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# NATIVE ARTS





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# Introduction to Native Arts Panel

*Kenneth Lincoln*

My generous friends Jim Barnes and Greg Sarris join us to celebrate four decades of Native American studies at UCLA. The Choctaw/Irish writer Jim Barnes is 2009–2010 Poet Laureate of Oklahoma; professor emeritus of English and comparative literature from several universities for more than four decades; editor of the *Chariton Review* for thirty years; and author of thirteen books of poetry, several memoirs and fictions, and countless articles and essays. He is a soft-spoken singer of local Oklahoma hills and sloughs, a reader and writer carrying on Native traditions, an advocate of mixed-blood fusions across cultures and bloodlines. Jim is less self-conscious of his honored regional role in the heartland of Native America than dedicated to his ongoing craft and tribal peoples everywhere.

Navajo and Mexican, Paul Apodaca is a professor of folklore at Chapman College and a distinguished UCLA graduate student. He has authored many books and articles in Native American studies, notably studies of the Cahuilla bird songs and their singers. Many decades ago in Southern California, Paul supported his family by selling roadside sand paintings. He learned early on that art is what Natives do: needing no badges, curators, or dog soldiers. He has directed Native museums and worked with the recent renaissance of tribal arts and cultures in the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, all the while asking that the country let the people be who they are and what they do, indigenously. Keep the songs and stories alive, he repeats passionately as an elder teacher and tribal keeper of Native arts.

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KENNETH LINCOLN has been teaching Native American studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, for more than forty years. His 1983 book, *Native American Renaissance*, initiated a discussion of Native writing nationally, and since then he has published more than a dozen books in the field.

We are celebrating four decades of an American Indian cultural and political renaissance. Remember that N. Scott Momaday's 1969 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *House Made of Dawn* (1968) kick-started a national reawakening, along with Vine Deloria Jr.'s spunky Buckskin Curtain roast, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969), originally a bumper sticker to goad missionaries, social scientists, and politicians into putting hard work, clout, and cash behind their kind words and professional interests. The year 1969 also witnessed the courageous occupation of Alcatraz as a Thanksgiving retaking of surplus Native land and saw the first white man on the moon hitting a golf ball into space.

I'd like to remind us of our collective, cross-tribal, all-American heritage in the words of Scott Momaday's honoring poem, "Carriers of the Dream Wheel" (Duane Niatum, *Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry*, 1975):

This is the Wheel of Dreams  
Which is carried on their voices,  
By means of which their voices turn  
And center upon being.  
It encircles the First World,  
This powerful wheel.  
They shape their songs upon the wheel  
And spin the names of the earth and sky,  
The aboriginal names.  
They are old men, or men  
Who are old in their voices,  
And they carry the wheel among the camps,  
Saying: Come, come,  
Let us tell the old stories,  
Let us sing the sacred songs.

So let us start our dialogue with questions of art, culture, history, and public use. How do ceremonial voices carry the ancestral dream wheel forward? On and off the rez, blood ties to crossing peoples, consider how wide and far the sacred hoop surrounds us, tribe to academy. Imagine the old made new with stories and songs. How do earth and sky draw inspiration from the ancient names?

Contemplate how cultural tradition informs us today, when the past fuses into the present. How can young women and men be traditionally wise, indeed "old in their voices"? Ponder where we are going, whose camps, what voices, which roads to where. Are the "old stories" and "sacred songs" still relevant to "now-day Indi'ns," as my Lakota brother Mark Monroe used to say? Listen

to the last song of Sitting Bull, December 15, 1890, now the Sioux National Anthem in our High Plains home country:

*I-ki chi-ze wa-on-kon he*  
*Wa-na he-na-la ye-lo he*  
*I-yo-ti-ye ki-ya wa-on.*  
So I have been a warrior  
And now the war is over so  
I know to bear against hard times.

Let us “sing with the heart of a bear,” as the people chant where I grew up. May we “speak like singing” and go forward into our shared, recommitted, renewed awakening.