

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Rolling in Ditches with Shamans: Jaime de Angulo and the Professionalization of American Anthropology. By Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/84d1m3jz>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 29(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Ferreira, Mariana Leal

Publication Date

2005-06-01

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/>

is not addressed in the text, and smacks of disingenuous hype to anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of the tribal history of those other park units.) To the authors' credit, such a critical examination of park-tribes relations is not especially practical in a document that originated within an NPS-funded study. They are well poised to examine this relationship in the wake of their research efforts for the current book, however, and would perform an important service if they might give this theme more considered attention in subsequent works. In the meantime, those wishing to understand parks-tribes relations at Yellowstone and elsewhere should consult the growing literature on the topic, such as Robert Keller and Michael Turek's *American Indians and the National Parks* (1999), Philip Burnham's *Indian Country, God's Country* (2000), and Mark David Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness* (2000). Nabokov and Loendorf's book performs an important service—it stands apart in its documentation of Yellowstone's unique position in the histories and cultures of the principal peoples of the region. Read in conjunction with these other sources, it provides us with a clear understanding of the past, a glimpse of the present, and hints of the future, as we seek to understand the enduring relationship between American Indian peoples and this unique place on the North American landscape.

Douglas Deur

University of Washington

Rolling in Ditches with Shamans: Jaime de Angulo and the Professionalization of American Anthropology. By Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. 359 pages. \$59.95 cloth.

Rolling in Ditches with Shamans addresses the politics of the professionalization of American anthropology shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. The discipline's major goal at the time was to salvage traditional cultures "before they all went to pieces," as anthropologist Alfred Kroeber liked to put it. Leeds-Hurwitz's thorough analysis of archival documents—mostly personal letters written in the 1920s between the French physician, amateur anthropologist, and self-proclaimed "anarchist" Jaime de Angulo (1887–1950) and Franz Boas, Edward Sapir, and Kroeber himself—reveals that the field of anthropology was shaped not only by the functionalist paradigm of the day but also by a conservative and xenophobic American society intolerant of unconventional writing styles and eclectic social behaviors. Results of professional, ethnographic fieldwork were said to be restricted to the formation of large databases and to the description of "perishing data" in periodicals and volumes aimed at a highly erudite audience interested exclusively in the advancement of "science." The writings were never intended for an indigent audience and rarely made it to California reservations and rancherias, which helps explain their present-day hostility to research, and to anthropologists in particular. De Angulo, instead, wrote for "his Indians" as well, while insisting that "ethnographic texts" were not merely descriptive and objective,

but interpretive and intersubjective endeavors that weaved together fact and fiction—a claim advanced by late modern thinkers and poststructuralists of the late-twentieth century. Disgusted with the vulgarity of American society, de Angulo found solace and inspiration in the writings of psychoanalyst Carl Jung, whom he regarded as a “genius.” Jung claimed that anyone interested in the human psyche would be better advised “to abandon exact science, put away his scholar’s gown, bid farewell to his study, and wander with human heart throughout the world.”

Rolling in Ditches with Shamans would be unacceptable as a book title on the professionalization of American anthropology were its main protagonists acclaimed anthropologists like Franz Boas or Kroeber, who favored participant-observation but condemned “going native” as an ethnographic research method. Nor does this catchy title manage to do justice to the remarkable contributions de Angulo brought to the emerging field of anthropology and linguistics vis-à-vis the production of California Indian ethnographies in the 1920s and 1930s. Smart, handsome, and popular with women and Indians alike due to his festive personality, French accent, and Spanish looks, de Angulo found that within a few years his prominence at the University of California, Berkeley, turned into a complete rejection of his linguistic work even though it is considered one of the best contributions to the study of Native languages according to the eminent linguist Edward Sapir and his colleagues at Columbia University. Neither does the title fairly portray de Angulo’s dedication to making California Indians’ colonial history and cultural and linguistic diversity known to a larger audience, including the KPFA radio broadcasts since the 1950s of his most popular pieces—“Indian Tales” and “Old Time Stories.” In his academic and literary writings, including novels and books for children, de Angulo shared his informants’ views of everyday life in an attempt to humanize and capture in a more personal way the lives of the Indians he met, rather than treating them as “museum species.” De Angulo’s good rapport and intimacy with “his” Achumawi people were the opposite of Kroeber’s well-known intolerance to his own informants’ tears while relating personal accounts of colonial history.

The Frenchman seemed to achieve quite easily, but at the expense of his career, what most American anthropologists have striven for unsuccessfully: popularity not only within the academic world and public arena but also in American Indian communities, who were beginning to produce their own portrayals of indigenous social history. Such is the case of *To the American Indian: Reminiscences of a Yurok Woman* (1916) by Lucy Che-na-wah Weitch-ah-wah Thompson—the first American Indian woman to be published in California and only rediscovered in the 1990s. Much like de Angulo, Thompson rescues “her Indian people” from museum cabinets and wax cylinders, offering to a broad audience a vivid description of Yurok struggles with alcoholism, venereal diseases, and boarding school confinement following the American invasion of California, the Gold Rush, and the federal government’s refusal to ratify each and every treaty negotiated with California Indians.

The second half of the book is somewhat disappointing. While it is of interest to contemporary anthropologists, American Indian scholars, and

historians of science, the general reader is hard-pressed to discover therein the significant theoretical contributions to the field anticipated by de Angulo in his observations of California Indian life. Halfway through the book, the reader is quite anxious for the comprehensive analysis of de Angulo's writings promised at the start, in particular the personal and historical accounts in *The Achumawi* (1929), the writer's first ethnography. Perhaps we will also be offered a glimpse of his first novel, *Dom Bartolomeu* (1925), or a tiny taste of *Indians in Overalls* (1948), highly acclaimed by Ezra Pound, Marianne Moore, and other celebrated poets and writers. What happened to his last novel, *The Androgynes*, which is still unpublished? It becomes frustrating to have to scavenge for de Angulo's insights amidst sparse fragments of his own words, surrounded by what amounts to an encyclopedic examination of how research committees worked, replete with listings of funding sources, languages described, and texts collected. In this respect the structure of the book closely resembles how functionalism helped shape the field of American anthropology: *Rolling in Ditches with Shamans* claims to elucidate de Angulo's role in the professionalization of the discipline while situating him within a preestablished social and academic order, allowing little room for his own perspectives and fundamental contributions to the field of anthropology to emerge.

For instance, de Angulo's reflections on the "mentality of primitive man" in the 1920s mirrored the interest of European anthropologists, especially seen in the works of Lévy-Bruhl. Most strikingly, de Angulo anticipates Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion in *The Savage Mind* (1962) that the "science of the concrete" is a characteristic of how all humans think today, rather than an exclusive attribute of indigenous societies. While American anthropologists and their fellow psychologists, especially Kroeber and Erik Erikson, respectively, applied Freudian theory to understand American Indians' "primitive minds," de Angulo wrote in 1922: "Their psychology is just like ours, only more so. . . . What I have gotten out of my study, so far, is less an understanding of the primitive psychology of the Indians than a clearer understanding of the primitive psychology of most of us" (100). On a similar note, remarkable insights advanced by de Angulo about California Indians are proof of his extensive dialogue with British social anthropology as well, including Evans-Pritchard's famed *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937). De Angulo also asserted that California Indians understood not only the "how" of disease and misfortune, that is, the chains of physical cause and effect but also the "why me" and "why now," touching upon critical social relationships that science is rarely interested in discussing. The Achumawi's logical interpretation of why an engine broke down not only "made use of logic just as any white man would" but also explained why it happened to a particular individual at a certain moment in time (190).

An interesting correlation can be traced in de Angulo's writings between "religious feeling" and the "fervor of gambling," past and present. A better understanding of gambling as a sacred activity could help explain how hegemony and culture converge to strengthen oppression and discrimination, as proposed by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci in the 1920s. A more critical picture would then emerge to explain why American Indian communities

began rallying for permission to erect casinos on indigenous lands as a means of economic development, a permission that was granted when Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988. The current controversy about the benefits of casino money could broaden if the American public was made aware of the traditional role played by gambling in indigenous communities, such as in the “stick games” of California Indian nations, and how indigenous gambling reflects theories of gift exchange, which differ radically from the capitalist notions that undergird white American casinos.

Undoubtedly, the biggest merit of the book is to uncover the “social facts” that shaped American anthropology. Leeds-Hurwitz’s book dispells the persistent myth of anthropologists’ objectivity when describing or portraying indigenous peoples worldwide. The politics of the professionalization of American anthropology remains somewhat taboo within the field since there is little interest in uncovering details of its social history. George Stocking, George Marcus, and Clifford Geertz are some of the best-known scholars who have attempted to capture the politics of anthropology-making, but they have done so largely from a theoretical standpoint that avoids the social and personal issues intrinsic to the formation of any academic field. In this respect Leeds-Hurwitz, as an “outsider” and speech-communication specialist, brings original insights to how academia really works and why interpretations become social facts, thereby unveiling some of the “mysteries” that have preserved indigenous hostility toward anthropologists—alive and well to this day—in the United States. Contemporary American Indian writers, scholars, and activists nowadays claim, as de Angulo did almost a century ago, that indigenous knowledge—including emotions, actions, embodied skills, taxonomies, and other forms of communication—are indeed more representative of what anthropologists know, what we don’t know, and what is probably unknowable about any human population altogether.

Mariana Leal Ferreira

San Francisco State University

Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom.

By Tiya Miles. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. 306 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

In this engaging work, Tiya Miles explores slavery, nationhood, and kinship among the nineteenth-century Cherokees. Miles joins a growing body of scholars interested in the complex relationships between peoples of African and Native descent in the American South and Indian Territory. *Ties that Bind* focuses on a single Afro-Cherokee family, the Shoeboots, from the late-eighteenth century through the Civil War: “Their saga reflects the complexities of colonialism, slavery, racialization, nationalism, and the family as a site of subjugation and resistance” (4). In addition to historical documents, Miles weaves literary criticism, anthropology, slave autobiographies, and recent works of fiction to create an insightful, lively narrative.