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INTRODUCTION



Gathering Native Scholars and Artists: A Celebration of Forty Years—October 22 and 23, 2009

David Treuer

INTRODUCTION

It is my pleasure to introduce to you this special issue of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal (AICRJ)*, celebrating forty years of American Indian studies at UCLA. This issue is special—not just because we are celebrating American Indian studies, but also because the bulk of the pieces in this issue were, initially, performed on panels or solo in front of audiences gathered at UCLA to celebrate the program. One hesitates to describe these performances—the ones at the gathering and the ones gathered here—as “oral.” They were prepared and presented and written and written again. One hesitates again to call them in the oral tradition. But in at least one way the oral tradition and the academic tradition do overlap; they both delight in myth making.

Because the best introductions are short I will try to keep this that way. To that end, I asked the contributors to this volume to provide short synopses, in their own words, about the Gathering of Native Scholars. The only rules were that the synopses had to be 140 words, they had to address the gathering as a whole, and the contributors couldn't use that space to talk about their own work. Despite that last stipulation, we received a great many back from our cohort. Some chide, some celebrate, some bemoan, and some tease, but all manage to show the one thing that was on display at the gathering and, subsequently,

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amply on display in this volume. All the participants—no matter their field or their personality or their approach or their reservations or even their race—care deeply in and believe in the continued vibrancy of the field of American Indian studies. We are blessed with their efforts—calm, sneaky, fractious, restrained, patrician, and perfect. What we can see is a field to which many of talent and heart are dedicated and a field that is in a moment of great flux and change. Both should hearten us. We should, as Justin Richland does, truly celebrate what we’ve all done together. What follows is the call for introductory material as it went out and the responses exactly as they were and unedited and in the order they came in. As with the rest of the special issue—read and enjoy!

BOOZHOO EVERYONE

david treuer here. i’ll be “editing” the special issue “gathering of native scholars” in which all or most of you will appear. i put editing in scare quotes mostly because the job is very light duty—you all and pamela grieman and her co-workers have done most of the work already. i think it was a great gathering and this will be a great issue of the *AICRJ*, somewhat dazzling in its diversity of thought, style, and mode of address.

what little there is left to do is to provide an introduction. But since this issue isn’t the usual kind and is, by definition, a gathering of scholars and not so much guided by the editor’s choices, i thought perhaps a different kind of intro was in order.

rather than frame things as i see them or provide simple summaries of your various and varied points and perspectives, i wanted to give everyone a chance to weigh in somehow, to provide a “joint intro” if you all wish. writing by committee is hard (a bit like everyone trying to darn the same sock at the same time), but i’m open to suggestions.

one idea—in this, our twitter-age—might be if each one of us provided one long paragraph, with only three modest rules: no more than 140 words (not characters), it should address the gathering as a whole, and each writer should refrain from talking about his or her own work. other than that, you are free to express yourselves in whatever idiom or language you like. i can gather these and stitch them together. i think (yes no maybe pamela?) we have two weeks to do this. but 140 words of a general positive nature shouldn’t be so hard, right?

i really do think the idea of a chorus (dissonances encouraged!) might best serve this issue. as it is, i am very happy to be working with you all.

cheers,

weweni sa go mii ezhi-babaamoseyeg iidog sa gona

david

CLARA SUE KIDWELL

Dear Mr. Treuer:

My paragraph: The UCLA symposium marked an important step in the maturation of an intellectual movement that began in the late 1960's in the midst of social unrest and political turmoil. That movement began largely in response to those external forces, and active confrontation was the order of the day. The movement, an attempt to find ways to effect change for American Indian communities, might have foundered out of sheer frustration, but it has survived and now allows us to reflect back with much greater sophistication on the past and chart new courses for where we can go in the future.

That is probably longer than my allotted 148 words, but it is what I see as the importance of the gathering.

GREG SARRIS

Dear David,

[Greg changed his mind and dictated this to me over the phone, from his impressions.]

In retrospect, the gathering at this conference underscored the continued need for scholars to apply their respective work in real and meaningful ways to Indian communities. Some of the discussions I heard became debates about approaches and ideology that I failed to understand their immediate use to Indian communities. Now, more than ever, there is a need for scholars to work with one another and not be co-opted by either academic or university politics that work to prohibit us doing our job, which, as I see it, is to both enhance an understanding of American Indian peoples and empower our respective American Indian communities. Finally, it was good for me to see that there are many of us still interested in this work that scholars before us began. Now the big challenge is for us to continue.

KEN LINCOLN

Hola David: congrats on your new digs.

The attached is a bit longer than you ask, but since I organized the conference and edited the *Journal* proceedings for the gathering, maybe I get an extra few words. I'm including the text here and the file, in case you can't open the Mac Pages file.

Best, Ken

As I pack my tent to retreat into the Southwest desert hills, I'm proud over forty years to have contributed to UCLA American Indian studies. Most of us pulled together to help out, as they say back home in Sioux country. Today the identity question spins back with an ethnic twist, Who's Indi'n, Whose Indian? In the old days we had to beat the brush to find volunteers to bridge the Buckskin Curtain; today the brush is being beaten back with various Red or White callouts from inside and outside the camp. What have we learned from the rez to academia over my professional lifetime? The old-timers have learned that Indian cultures are indeed tenacious, but friable and susceptible to co-option within or out. We have learned that trash talk whips like wildfire through delicate alliances across cultural divides. We have learned that "blood" purity can be used as racial ploy, no less than ethnic eugenics, fracturing historic custom, marital fusing, adoptive kinship, clan crossing, tribal relocation, and community service in determining the people. Everyone counts when human capital is critical. We have learned despite the obvious shortcomings of academics, church folk, and politicians—as Vine Deloria checked his own diatribe on Custer dying for our sins—that religion, government, and higher education gather critical density cores to discuss issues, hash out policies, initiate necessary research, and apply tried-and-true, innovative, or hybrid approaches to solve common problems. From reservation, to urban, to academic Indian our pantribal work coalesces in groundwork research for scientific scrutiny, community use, and public debate to educate all peoples. Mutually we cannot squander our Native and American resources.

DAVID SHORTER

My apologies. I wrote this a week ago and sitting here on this plane realized, I never sent it. It might be too "out there." I can rewrite it if you want. Hope you are well.

As if we need any further proof that academic cultures are "little communities" worthy of their own ethnographic studies, the symposium provided as much information on ritual as it did history. We had our clowns, elders, politicians, organizers, and interlopers. The clowns helped us laugh at ourselves by showing the futility in getting everything right all of the time. They also showed us that we were, at the core, part of life-affirming processes. The ritual of bringing alumni of UCLA's American Indian studies evolving programs together with current contributors reminded us to be thankful for our longevity, for our presence not only on campus, but here on what is still "native land." And from session to session, we heard our community's elders, leaders and participants discuss our shared past. And like those tribal histories, they

were equal parts politics, myth, and hope. The gathering was ceremonial: we learned things both true and real about ourselves.

PAUL APODACA

I have sent this to *AICRJ* already:

American Indian studies has a large future as we maintain the use of the interdisciplinary format and continue to further academic theory and method so as to include, value, and incorporate innovation from the worldview and specific insights of American peoples and individuals.

The history of the development of American Indian studies within the academy has a varied history and diverse goals. Some efforts have focused on bringing the benefits of the academy to the native community so as to enhance the voice and authority of native cultures and people. The pursuit of improved and inclusive methods that can allow for and incorporate American Indian contributions to world knowledge and provide tools for interpreting the New World and its peoples is another approach. Each scholar has their own approach and is confident in their understanding. The future of American Indian studies is one that allows for this continuance, diversity, and growth.

Best,
Paul

GARY NASH

David: I'm not sure just what I can add to my panel remarks and lunchtime talk. I suppose I might count up the number of scholars whose essays have been published in the journal over 40 years and use that impressive number to make the claim that the Center's journal has established a national and international presence and become an important part of the explosion of scholarship in Native American history, literature, public policy, law, and other fields. To that, you might add the number of books reviewed in some 160 issues of the journal—again to make the claim that the Center's journal has made a big footprint in the world of Native American studies. Then, perhaps you might add up the number of graduates of the M.A. program in order to say that the Center has attracted budding scholars from all over the country and abroad. You might want to mention the countries from which they have come to study in the M.A. program.

regards, Gary Nash

MELISSA NELSON

On a warm October evening in Los Angeles, this gathering of Native American scholars and artists was kicked off by a keynote talk by Coast Miwok professor and tribal Chairman Greg Sarris. As a California Indian leader it was fitting that he started the event with words about tribal sovereignty, indigenous intellectual pursuits, and recognized the achievement of forty years of Native presence in the academy. Sarris, a self-described “scholar and Indian chief” and with passion, humor, and insight, opened the gathering with a unique mixture of celebration and gravitas in recognizing the complexity of Native life today.

The next day we had a full schedule of panel discussions featuring the extraordinary senior scholars who created the field of American Indian/Native American studies and younger scholar-activist-writers who are expanding and redefining the field.

The senior scholars shared from their largely disciplinary perspectives as visionary historians, literary critics, and anthropologists, while the young trans-disciplinary scholars and artists shared their contemporary, applied approaches.

Melissa K. Nelson

AMY LONETREE

Dear David,

Thanks for your patience. Edit as you see fit. . . . Best wishes, Amy

Participating in the 40th Anniversary Celebration of UCLA’s American Indian Studies Center came at a critical time nationally as Native American studies departments are facing diminishing resources in lean budget times. While the event allowed us to honor UCLA’s deep history of active and significant contributions to the field, I was also reminded of the ongoing efforts needed to develop and/or revitalize American Indian studies programs throughout the country. The panelists presented a diverse and compelling case for the vibrancy of scholarship by, for, and about Native people, while also reminding us of the work to be done to protect the inroads we have made over the last four decades. We came together in October 2009 to commemorate past achievements by those early visionaries and leaders in the field, and to provide vision for the next 40 years of American Indian studies scholarship.

PAUL KROSKRITY

Hi David,

I am only writing an intro to the Productive Paths session so I wondered about even including the 140 words. Still, if you think it may be useful:

Since the very inception of Native American studies, the relationship between Native American and academic communities has always been a focal concern. The founders of our field viewed the protection of Indian homelands as its highest cause, and the core themes of sovereignty and indigeneity are traceable to this value. This foundational move both constructed and distributed authority and types of knowledge in an innovative manner. Today we can find many examples of productive relationships being forged between Native and academic communities. Academic approaches to Native American cultures and societies critically need to recognize the cultural authority of indigenous people at the same time that indigenous communities recognize that academic knowledge may be important and even necessary for their projects of economic development, linguistic revitalization, and cultural sovereignty.

JUSTIN RICHLAND

Dear David,

Here is my contribution, sorry it is late. Feel free to edit as you please. Hope it works for what you're planning.

Best,

Justin

Hey American Indian Studies Center, Happy 40th! Wow, you make 40 look great! Sure, you're sporting a little more gray, and maybe are a little thicker around the middle. But think of what you've been through: the shake-downs, the shake-ups, and the shake-it-all-arounds. And you have the scars to show for it. But, of everyone starting out back then, you were the one they said would never make it out of the 70s. But you're still here, kicking ass. You're like the Stones, or at least Keith Richards—missing a few teeth, not quite throwing it back like you used to, needing some fresh blood every now and then. But definitely still rocking, still talking shit, but not taking shit from anyone else. And always with that crazy hair. And somehow that all seems just about right to me. Congrats.

And with that—we begin!