

# Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

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# Agenda

## Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies



- Week 1 – Keywords: Indigeneity/Indigenous, Native
- Week 2 – Keyword: Land
- Week 3 – Keyword: Sovereignty
- Week 4 – Keywords: Nation, nationhood
- Week 5 – Keywords: blood, tradition
- Week 6 – Keywords: colonialism, decolonization
- Week 7 – Keyword: Survivance
- Week 8 – Keyword: Knowledge
- Week 9 – Keywords: Literature, Art
- Week 10 – Keywords: Queer, 2-Spirit or, previously (derogatory), berdache
- Week 11 – Keyword: Resistance
- Week 12 – Keyword: Race

# Course info

- All readings are recommended, not required. Of course, all will be helpful in deeper understanding what we are discussing in class.
- As the case with all classes, no one course (or two) can cover the entire breadth of a topic. There will be things that we will not cover / will be left out. This is the difficult choice every instructor has to make in preparation for a course.
- Every instructor has a specialty of research. While my specialties include race and ethnic studies, including indigeneity in the Americas, there are things that I do not know. However, as a scholar and professional researcher, I am always happy to point you in the right direction if you are curious in a topic about which I am unfamiliar.
- Our focus will be exclusively on the North American indigenous areas, but there will be tribes we will not discuss. In general, we are following disciplinary standards established in Native American Studies, which began as a discipline in the wake of the American Indian Movement (AIM) at a convocation at Princeton University in March 1970.

# Course features

## THEORY

- *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith, and Michelle H. Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015).
- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2015 American Book Award Winner) (2014)
- *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizenship*, Cecilia E. Taylor (2008).
- *Gender and Sexuality in Indigenous North America, 1400-1850*, ed. Sandra Slater & Fay A. Yarbrough (2011).
- *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, Gerald Vizenor (2000)
- *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017).

## LITERATURE

- *When the Light of the World Was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through: A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry*, ed. Joy Harjo (New York: WW Norton, 2020).
- *Native American Literature: An Anthology*, ed. Lawana Trout (Lincolnwood: National Textbook Company, 1999).
- *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit & Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction*, ed. Joshua Whitehead (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2020).

## FILM & TV

- *Reservation Dogs*, creators Sterlin Harjo & Taika Waititi (Hulu: 2021-present).
- *Inventing the Indian*, dir. Chris Cottam (BBC: 2012).
- *Native America* (PBS: 2018)



# Dan Namingha

(Tewa-Hopi, 1950-)

**Left: *Palacca #6* (2001); Above: *Triple Clouds* (2009)**

acrylic on canvas 60 x 48 x 1.5 in.

oil on canvas 30 x 37 7/8 x 1.5 in

# Defining Indigeneity

- settler colonialism - colonization that uses forms of genocide, including forced displacement, starvation, chemical or biological warfare, and traditional warfare, in order to create a new homeland for the colonizing community (e.g. United States, Canada, Israel)
- Indigenous/Native Americans - sometimes called First Nations, AmerIndians, American Indians, or just Indians; are the descendants of those inhabiting what is today the U.S. and Canada prior to European contact; there are 574 federally recognized 'domestic dependent' nations (after 1871, the US gov't ceased to recognize independent sovereignty of Native nations).
- Native American Studies - interdisciplinary field of study concerning the indigenous North American population(s)
- manifest destiny - the widely held cultural belief in Nineteenth Century United States that racially white, ethnically Anglo-Europeans were destined to expand the country from east to west coast
- The Trail of Tears - the forced displacement of various Native American tribes, including Cherokee, Seminole, Creek, Chickasaw, and Choctaw, by U.S. military forces and informal militias that lasted from 1830 with the Indian Removal Act through the 1850s
- Settler colonial occupation, as the distinct form of colonization used to establish countries like the United States, Australia, and Canada, is based on the assumption of white Western European supremacy
- Whereas other forms of colonization (in places like Southeast Asia, Africa, South America) may have employed genocidal methods to extract resources for financial gain, the extraction of resources was the priority, not the establishment of a new homeland via genocide. With settler colonialism, a new culture develops in the colony that is seen as preferable to return.
- In 1823, the Monroe Doctrine makes official what had previously been a widely held cultural belief that European settlers and their descendants in the U.S. were fated to uproot the native population and expand the geographic borders of the newly independent United States of America. The term for this belief was later named manifest destiny.
- As the U.S. expands into the West, they are met with resistance from Native American tribes. After making a series of treaties and violating these, the U.S. government decides to remove Native tribes to the west, beginning an on-going process of genocide.

1862

Acres seized since 1776:  
**815,240,410**

Indian homelands  
(1776 to present)

Reservations

# Language

- Colonialism has functioned not only politically and territorially but on the linguistic level as well. This includes the imposition of English and other colonial languages, but in a larger sense it also refers to the power to set the terms of discourse.
- Hortense Spillers describes what she terms the American grammar of race that provides the symbolic order for white supremacy and genocide. She declares, "Sticks and bricks might break our bones, but words will most certainly kill us." Language does not simply describe conditions of settler colonialism and genocide, it also creates the world in which these phenomena can occur.
- Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird explain that part of the process of decolonization is "reinventing the enemy's language." Bird states that part of the colonial process was not just the theft of land and resources but the attempt by colonizers to change the reality of Native peoples through the use of language.
  - The "enemy" was determined to control the language of real life and in that process manipulated how we, as native people, perceived ourselves in relation to the world. Often our ancestors were successfully conditioned to perceive native language as inferior or defective in comparison to English.
- However, contend Harjo and Bird, the "enemy" does not have the last word. Native peoples have been able to transform the English language and use it against the colonizer.
  - These colonizers' language, which often usurped our own tribal languages or diminished them, now hand back emblems of our cultures, our own designs: beadwork, quills if you will. We've transformed these enemy languages. "Reinventing" in the colonizer's tongue and turning those images around to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers as a process of decolonization indicates that something is happening, something is emerging and coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression.

# the *Keywords* project

- It follows then that the English language not only structures colonial reality but also constructs the means by which indigenous peoples will seek to resist that reality. Consequently, the foundational terms within Native studies always have multiple and conflicting meanings. These terms carry the colonial baggage that has accrued from histories of contested words within the colonial society.
- Still, as Harjo and Bird note, Native peoples have redeployed and reinvented these words to signal new realities beyond settler colonialism. What their analysis suggests is that there are no terms that can be simple foundations of indigenous resistance. These words cannot be taken for granted. Rather, a constant interrogation and reinvention of language and terminology is part of the process of decolonization itself.
- Of course many intellectual projects (inside and outside the academy) have deployed their own keywords. Raymond Williams's text in particular, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, has inspired many other keywords projects. Williams explained that the task of a keywords project is not to present dictionary definitions. Rather, the project is to interrogate the histories and varied political and social meanings of these words.
  - We are quite beyond the range of the “proper meaning.” We find a history and complexity of meanings, conscious changes, or consciously different uses; innovation, obsolescence, specialization, extension, overlap, transfer, or changes which are masked by a nominal continuity so that words which seem to have been there for centuries, with continuous general meanings, have come in fact to express radically different or radically variable, yet sometimes hardly noticed, meanings and implications of meaning.

# Language

- In particular, certain words, Williams noted, have “meanings . . . [that are] inextricably bound up with the problems they are being used to discuss.” Essentially, the words we use to discuss certain problems simultaneously affect these problems and constrain the way in which we frame and discuss them.
- Within Native studies, there is much debate about which words are appropriate to use. Can Native women be “feminists”? Should we support “sovereignty” or “nationalism”? These debates tend to presume that there are “pure” words, attached to pure politics or identities, without any ideological trappings or contradictions attached. In reality, behind each word is a political analysis that requires further exploration. What are the histories of these words? What is their potential for intellectual and political efficacy, and what are their limitations? How do these words function as intellectual shorthand that sometimes short-circuits a deeper engagement with the problematic it purports to describe?
- To evoke Foucault, this keywords project is a genealogical project that looks at the history of words that claim to have no history.



Cultural anthropologist A.L. Kroeber's terms for pre-Columbian North American geography are still used today to regionally define/name tribes.

# Defining Indigeneity

- The term indigenous designates a political category that enables solidarity among diverse indigenous peoples and nations. However, what exactly makes a group “indigenous?” Although the term indigenous is often used to distinguish Native peoples from those who have ethnic or racial minority status as well as those of the dominant ethnic or racial majority in a given nation, does the term itself operate as a racial/ethnic marker that erases the distinctness of each indigenous nation or peoples? Questions such as these drive debates among Native Studies scholars over the political and intellectual efficacy of the term indigenous. Indigeneity functions as both a fluid and grounded form of identification with its basis in indigenous cosmologies and survival amid colonialism.
- The Working Group on Indigenous Populations was established in 1982 by the United Nations Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. The group was composed of state representatives and indigenous groups tasked with writing a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The definition, reprinted below, changed over the years as the working group struggled to maintain itself and manage the multiple viewpoints (and governments) that its members represented.

*Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them and, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs and traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a State structure which incorporates mainly the national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the population which are predominant.*

# Defining Indigeneity

- Indigenous peoples rejected the category of “racial minorities,” even if they might occupy that status in their settler-states, because racial minorities (unlike indigenous peoples) do not have the right to self-determination under international law. It was argued that being categorized as a “racial minority” limited the legal claims of indigenous peoples. Members of the working group pushed in turn for indigenous peoples to have the right to name and define themselves in light of their colonial history of being defined by others.
- Efforts to organize around the rights of indigenous peoples at the UN culminated in the 2007 adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP). The adoption of DRIP has served as a powerful political tool that fosters a global indigenous peoples’ movement to protect lands, languages, and resources and to assert historical continuity as distinct peoples. Contested as the term indigenous might be, DRIP exhibits how indigenous has gained global political traction.
- At the same time, UN organizing has also limited this movement to certain parameters. The UN is represented by nation-states that insist on their right to territorial integrity. Consequently, no committee or other body of the UN recognizes indigenous peoples’ right to secession or complete independence from settler states. Although indigenous peoples distinguish themselves from racial minorities, the UN framework still essentially casts them as minorities being granted recognition from states rather than as peoples who could or should be independent from states.
- Jeff Corntassel and Tomas Hopkins Primeau discourage the common practice of referring to prior treaties made at the time of contact as a means to reclaim “sovereignty.” Treaties were never meant to be permanent by colonial powers. Under the doctrine of discovery, colonists assumed that they would eventually gain complete ownership and control over Native lands. Treaties were simply a means to manage indigenous populations until such time that they could be overpowered.

# Defining Indigeneity

Espousing a global Indigenous identity says much less about tradition, than about the common politics of colonialism. If we try to link environmental, spiritual, and other traditions of Indigenous Peoples globally (rather than discussing such connection at the level of parallel colonial experiences), there are opportunities for the neglect and erosion of tribal cultures and the loss of tribal histories. Cultural practices are in particular danger if viewed as contradictory to the emerging definition of a morally superior Indigenous environmental consciousness that is at the core of the global Indigenous identity. In organizing internationally we must be careful not to violate our political and cultural integrity as peoples with distinct beliefs, histories, and cultural practices. If we racialize ourselves into one monolithic Indigenous race, we diminish understanding of the diversity among us and we present risks (in addition to those the colonizer thrusts upon us) to the specific knowledge and histories that we carry. We may also undermine the cause of tribal-specific political rights.

– Kimberley Tallbear, "Racializing Tribal Identity and the Implications for Political and Cultural Development," in *Indigenous Peoples, Racism and the United States* (2001)



# Defining Indigeneity

- David Treuer expresses similar doubts. Within literature in particular, Treuer argues that indigenous functions to entrap Native fiction within the category of ethnographic representation. That is, it becomes the presumed task of the Native writer to represent the “truth” of their community. Furthermore, he argues that this form of representation hinders substantive engagement with specific tribal histories and cultures. One no longer feels the importance of learning one’s language, one need only use simple signifiers of indigeneity to represent oneself as authentic. He concludes, “If we insist on asking our writers and demanding of our prose to give us stories that represent instead of create, we ignore the gifts our cultures and languages have left us and limit ourselves in what our art can potentially offer.”
- Despite these critiques of *indigeneity*, many scholars have employed *indigeneity* as a tool of resignification. As compared with the “Native,” who re- mains locked within ethnographic anthropology, *indigeneity* signifies the dialogic process of movement and tradition
- Theorizing indigeneity has become favored within Native studies, as the term fosters an understanding of how power shapes specific identities through various discourses. Scholars affirm that indigeneity is always changing; it signifies a process of constant transformation. At different moments indigenous groups may willingly submit to dominant scripts as well as actively work to reformulate those scripts into resistant identities. This does not imply that these actors are any less indigenous, only that the analytic category of indigeneity is intended to disrupt the stagnant (and stagnating) ontological category of the “Native” or the “indigenous subject” by injecting a sense of historical and cultural movement or mobility and therefore a sense of agency.
- When indigenous people are viewed as active agents, it allows us to consider indigenous peoples’ power to make meaningful choices, including the choice to resist, but it also encourages us to consider how we as indigenous people participate in our own subjugation (and how we subjugate others) through our choices and political investments.

Next class...

# Keyword: Land

- *Native Studies Keywords* pp 59-108
- *Inventing the Indian* (2012):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmP3gGj9yjM>
- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2015 American Book Award Winner), "The Land" pp. 1-14; "Culture of Conquest" pp. 32-42

