

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Biomapping Indigenous Peoples: Towards an Understanding of the Issues. Edited by Susanne Berthier-Foglar, Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, and Sandrine Tolazzi.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/59q2z33k>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 38(2)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

TallBear, Kim

Publication Date

2014-03-01

DOI

10.17953

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/>

demonstrates the transformative spirit of the human heart and shows us how to laugh through pain and harness the strength of resilience.

At times Miranda can be crass, “Erasure is a bitch isn’t it?” (25) but it all comes from a humorous and yet very honest place. The only flaw of this text is the lack of footnotes and reference. Miranda cites photos and archives but there are no direct sources to specific facts. For the unacquainted reader, *Bad Indians* may appear to be an unsubstantiated conversation on the ills of California. In fact, Miranda references facts that have been verified by numerous preceding scholars. Therefore, *Bad Indians* would be a wonderful read in conjunction with authors Miranda notes herself, such as Hackel or Rawls and California Indian scholars, Costo and Costo.

Bad Indians is a book we have all been waiting for. It contemporarily addresses the gap in California Indian studies and invites itself to be taught in various introductory classes on California and Native American studies. California Indian scholars and those interested in the hidden truths of California and colonization will be eager readers. For those outside of the university, Miranda’s profound text is easily accessible and highly educational. In fact, every Californian owes themselves this read. Miranda puts it best, “Indian or not, haven’t we lived under the burden of California mission mythology and gold rush fantasy long enough? Isn’t it time to pull off the blood-soaked bandages, look at the wound directly, let clean air and healing take hold?” (208). Heed Miranda’s advice and read this important book.

Caitlin Keliiaa

University of California, Berkeley

Biomapping Indigenous Peoples: Towards an Understanding of the Issues. Edited by Susanne Berthier-Foglar, Sheila Collingwood-Whittick, and Sandrine Tolazzi. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2012. 476 pages. \$130.00 cloth.

A collection of essays by international scholars, *Biomapping Indigenous Peoples: Towards an Understanding of the Issues* provides historical, ethnographic, and textual approaches to understanding the politics and ethics of genome research on indigenous populations. Essays primarily address peoples in the English-speaking world—Australia, Tasmania, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States—with additional chapters on Taiwan and Siberia. The volume provides a basic overview for a nonspecialist audience of the predicaments of human genome research and historical, colonial, and disciplinary contexts.

The collection’s integration of relevant specialized fields such as science and technology studies, bioethics, and Native American and indigenous studies is

uneven, producing citations that are less than optimal. In the case of dynamic tribal political membership criteria in the United States, for example, there is a large literature within Native American and indigenous studies and cultural anthropology on the politics of tribal membership, but rather than citing social scientists who focus on the intricacies of the practices, the book extensively cites a physical anthropologist. Perhaps the Europe-based scholars who authored most of the US-focused chapters do not have sufficient immersion in US race politics and related scholarship. German scholar Frank Kressing's essay "Screening Indigenous Peoples' Genes" and French scholar Marie-Claude Strigler's contribution "Tribal Communities and Genetic Research" analyze the Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP) and Genographic, as well as the broader culture of genome research, maintaining that within these discursive contexts indigenous peoples are narrated as isolated and primitive. Indeed, this is a key drawback of such research. Yet key citations are missing from these chapters that have previously treated these topics, such as Jenny Reardon's 2005 seminal treatment of the HGDP, *Race to the Finish*. Although Kressing's essay revisits a deeper history of nineteenth-century race science, neglecting recent literature that treats the insidious reconfiguration in the late twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries of biological race in human genome diversity research undercuts the authority of Kressing's assertion that indigenous recognition "might increasingly depend on the ability to provide the 'right genome frequency.'" This may indeed be the case, but such claims need to be rooted in reading the state of science and cultural politics today, not only that of the nineteenth century.

A second German scholar, Renate Bartl, writes the chapter, "Genetic Blood Testing of Native Americans in the U.S.A.," in which she critically analyzes mid-twentieth-century testing on blood-type gene frequencies that researchers hoped would help racially classify Native Americans, African Americans, and European Americans. They sought to understand the actual percentages of racial ancestries that self-identified subjects from each group possessed. That research foreshadowed today's genetic ancestry testing in which subjects' DNA is examined for markers found in higher and lower frequencies in populations from around the world, thus indicating probable ancestry in Europe, Asia, Africa, or the Americas. Social and biological scientists have pointed out how genetic ancestry tests rearticulate older concepts of race within the modern concept of "population." Bartl notes extensive problems with the methods of the earlier blood-type study, specifically how subjects were determined to be racially full-blood or part-blooded; however, the ABO blood testing for racial classification has been sufficiently debunked by historians of science and was discontinued long ago. This contribution would have been more innovative had the author compared the blood testing for racial classification with today's

DNA testing that seeks to determine “biogeographical ancestry” percentages, but unfortunately Bartl only notes potential overlap at the end of the chapter and provides no analysis.

In Ulia Popova-Gosart’s chapter, “Indigenous Peoples: Attempts to Define,” she points out that “Social-science authors, whose work reinforces legal scholarship, repeatedly employ concepts of indigeneity that signify a so-called ‘traditional’ life-style distinguished from modernity” (89). This is sometimes true but the literature is more diverse than that. For example, the important 2007 volume *Indigenous Experience Today*, edited by Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn, features essays from renowned social scientists and humanists who work in indigenous communities around the globe. That collection complicates static notions of indigenous tradition and overly simplistic continuity. Indeed, the author might note that genetic scientists are more likely these days to rely on notions of tradition versus modernity in describing indigenous people as genetically more isolated. Her breakdown of literatures and approaches to “indigenous realities” (91) neglects to note definitions by biophysical scientists at all, which is odd given this volume’s topic.

The chapter, “No Matter How White or Black the Skin, How Pure the Blood: Cherokee Identity and the 2007 Vote,” is an interesting contribution that does some things well and others not as well. French scholar Séverine Gauthier-Labourot did fieldwork in Oklahoma but does not sufficiently ground her analysis in the most current US scholarship on tribal blood politics, enrollment, and genetics. Key citations are omitted, including Circe Sturm’s *Cherokee Blood Politics* (University of California Press, 2002). Gauthier-Labourot also makes a fundamental mistake at the beginning of the essay—although United States-based scholars make the same mistake—when she explains, “The Cherokees have long been reluctant to consider blood a valid criterion for tribal identification, choosing instead, in their 1975 constitution, to rely on genealogy” (137). But of course the Cherokee choose or do not choose “blood” in fundamentally the same way that all US tribes choose it—they call on the *symbolics* of blood when they use “genealogy” or lineal biological descent as the chief criterion for enrollment. No tribe uses laboratory prostheses to examine blood as a physiological substance. Other tribes that use “blood quantum” call on blood symbols differently, but all modern-day Native American tribes use the idea of blood descent. It is true, as the author points out, that the Cherokee Nation draws on descent in ways that are more inclusive of multiple descendants. What I like in this chapter is the author’s rich analysis of Cherokee historical patterns of conferring kinship and identity in ways that were more complex and more literally engendered by social and kinship obligations than are today’s blood descent criteria. She argues that Cherokee matrilineality was misinterpreted by European American observers

who brought their non-Cherokee blood symbolics to understand Cherokee “half-bloods” as therefore acculturated to the dominant society. The author argues that to the contrary, Cherokee society exerted considerable cultural influence not only over its citizens, including half-bloods, but also over whites who married into and did business with the Cherokee Nation. In recognizing dynamic Cherokee practices over time, the author analyzes the history and politics of enfranchisement and subsequent disenfranchisement of freed black slaves into the Cherokee body politic. She ends up demonstrating, counter to her original assertion, that the Cherokee indeed *do* value blood; this is evident in the disenrollment of black Cherokees listed on freedmen, and not Cherokee, blood rolls.

Several chapters add more in terms of original research. Yu-Yueh Tsai’s chapter, “The Geneticization of Ethnicity and Ethnicization of Biomedicine: On the ‘Taiwan Bio-Bank,’” explains the entangled history of “ethnicity” and “race” categories in social and biomedicine and how this history influences the construction of the Taiwan Bio-bank. In turn, the bio-bank loops back to reaffirm older notions of genetically determined race. The author also explains how bio-banking in Taiwan is related to a quest for a Taiwanese identity and political status that is distinct from China. This chapter contributes to an increasing body of English-language science and technology studies literature that analyzes the politics of science, technology, and society in Asia.

In “Disturbing Pasts and Promising Futures,” Emma Kowal argues that because Australian Aboriginal people have so successfully resisted involvement in genomic research, Australia lags behind the United States, New Zealand, and Canada in discussing and producing regulatory mechanisms for genome research in indigenous communities. She provides a useful comparison of Australian, United States, and Canadian policies and politics of research on indigenous peoples. In a second chapter, she and Ian Anderson present indigenous reactions to and critiques of genome research at a 2010 Australian roundtable on indigenous genetic research. Their incisive ethnographic vignettes illustrate common indigenous challenges to particular genetic concepts and data-gathering practices. The vignettes make this a teachable chapter, especially for those readers who are still unconvinced that indigenous critiques of genome research are anything more than unfounded fears rooted in a misunderstanding of science.

Finally, Golbeck and Roth’s “DNA Ancestry Testing and Changing Concepts of Indigeneity” addresses a key gap in the literature: do Native American ancestry DNA tests actually inform the identities of the genealogists who use them? The authors find that DNA test takers indeed rescript their identities as Native American or not based on DNA evidence. Furthermore, such test takers tend to be highly critical of US tribal government citizenship

regulations that do not consider DNA testing as evidence for purposes of conferring tribal status. Golbeck and Roth conclude that DNA testing in popular culture may come to overshadow the idea of Native American identity as tribal and determined by tribal entities. It may instead come to be understood in the popular imagination as genetic, with potential serious consequences for Native American tribes.

In summary, *Biomapping Indigenous Peoples* provides a useful overview of how genomic research today challenges indigenous peoples' sovereignty and worldviews. The volume provides useful historical context as well, rooting the problems of genomics in a much deeper history of colonial scientific practice. But for those familiar with the literatures in which this collection attempts to intervene, the volume may fall short.

Kim TallBear

University of Texas at Austin

Blackbird's Song: Andrew J. Blackbird and the Odawa People. By Theodore J. Karamanski. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012. 293 pages. \$39.95 cloth.

I still remember the thrill of my first encounter, in a Northern Michigan bookshop, with a small, yellow, locally reprinted copy of Andrew Blackbird's 1887 *History of the Ottawa and Chippewa: A Grammar of their Language, and Personal and Family History of the Author*. I was transfixed. At that time I was faculty member working with a Native American student organization at Eastern Michigan University, and I learned that by dint of uncommon resourcefulness and intelligence Blackbird had enrolled at Eastern in 1858, then the Michigan State Normal School in Ypsilanti. As part of his longer-term vision to equip himself to be a vehicle for the education of his people, upon securing whatever earlier education he could muster through missionaries, Blackbird walked hundreds of miles from his northern Michigan village of L'Arbre Croche to Detroit, knocked on the door of Lewis Cass, the former territorial governor, and gained, through Cass's personal advocacy, Indian Bureau support for college tuition.

Even a quick glance at the account by this fascinatingly bicultural Native man suggested there was a story there, and now Theodore J. Karamanski has told that story well, in an assiduously researched and narratively detailed book. I had read in Blackbird's account that his studies in Ypsilanti were cut short in his third year for want of sufficient funds, and that he returned to the Odawa settlements along Lake Michigan's Little Traverse Bay with an education, if