

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America. Edited by Victoria Lindsay Levine and Dylan Robinson.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0dj5h8gj>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 45(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Parkhurst, Melissa

Publication Date

2021

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Something that surprised me is the eight-page epilogue at the end. Written by editors Lynn Stephen and Shannon Speed, the epilogue is titled, “Indigenous Women and Violence in the Time of Coronavirus.” It functions as a positionality statement of a historical moment in time and place—a postcard to the future of when and how this collection of essays was published. In only a few pages of reflection, Stephen and Speed reveal startling statistics of gendered violence resulting from COVID-19 that give readers a lot to think about as we move forward with embodied activist research and community work.

Although the fields of anthropology/ethnography and gender studies have been grappling with the complexities of indigeneity and settler colonialism for decades, Native feminism continues to be an under-theorized subfield. Through engaged feminist scholarship, *Indigenous Women and Violence* encourages its readers to both produce and transform methods of research, as well as to attend to the issues of violence and gendered justice for women across settler-imposed borders. The volume’s contributing scholars have done an excellent job providing critical analyses within frameworks that center distinct elements of Indigenous epistemologies, or ways of knowing, and using Native feminism as activist research methods.

Marcella Ernest

University of New Mexico

Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America. Edited by Victoria Lindsay Levine and Dylan Robinson. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2019. 360 pages. \$85.00 cloth; \$26.95 paper; \$21.99 electronic.

Today I’m modern; tomorrow I’ll be modern ‘til tomorrow; yesterday I was modern for yesterday.

—Sadie Buck (Tonawanda Seneca, Turtle Clan)
of the Six Nations Women’s Singers

This anthology brings together diverse authors who explore what it means to be an Indigenous person creating or using music in modern times. The conversations and questions that emerge in reading *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America* will stay and change the perspectives with which readers experience First Nations music. By centering Native points of view and undergirding its chapters with Indigenous epistemologies, this book overtly problematizes “modernity” in ethnomusicology and Indigenous studies. As contributing author Dawn Ierihó:Kwats Avery (Kanienkéha) states, “Indigenous modernity is part of a process that creates and maintains Native societies that are grounded in traditional beliefs.” Despite its being a connecting theme for the anthology, in the service of Indigenous tradition, creation, and survivance, modernity is allowed to take a back seat role. As Beverly Diamond asserts, “the *why* of Indigenous tradition, rather than the *what*, is arguably more relevant to a global future than the why of modernity.”

In the prologue, Inupiaq musician and scholar Heidi Aklaseq Senungetuk issues a gracious invitation to the reader to join in the welcoming dance of getting to know the authors and their approaches—just as in an opening *puala*, or invitational dance, where visitors and hosts share the dance floor and “get a sense of one another’s skills, attitudes, prowess, and willingness to share in celebration.” Contributors engage a variety of genres to probe the idea of music and modernity among North America’s First Peoples. Collectively, the essays lifts the breadth of musical activity among Indigenous peoples today. Hip-hop and powwow are represented richly, and activism powerfully grounds and animates many of the musical practices covered in this volume. Several contributors explore how musical functions are playing out in activist indigeneity, acknowledging the ways meanings are generated at the confluences of music, genre, culture, and political movements.

We encounter in the subsequent chapters a dynamic array of musical expressions. In many of the chapters, we are reminded of the mixed heritages that Indigenous musicians may embody, and how the sounds listeners might hear as hybridity are unified in the musicians’ own lives. These include a much-needed unpacking of the highly used photo of Frances Densmore and Mountain Chief with phonograph; analysis of music in Mi’kmaq funeral practices as a vehicle for reclaiming indigeneity; an explication of how the women’s vocal group Asani has furthered Indigenous activism; hip-hop’s particular forms of resistance along the United States-Mexico border; the powerful role of Round Dances in the Idle No More movement; the centrality of the cosmopolitan for Indigenous consciousness in hip-hop; the politics of powwow musicking in a university soundscape; how powwow and traditional cultural practices figure into public education and child-welfare provisions in Canada; how Inuit-led sound worlding and audiorealism transform recent documentary-style programs about Alaska; how Native classical music reflects such Indigenous values as interconnectedness, relationality, continuity, and political action.

A critique of the term “Indigenous modernity” traces its origins and its varied implications when used today. Essays by Beverly Diamond and Trevor Reed round out the conversation by purposefully reflecting on the false binary of “tradition” and “modernity,” exploring Indigenous approaches to listening, offering ways of countering simplistic stereotypes, and laying out a modern methodology wherein ways of listening can help us understand relations, power, and ongoing violence. Some repertoires (such as but not limited to hymnody) reflect changing assumptions about settler-Indigenous relations.

The diverse backgrounds of the authors are a real strength. Many are tribal members spanning a broad geographic reach; several identify their mixed heritage. Most hold faculty positions and some are independent scholars. Their research interests range far. Through the biographic statements at the close of the book, readers can discover further groundbreaking articles, soundtracks, and projects. Thematically, the chapters stick together by intentionally invoking common conceptual threads and dialogues. When the idea for this book was first starting to take shape, the contributors met to discuss the concepts that might weave the case studies together. A year later, they met again for a three-day writing workshop to share feedback on early

drafts of each chapter. The result is an anthology that sparkles with connections across disparate voices.

When examining these essays together, a robust and challenging research methodology is clear. Ethical scholars working in Indigenous studies and ethnomusicology must examine the political and social inequalities within which their artists are working and living. They must consider ways to remediate, rather than reinforce, the cultural harm caused by settler colonialism. They must problematize modernity, with all of its allegedly rational and distinct domains and categories. And they must continue developing language and concepts that accurately describe how music functions in people's lived experience. *Music and Modernity among First Peoples of North America* is a critical springboard for the next steps in decolonizing First Nations music in academia.

Melissa Parkhurst
Washington State University

Native Southerners: Indigenous History from Origins to Removal. By Gregory D. Smithers. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2019. 259 pages. \$29.95 paper.

One of the burgeoning fields in the study of Native American history over the past twenty-five years is the study of the Native south. The region, long the focus of narrative histories of the so-called "Five Civilized Tribes," has seen a groundswell of interest in a multitude of topics, time periods, and cultural groups, with studies of multiple polities, gender roles, forms of slavery, cultural formation, and other realms of both historical continuity and change creating an extensive body of literature. Historian Gregory Smithers has managed to synthesize this vast body of literature to produce an overarching examination of southeastern Native American history from the origins of Indigenous southerners through the era of removal, with a brief epilogue considering the history of Native southerners since removal. In the process, Smithers has crafted a compact but comprehensive survey of the Native south that serves to summarize the key bodies of research in this extensive field while simultaneously developing an organized and highly readable historical overview.

Smithers structures the book in a roughly chronological fashion. The first two chapters, focused on origins and the age of chiefdoms associated with mound building cultures, rely heavily on anthropological and archaeological information, but also work to maintain focus on oral histories and traditions to best understand how Indigenous peoples situated themselves in the world that became the Native south. An emphasis in these early chapters is the process of dynamic change. Even with the occluded perspectives available about the deep historical past, Smithers demonstrates that the Native south was far from static. A locus of societal, political, and geographic flux, the centuries before the arrival of Europeans witnessed the rise and fall of chiefdoms of varying size, the formation and reformation of cultures and communities, geographic movement, and various technological and agricultural developments allowing Native