statistics shows that Native Americans, who are “0.8 percent of the population . . . comprise 1.9 percent of police killings.”<sup>31</sup> From 1991 to 2011, law enforcement killed 5.9 Native American men between the ages of 35 and 44 for every million, three-tenths of a percent higher than that of African American men.<sup>32</sup> The US Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics also reports that Native Americans fall victim to violence at more than twice the rate of any other racial or ethnic group in the country.<sup>33</sup> Researchers have found that 60 percent of violent crimes committed against Native Americans are “described” as being inflicted by white perpetrators.<sup>34</sup> In Vancouver, British Columbia, the other great metropolitan



area of the Northwest, Native heritage is considered the main factor when a woman goes missing or is murdered.<sup>35</sup>

The oppression of Native people today is tied to the way the United States and Canada settled the continent, waging an onslaught against Native people.<sup>36</sup> This “genocide of Native people,” as Luana Ross calls it, “was never seen as murder”; if non-Natives could imagine Natives as savage, then the expansion of the nation would be seen as virtuous. Ross further stresses that “racialized oppression, then as now, was not a discrete phenomenon independent of larger political and economic tendencies,” in that criminalizing Native individuals helped secure national territoriality.<sup>37</sup> As newcomers organized townships and counties that grew into cities like Seattle, they cited Natives as ineligible for a place in public life at the very moment they were taking land and authority from them.

The nation codified these prejudicial attitudes towards Natives and their practices in the legal system. Outlawing aspects of Native culture marginalized Native people themselves as criminals without the right to public selfhood. Ross contends that “new laws were created that defined many usual, everyday behaviors of Natives as ‘offenses.’”<sup>38</sup> Cities and counties even passed laws forbidding Natives to congregate in community spaces or to practice their culture. Following the unjust laws, enforcement officers policed Natives in ways distinct from their surveillance of non-Natives. For example, during the nineteenth century, both the United States and Canada criminalized the indigenous practice of the potlatch in the Northwest. Lawmakers viewed this gift-giving ceremony, during which families give away their belongings, as uncivilized for modern society. In *Inventing the Savage*, Ross connects national growth with the criminalization of such behavior, calling the action the “social construction of Native deviance.” Criminalization was employed in justifying “genocide and attempts to supposedly assimilate Natives into the dominant society.” Ross also notes that the law didn’t enforce itself, writing that “law-enforcement officials were not simply bystanders in this history; they participated and encouraged lawlessness in the interests of suppressing minorities.” This legacy, Ross concludes, would contribute to how law enforcement agencies interacted with Natives in contemporary times.<sup>39</sup> The illegalization framed Natives as divergent from American life, creating what Nancy Fraser calls a “counterpublic,” a term Kevin Everod Quashie describes as “contrary to the ideals of the hegemonic public sphere.”<sup>40</sup>

Direct links bring together this history of cultural prejudice and aggression with John T. Williams’s death. Employing the myth of savage criminality, initial reports from the police falsely asserted that Williams attacked Officer Birk with his pocketknife. Shortly after the shooting, Detective Renee Witt of the Seattle Police Department Public Affairs division gave a press conference at the intersection of Boren and Howell. She indicated that while in his patrol car Officer Birk noticed an adult male sitting on the curb with a knife. Curious about the situation, Witt asserted, Officer Birk left his police cruiser to investigate the situation further. “The male stood up,” she told the press, “and made advances toward the officer.” Witt concluded, “The officer made very loud commands for the gentlemen to stop and drop the knife, at which point he did not and the officer used lethal force on him.”<sup>41</sup> The declaration that

Williams approached Birk—which justified the use of lethal force—was later proven false; forensics analysis showed Williams’s wounds were to the right and rear side of his body, indicating the impossibility that Williams was facing Officer Birk head-on when the shots were fired toward him. Though Williams was holding a knife, it was a *closed* three-inch utility knife commonly used in many households. The facts proved the police narrative unfounded and demonstrated how officials could draw from the mythology of Native savagery when speaking of the circumstances of Birk’s shooting of Williams. The image of an “armed” Native proved a powerful screen against which Officer Birk could project the savage, “imaginary Indian,” which in the eyes of law enforcement justified his actions.

For the officer, and those who put forth his story, the tool of Williams’s trade—the very item connecting his life with his much admired work—was viewed as an instrument of violence, not art. On further inspection, this small pocketknife serves as a window into a legacy of even greater cultural brutality, one that acts as a fulcrum for marginalizing Native lives and culture, rendering them rightless and dispossessed of social value. If he had been allowed to live, Williams would have used his pocketknife to produce the art forms that Seattle residents adore; however, his possession of this same knife emerged as justification for his death. In comparison to an officer’s pistol, a knife represents an outmoded weapon in the same way that the vanishing, necropolitical, “imaginary Indian” embodies an oppositional figure to American modernity. The innocent artist and his tool together conjoined to exemplify a myth that could validate a state of exception, excusing the officer of irresponsible conduct that would be illegal under normal circumstances. An Indian with a (closed) knife harkened back to the colonial mandates that sought to eradicate Native America for the benefit of the nation. To misrecognize Williams as a figure from an erroneous “savage” past attests to society’s ability to separate Native art from the reality of Native life. The cultural disarticulation between the maker, Williams, and his artwork exemplifies how the rise of formalist veneration of Native art helped Native art enthusiasts turn a blind eye to the continual subjugation of Native people and their individual and community dispossession. Moreover, the knife in Williams’s peaceful *and productive* hand transgressed the concept of the vanishing Indian, threatening the belief of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls “patriarchal white sovereignty” that settlers have a right to occupy a continent free of indigenous presence.<sup>42</sup> The tool stands as a signifier for a colonial process, which though executed, was never fully completed in the Americas.<sup>43</sup> Native artists producing work on city streets contradicts long-held, misleading ideas about American modernity, even though their artwork finds popularity among private collectors and museums worldwide.

## A COMMUNITY RESPONDS

After Williams’s death many openly rejected official claims of his criminality, crying out against the unfairness of his death. Outraged citizens immediately took to the streets protesting the injustice, as Seattle community leaders held press conferences expressing their frustration and sadness over this senseless killing. A person whose

public life had been rendered nonnormative became the center of a civic protest in death. The Seattle community embraced the Williams family, treating their dreadful loss as their own. John's older brother, artist Rick Williams, arose as the family's spokesperson, and demanded a comprehensive investigation of Birk's conduct. Over the coming months, under the eyes of a watchful public, a formal investigation ultimately revealed Williams's innocence.

At 4:15 p.m. on September 3rd, exactly three days after the shooting, Randy Lewis, a member of the Colville Confederated Tribes and acting representative for The United Indians of All Tribes Foundation, read a statement at the Chief Seattle Press Club Conference in Seattle. Behind him stood the Williams brothers, Rick and Eric. As a young man, Lewis had participated in the American Indian Movement's reclaiming of Alcatraz Island in 1969.<sup>44</sup> Without question, Williams's unjust death must have crystallized many of the forces that Lewis had spent his life fighting against. He stood tall and spoke clearly to the crowd of reporters. "The city of Seattle, like many of the great Northwest cities, owes its life, its livelihood, its tourism—millions of dollars—to Native people," he began. In relating the region's Native art economy to Williams's death, Lewis then compared the colonial ruthlessness of Western expansion with Officer Birk's fatal actions.<sup>45</sup>

Lewis criticized both the senseless criminalization of Natives as well as the mythology of Crosby's "imaginary Indian." "We come from a past of basket makers, of carvers, of silver makers, who work on the street because that is where the tourists are," he continued, "but we have been confronted over the years by the same situation, by the brutality, if not by the institutions, then by individuals on the street, so this is not a separate event. It's one of many."<sup>46</sup> Even though the commodification of Native arts helped this city flourish, he argued, the violence against its indigenous population, beginning with the settlement of the area, has continued into the present day. Echoing Luana Ross, Lewis attested that both institutions and individuals have executed this "brutality" on Native people.

Confronting the divergent necropolitics of the "modern/traditional" Native subject, Lewis continued, "We are not a people of a romantic past nor are we a people of an irrelevant present and we're not going to allow this to go swept under the rug." He then told the press that he'd known Williams for the last ten to twelve years, and when he heard of the shooting, "they didn't even have to tell me who [the victim] was, all they had to say was 'a little man whittling.'"<sup>47</sup> Thus, not only did Lewis view the shooting as aligned with a comprehensive history of violence against an unvalued Native people, he affirmed that John T. Williams was an innocent person killed because of bias.

Five months later in January, 2011, witnesses Deanna Sebring and Barbara Newman testified at a formal inquest held in Seattle, corroborating that Williams posed no threat to Officer Birk. According to *Seattle Times* staff reporter Steve Miletich, Sebring testified that Williams wasn't "acknowledging, engaging, threatening or attacking Birk in any way when the officer opened fire on him."<sup>48</sup> After the inquest, Ian Birk resigned from the Seattle Police Department on February 16, 2011, when the public learned that no criminal charges would be filed against him. Sadly, the King County prosecutor was unable to charge Birk with a crime since the court required

proof that Birk had malice towards Williams. On April 29th, the City of Seattle agreed to pay the Williams family a settlement of \$1.5 million, including \$250,000 to John's mother in a civil case of wrongful death.

## NATIVE ART IN MEMORIAM

Indigenous artists produced a number of works reacting to both John T. Williams's death and to the necropolitics produced from the colonial history of which his passing is a reminder. These works mended the fissure between the social contexts of Native life with the adoration of Native art. A popular Canadian First Nations electronic music group, A Tribe Called Red, consisting of three members—Ian "DJ NDN" Campeau, Dan "DJ Shub" General, and Bear Witness—gave one such important response. A Tribe Called Red has toured throughout North America and Europe and has been nominated for and has won numerous awards, including one for best group in the 2013 Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards. They have been active in speaking about indigenous issues, such as vocally supporting the Idle No More movement and openly opposing racialized sports mascots.

Their poignant mash-up song "Woodcarver," which appeared on their 2012 self-titled debut album, signaled a transnational, continent-wide recognition of the injustice Williams suffered while also honoring the carver's memory. "Woodcarver" looped audio from Birk's police radio and sound bites from news reports and layers them over a slow drumbeat.<sup>49</sup> "Hey. Hey you," Birk can be heard yelling, "put the knife down, put the knife down," followed by the four shots from his pistol. Meanwhile, a guitar softly plays in a minor key. Layered over the guitar, a police radio can be heard reporting the confrontation.

Produced by band member Bear Witness, the music video opens with the video from Ian Birk's patrol car camera. These images are overlain with video of a long-haired, ghostly figure running in the sunlight. A looping cry of agony interplays with reporter voiceovers describing how John T. Williams was not the aggressor because he was shot in the side. As the video and music progresses, the viewer watches the faded image of the sun, imposed upon the Williams footage, as it set along the horizon. After five minutes and twenty seconds, the looping music and the beat fades as the silhouetted figure of the Indian man appears to be shot in the back, his flesh spraying. In silence, the figure continually falls into a pool of red liquid. The timeless indigenous figure, long hair flowing in the wind, came to symbolize the long history of oppression against Native people with the death of Williams. Beneath the tumbling image, the facts of John T. Williams's shooting roll through the screen as the video fades. The song "Woodcarver" merges art with the unjust criminalization of Native people, a condition often eclipsed in the formalization of Native art. The piece is Native art crafted from the scene of a Native person's death.

## SOMEBODY LIKE US

In addition to "Woodcarver's" release, other Native artists produced work responding to Williams's killing. Similar to the themes expressed in "Woodcarver," the Seattle local

Native performer and poet Storme Webber sought to come to terms with her friend's passing. In November 2010, two months after John T. Williams's shooting, two-spirit African American Choctaw Alutiiq artist Storme Webber composed and performed an untitled piece about Williams at the Seattle City Arts Festival.<sup>50</sup> Webber founded Voices Rising: LGBTQ of Color Arts & Culture, a foundation that serves to nurture and promote the arts in LGBTQI and communities of people of color. In addition to being a published poet and writer, she has performed on stages throughout the world and in numerous films. A longtime activist in many of Seattle's communities, she has worked as a Writer in Residence at Red Eagle Soaring Native Youth Theater and for the Jack Straw Foundation, a nonprofit multidisciplinary audio arts center.

Before a full house at the Seattle Arts Festival, Webber held a Williams-carved walking stick when she spoke: "At the intersection of manifest and destiny a man fell . . . he wasn't a big man/ he wasn't driving a Ferrari / or wearing diamonds like P. Diddy / or any of these other people we are suppose to want to be." As an indigenous person of color, she asserts that John T. Williams fell victim to manifest destiny, the widely held ideology that was used to justify US expansion across the North American continent. When she declares that Williams "wasn't a big man," she refers not only to his physicality, but also to his necropolitical status as an indigenous person without a "Ferrari" or "diamonds." Through this description, Webber implies that John T. Williams refused to personify a pop culture artist such as P. Diddy Combs, who is associated with materialist, glamorous lifestyles. Her comparison of Williams to Combs forces the listener to make and unmake comparisons between the two men's class positions. Combs's mass-produced art has brought him wealth; Williams's art, made with the carving knife, while much admired, brought him a tragic destiny.

Testifying to Williams's homelessness and continued artistic production, Webber notes that "he was a man who had fallen and risen / And hadn't surrendered his life to all the sadness he'd seen / Somebody like us." For Webber, unlike the hip-hop celebrity P. Diddy, John T. Williams was "like us"—someone who had "fallen and risen" against life's hardships without allowing these hardship to deter him from making art. Webber paints Williams as a person whose life resembles many peoples' experiences, more so than P. Diddy's career. She then elaborates on the relations between the national colonial expansion across North America and Williams's death by saying that he "was walking through that intersection of Custer and Bad Water / Or was it firewater and small pox? / It's hard to remember there are so many roads." By employing the trope of the road, Webber creates comparisons between Boren and Howell—the intersection where Williams and Birk met—to other violent intersections Natives faced brought on by the colonization of the Americas.

Webber's performance is also built on allusions to the historical treatment of Native people by government functionaries; for example, she says that Williams fell "when another cavalryman, or was it a police officer / saw him carving and because telling stories in wood is something no good in our time anymore / impossible to tax." Williams peacefully walked across the intersection when he met his executioner, whom Webber conflates with nineteenth-century cavalry officers whose duty was to eliminate Natives to foster national growth. As law enforcement officials, she asserts,

both the cavalry officer and the policemen were/are charged to prejudicially eradicate Native people. “Besides,” she asks, ventriloquizing in a non-Native persona, “didn’t we already kill you people?” The question refers to the belief that Native people had been executed, or assimilated, long before Officer Birk killed Williams. In the latter part of the performance she illustrates that an art tool in the hands of a Native becomes, in the view of law enforcement, a weapon. Selling art on the street, she posits, became “impossible to tax,” showing for the dominant society a sustained sense of Native criminality. “Impossible to tax” refers back to the history of laws formed to create Native rightlessness. Governments earn no tax income when one sells art on the street without a permit, and therefore the Native artist is figured as an illicit offender.

Speaking directly to the social inequality endemic to the culture from which the Native art industry arose, Webber proceeds, “you don’t go with anything in my condo / you breathed on my Benz.” Non-Native art collectors, in her view, want the artwork solely for their decorating schemes, arrangements that are in opposition to the lived realities of their displaced Native craftspeople. Webber asserts in the performance that, “somewhere between a nation of immigrants, and a noble savage John T fell / Splintered / And stories ran from his carver’s hand.” In this part, she identifies how the generations of cultural knowledge, the generations of craft, contained in his work, bled out with him that day. Thus her anger and frustration is consumed not only with the loss of her friend, but also the loss of the “stories” his work conveyed for Native culture.

In vexation, she then turns her attention to the police officer, for whom “we are asked to have sympathy,” who had a “life leading him to stop his police car and kill a man in one minute flat.” She questions, “Ian Birk if you were that scared of a half-deaf near-sighted limping Native woodcarver minding his own business / you should have stayed your stupid ass in your car.” If Officer Birk was frightened of a mythical savage, she asks, why did he not radio police headquarters for backup officers and remain in his patrol car until their arrival on the scene? In revisiting the metaphor of the road, she closes the performance by aligning her experiences as a Seattle Native youth with Williams’s: “I grew up on these streets / spent my life vanishing / at risk / crossing the bridge of rise-up falling fighters / crossing over / forever crossing over.” Webber pointed out how Seattle’s streets, roads, and intersections reflect Seattle indigenous history, maintaining the city as The Little Crossing-Over Place. Challenging the mythology of the vanishing Indian, she makes the case that Native people have lived and continue to live in Seattle, though non-Natives choose to imagine them as vanished, socially dead. In this way, she, Williams, and the indigenous community remain “forever crossing over” in the indigenous spaces of the city. She acknowledges the power and efficacy of oppression by suggesting the impossibility and violence that attends Native people who “cross over” into visibility, whose lives belie the misrepresentations that devalue their very existence. Using the words “crossing over” to allude both to Seattle’s original Native moniker, as well as the devaluing of Native life, Webber attests to the necropolitics of indigeneity that allows others to calculate Williams’s worth only upon his tragic “crossing over” into death.<sup>51</sup> The very performance unveils the presence of Seattle’s counterpublic that Storme Webber and John T. Williams personify.

## THE JOHN T. WILLIAMS MEMORIAL POLE

Both A Tribe Called Red and Storme Webber paid homage to the fallen artist in testament to his social value, thereby employing an aesthetic that merged art with the context of Native life. Their important work stands beside another piece that “crosses over” from the nonnormative sphere of indigeneity into the heart of Seattle’s civic community. In 2011 an organization announced that brothers Rick and Eric Williams would carve a pole, or perhaps even two, to memorialize and honor their brother John. The project’s fiscal sponsor was The Potlatch Fund, a 501(c)(3) organization and philanthropic foundation with an office in Seattle dedicated to serving the Native communities of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Nevada. The organization, whose name is based upon a once illegal Native activity of the potlatch—the giving away of one’s possessions—raised the money through private donations. Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn, who supported the building of the pole, officially pronounced February 26th John T. Williams’s Day, what would have been the carver’s fifty-first birthday. McGinn also announced that the city would provide space for the project to be installed on the waterfront as well as allow the pole to be elevated at the Seattle City Center.<sup>52</sup>

That spring, the foundation partnered with the city to deliver a forty-foot-long, unfinished span of red cedar to the Seattle Waterfront. The project’s mission to carve a memorial pole for Williams prioritized education and outreach through public programming, extensive community access, and documentation of the process of carving the totem pole. The deceased’s brother Rick worked through the spring and summer on the waterfront. To involve the community, the work was made open to the public, and many people took part in the carving process.

The result was a gift to the city to promote the realization of indigenous presence and to diminish the rendering of Native people such as John T. Williams as abject to city culture. Rick’s design and carving on the pole limns what he described as “three generations of the Williams family carving family: at the top, an eagle, next the human master woodcarver holding a kingfisher, and at the base, a mother raven.”<sup>53</sup> On John T. Williams’s fifty-second birthday, the finished pole was moved from the waterfront to the City Center. Native drummers accompanied the transportation of the pole, singing in celebration. When the pole made its way to the Seattle Center, Rick Williams commented, “I feel like I’m flying right now. . . . I feel him walking with me.” That morning, hundreds of Seattle community members took part by carrying the pole by hand through the downtown streets. The raising celebration occurred on a green space between the Space Needle and the Experience Music Project. “It’s an honor to give something like this,” Rick said as the pole made its way. “From what they took from us. There is peace.”<sup>54</sup> This affirmation of Williams’s life and his contribution to Seattle served to recognize the city’s ongoing Native culture and imbue the people with value. The pole’s production, elevation, and celebration stood in stark contrast to how the city’s residents, a century ago, failed to respect the Chief-of-All-Women pole’s cultural significance.

Though both the Chief-of-All-Women pole and the Williams pole were dedicated to commemorating innocent people who had unfairly lost their lives, the production

of the Williams pole insisted that its social significance remain a central aspect of its value for the city. The piece turned the necropolitics of Native criminalization and the senseless loss of life into the remedy of affirmation to bring together the city's community, Natives and non-Natives alike. The John T. Williams Memorial pole signified that Native art represented more than the abstracted expression of decorative, well-executed carvings. The piece holds Williams's story, one that took place on the streets where Seattle residents themselves travel through the city. Upon the pole's elevation, Native people came to publicly recoup Seattle as The Little Crossing-Over Place, an indigenous home long before the arrival of the United States. The spatial organization of the memorial in the green space realized a very literal land reclamation that obligated both indigenous and non-indigenous denizens of the city to contextualize the pole appropriately, in a manner denied the Chief-of-All-Women pole a century before. The John T. Williams pole infused the site with an indigenous presence, rupturing the colonial legacies that pit Native people as a counterpublic.

The artwork's demarcation of the space relied upon the death of one of the city's vulnerable residents whose social capital was held as nonnormative by those outside his circle of fellow artists, family members, and friends. To what degree does the recognition of Williams's value persist in Seattle after the piece was raised in the Seattle Center? On September 7, 2013, Rick Williams attended a drum circle held beneath the pole. With more than forty participants, the event drew passing onlookers making their way to a concert around the backside of the EMP Museum and others strolling down the Center's promenade towards the cafés. The drummers played, singing under the blue cloudy Seattle sky. On a pathway under a row of trees two police officers on bicycles watched the congregation, with more officers joining them a few minutes later. The presence of heightened law enforcement changed the situation's atmosphere from one of celebration to one of dangerous fragility. That an indigenous performance paying respect to a person killed by a police officer who went unpunished could be seen as potentially illegal contradicted the primary intent of the John T. Williams Memorial pole. The police watching under the leafy fall canopy transformed the soothing cultural artistry into a possible threat to the state, a formation of "Native deviance"—similar to Williams's knife and wood. Considering the history of outlawing Native publicness and cultural display, the drumming proved to be an action of possible emergence that transgressed such oppression with peace. How could the nonviolence of a drum circle, a seemingly modest cultural declaration of indigenous sovereignty, threaten the social order of the City Center? The volatility between the cultural demonstration of sovereignty and potential repression marked a provisional recognition of indigenous presence.

## NOTES

1. Often Native artists sell their work at the picnic tables adjacent to the totem poles designed by the park's non-Native namesake, architect Victor Steinbrueck.

2. Sara Jean Green and Steve Miletich, "Seattle Police Have Questions about Fatal Shooting by Officer," *Seattle Times*, August 31, 2010, updated September 1, 2010, [seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-police-have-questions-about-fatal-shooting-by-officer](http://seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-police-have-questions-about-fatal-shooting-by-officer).



3. "Raw video/Dashcam Video during John T. Williams Shooting," *Seattle Times*, January 19, 2011, [seattletimes.com/seattle-news/raw-video-dashcam-video-during-john-t-williams-shooting](http://seattletimes.com/seattle-news/raw-video-dashcam-video-during-john-t-williams-shooting).
4. Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 16.
5. Achille Mbembe describes necropolitics as a "central project" of sovereign power for "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations," in the state's benefit. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 14, doi: 10.1215/08992363-15-1-11.
6. Scholarly works that deal, historically and culturally, with the perception of Native people as contrary to public life include: Louise K. Barnett, *The Ignoble Savage: American Literary Racism, 1790–1890* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975); Robert Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1978); *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture*, ed. Elizabeth S. Bird (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); Philip J. Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004); Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992); Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Jacquelyn Kilpatrick, *Celluloid Indians: Native Americans and Film* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1999); Roy Harvey Pearce, *Savagism and Civilization: A Study of the Indian and the American Mind* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University, 2001); *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, ed. Peter C. Rollins and John E. O'Connor (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, new ed., 2000); Rennard Strickland, *Tonto's Revenge: Reflections on American Indian Culture and Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1997).
7. "Storme Webber at Poetry and Hip Hop Church, City Arts Fest 2010," *City Arts Magazine* YouTube video, [youtube.com/watch?v=eWsdxDnRrAo](http://youtube.com/watch?v=eWsdxDnRrAo).
8. "Woodcarver," A Tribe Called Red YouTube video, March 30, 2011, [youtube.com/watch?v=sx4JLPBMUx0](http://youtube.com/watch?v=sx4JLPBMUx0).
9. Leroy Skalstad, "Hate Crimes against the Homeless: Violence Hidden in Plain View: A Report from National Coalition for the Homeless," January 2012, 10, [nationalhomeless.org/publications/hatecrimes/hatecrimes2010.pdf](http://nationalhomeless.org/publications/hatecrimes/hatecrimes2010.pdf).
10. Casey McNerthney, "Family: Man Shot by Police Was Deaf in Left Ear," *Seattlepi.com*, August 31, 2010, [seattlepi.com/local/article/Family-Man-shot-by-police-was-deaf-in-left-ear-885252.php](http://seattlepi.com/local/article/Family-Man-shot-by-police-was-deaf-in-left-ear-885252.php).
11. Erika Harrell, *Crime Against Persons with Disabilities, 2008–2010-Statistical Tables* (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, October 2011, rev. November 14, 2011), 2, [bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd10st.pdf](http://bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd10st.pdf).
12. Bernard J. Farber, *Police Interactions with Deaf Persons*, *AELE Monthly Law Journal* 101, AELE Law Enforcement Legal Center, Civil Liability Law Section, March, 2009, [www.aele.org/law/2009all03/2009-03MLJ101.pdf](http://www.aele.org/law/2009all03/2009-03MLJ101.pdf); Erika Harrell, "Crime against Persons with Disabilities, 2009–2012- Statistical Tables" (Washington, DC: US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, February 2014), Table 1, 1, [bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0912st.pdf](http://bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/capd0912st.pdf).
13. More than forty Native and Native-themed artworks, including poles and sculptures, are on display in public and private venues throughout the city, including the Alaska Square Totem Pole on Pier 48, made by principal artists Jon Hagan, Ed Kasko, and Cliff Thomas from the Chilkoot-Haines area, and the pole at Montlake Park, a 1937 piece by Haida Chief John Wallace, originally made for a cannery in Southeastern Alaska.
14. Coll-Peter Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 14.

15. Trisha Brown, "The Stolen Totem Pole," University of Alaska Anchorage LitSite Alaska Digital Archives Partnership, [litsite.org/index.cfm?section=Digital-Archives&page=People-of-the-North&cat=Native-Lives-and-Traditions&viewpost=2&ContentId=2659](https://litsite.org/index.cfm?section=Digital-Archives&page=People-of-the-North&cat=Native-Lives-and-Traditions&viewpost=2&ContentId=2659).
16. Thrush, 113; Kate C. Duncan, *1001 Curious Things: Ye Olde Curiosity Shop and Native American Art* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 162.
17. Duncan, 163.
18. Ibid.
19. Duncan, 175–97; Peg Boettcher, "Carvers to the Core: The Legacy of Sam Williams," Ye Olde Curiosity Shop weblog entry, February 28, 2015, [yeoldecuriosityshop.com/blogs/news/17494904-carvers-to-the-core-the-legacy-of-sam-williams](http://yeoldecuriosityshop.com/blogs/news/17494904-carvers-to-the-core-the-legacy-of-sam-williams).
20. Neal Thompson, "A Carver's Life," *Seattle Met* profile, SagaCity Media, April 22, 2011, [seattlemet.com/articles/2011/4/22/john-williams-the-carvers-life-may-2011](http://seattlemet.com/articles/2011/4/22/john-williams-the-carvers-life-may-2011).
21. The Williams family developed a carving tradition due to economic need.
22. Brown, "The Stolen Totem Pole."
23. According to Lisa Marie Cacho, to face social death means to be "dismembered" of social value through "normative criteria" that publically form one as fundamentally rightless through various processes, such by criminalizing their culture or rights to their land. Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 31.
24. Treaty between the United States and the Duwamish, Suquamish, and other allied and subordinate tribes of Indians in Washington Territory: January 22, 1855, ratified April 11, 1859. 12 Stat. 927.
25. Marcia Crosby, "Construction of the Imaginary Indian," *Academic Reading: Reading and Writing in the Disciplines*, ed. Janet Giltrow (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2002), 267–91.
26. Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 1–14.
27. Ibid.
28. Thrush, 153–54.
29. Mike Males, "Who Are Police Killing?," Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice weblog entry, August 26, 2014, [cjcj.org/news/8113](http://cjcj.org/news/8113).
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Steven W. Perry, *American Indians and Crime: A BJS Statistical Profile, 1992–2002* (US Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, December 2004), [justice.gov/sites/default/files/otj/docs/american\\_indians\\_and\\_crime.pdf](http://justice.gov/sites/default/files/otj/docs/american_indians_and_crime.pdf).
34. Ibid., v.
35. Approximately 824 women have been murdered or gone missing from 1990 to 2012. In compiling a data base of the missing or murdered Native women, Canadian government investigator Maryanne Pearce notes that circumstances such as homelessness and addiction make this population more vulnerable to violent predators but that being aboriginal was the main factor in determining if a woman would fall victim to a violent crime. See Mary Agnes Welch, "New Database Lists 824 Murdered, Missing Native Women in Canada," *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 24, 2014, [winnipegfreepress.com/local/grim-number-jumps-in-study-241776001.html](http://winnipegfreepress.com/local/grim-number-jumps-in-study-241776001.html).
36. The West is a term applied to Western culture, a system of technologies associated with Europe.
37. Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 14–16.

38. Ibid., 16.
39. Ibid., 14–16.
40. Kevin Everod Quashie, “The Trouble with Publicness: Toward a Theory of Black Quiet,” *African American Review* 43, no. 2/3, 2009): 330, [jstor.org/stable/41328610](http://jstor.org/stable/41328610).
41. “Seattle Police Shooting Scene,” [seattlepi.com](http://seattlepi.com) YouTube video, [youtube.com/watch?v=-eH48e0kz1M](http://youtube.com/watch?v=-eH48e0kz1M).
42. Aileen Moreton-Robinson describes patriarchal white sovereignty as “a regime of power that derives from the act of possession . . . but also is evident in everyday cultural practices and spaces,” as a means of controlling racialized populations. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 34–35.
43. Natives in the act of cultural production challenge tacit notions of their vanishing by providing the material proof of their existence.
44. Randy Lewis video oral history interview, University of Washington Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project, [depts.washington.edu/civilr/lewis\\_randy.htm](http://depts.washington.edu/civilr/lewis_randy.htm).
45. “Randy Lewis Reads UIATF’s Statement Regarding the Shooting of John T. Williams,” United Indians of All Tribes Foundation YouTube video, [youtube.com/watch?v=Pc\\_xRmhMAfM](http://youtube.com/watch?v=Pc_xRmhMAfM).
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Steve Miletich, “Two Witnesses Contradict Officer’s Version of Woodcarver Shooting,” *Seattle Times*, January 13, 2011, [seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2013926779\\_inquest14m.html](http://seattletimes.com/html/localnews/2013926779_inquest14m.html).
49. “Woodcarver,” [youtube.com/watch?v=sx4JLPBMUx0](http://youtube.com/watch?v=sx4JLPBMUx0).
50. “Storme Webber at Poetry and Hip Hop Church,” [youtube.com/watch?v=eWsdxDnRrAo](http://youtube.com/watch?v=eWsdxDnRrAo). In transcribing Webber’s poem slashes have been inserted to indicate pauses in her performance.
51. In the conclusion of her book *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*, Lisa Marie Cacho discusses her cousin Brandon Martinez, who lost his life in a car accident, and the loving memorial work done by family members, which “composed alternative representations that helped us mourn and work against his absolute erasure,” 57.
52. Casey McNerthney, “Mayor: Sunday to be ‘John T. Williams Day in Seattle,’” [Seattlepi.com](http://seattlepi.com), February 24, 2011, [seattlepi.com/local/article/Mayor-Sunday-to-be-John-T-Williams-Day-in-1031102.php](http://seattlepi.com/local/article/Mayor-Sunday-to-be-John-T-Williams-Day-in-1031102.php).
53. Seattle Office of Arts and Culture, Permanently Sited Collection Highlights, Seattle Center, *John T. Williams Honor Totem Pole*, 2012, <http://www.seattle.gov/arts/permanently-sited?cat=8&view=28&img=0&item=16>.
54. “The Raising of the John T. Williams Totem Pole,” Eric Jensen YouTube post of Komonews.com video, February 26, 2012, [youtube.com/watch?v=HGkW0wgml98](http://youtube.com/watch?v=HGkW0wgml98).