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

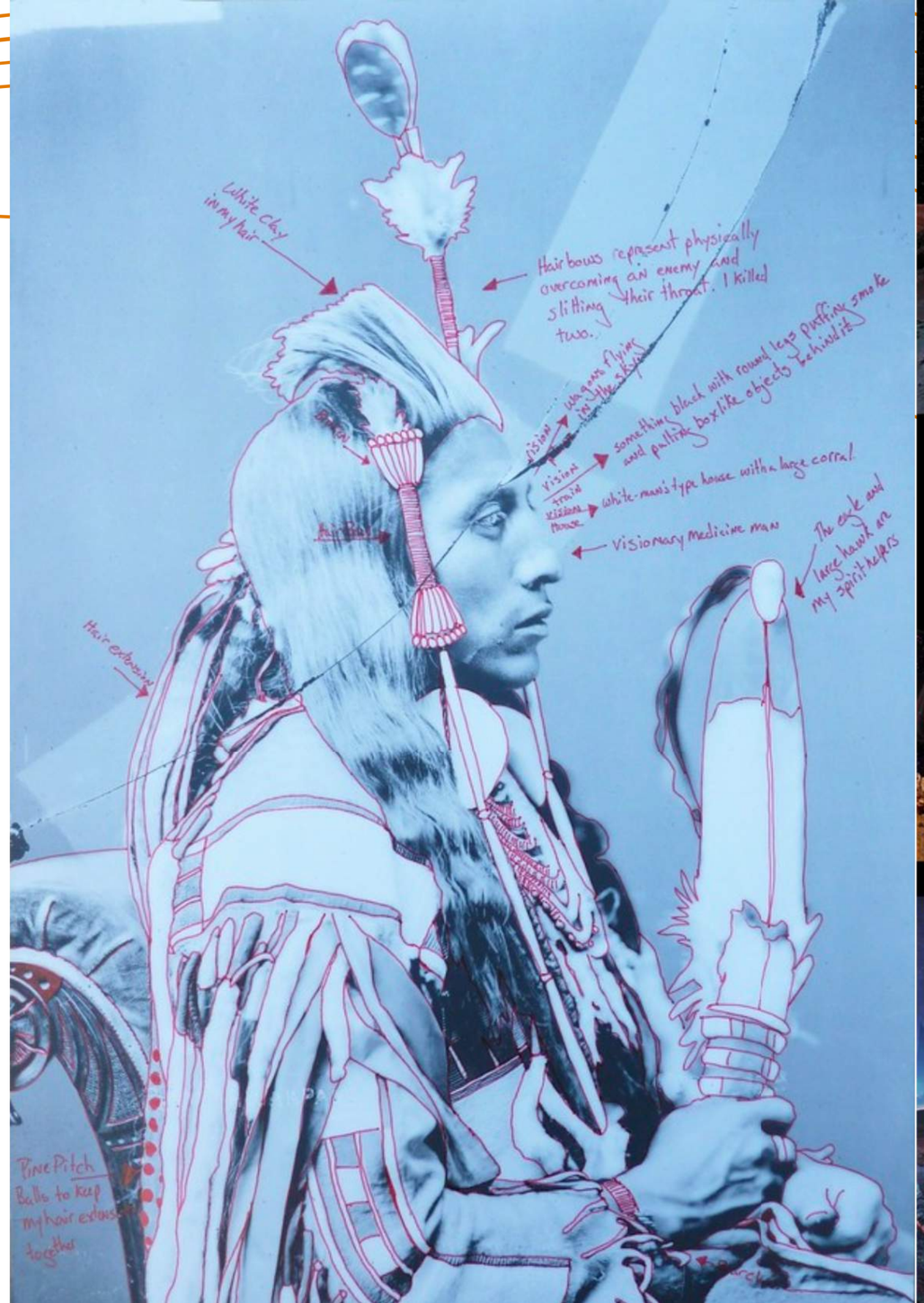
Week 11 – Keyword: Resistance

Week 12 – Keyword: Race

Left:
Peelatchiwaaxpáash/Medicine Crow (Raven), 1880 (2016)

Right:
The Thunder Up Above Full Suite of 6 (2011)

Wendy Red Star
(b. 1981)
Apsáalooke (Crow)




White clay in my hair
Hair bows represent physically overcoming an enemy and slitting their throat. I killed two.
Vision: wagons flying in the sky
Vision: something black with round legs puffing smoke and pulling box like objects behind it
Vision: white-man's type house with a large corral
Visionary Medicine man
The eagle and large hawk are my spirit helpers
Hair ornament

Blood quantum vs ....

- Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) – certification card attesting to the traceability of one's degree of "Indianness"
- Blood quantum – level of 'Indian blood' in one's blood that would legitimate one's enrollment for tribal inclusion; often dependent upon the specific tribe as to how much necessary (25% for Navajo)
- Blood quantum, as the *Native Studies Keywords* introduction attests, is a non-Native construct that arises in U.S. law in the post-Enlightenment era based first in contradistinction to the one-drop rule of African-Americanness and second in order to legitimate who is allowed/not allowed to claim Native identity (and therefore access to rights, privileges, and resources allotted by the government for Natives).
- It is the case that Blood quantum has been critiqued more in Native Studies than any other keyword we have encountered thus far.
- As Cedric Sunray makes clear, this conceptualization of Indian identity means that policing such parameters becomes essential to both re-instituting the power apparatus of the US militarized settler colonial state as well as the rhetorical and material realities of racism throughout the country. Sunray brilliantly points out the contradictory efforts of racist Cherokee Nation leaders simultaneously denying "legitimate" blood-quantum enrollment for African-American/Cherokee mixed race individuals and enrolling "illegitimate" individuals who had spent the majority of their lives previous to enrollment living as White people.

Policing Indian blood

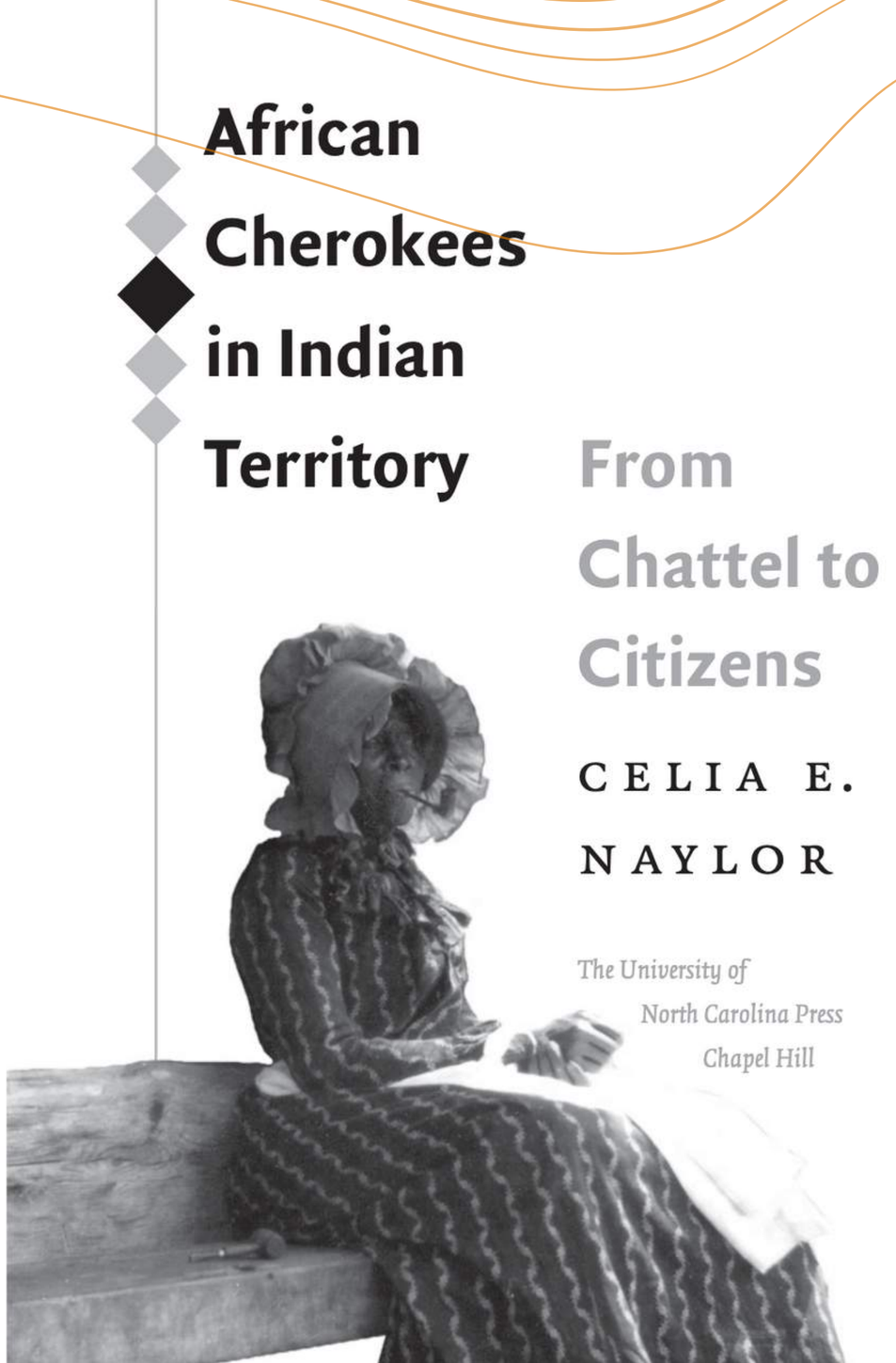
- This antiblack racial exclusion takes place on a larger level as well. Many Indian communities have historically been excluded from the federal recognition process. They do not have the big money. They do not have the high levels of education of some of their more privileged white and Indian counter parts. They do not have casino money. Their marginal status continues because of years of government policy aimed at eradicating their remnant communities. And now their enemy is not only the federal government but the tribes the federal government deems fit for governance.
    - For example, whenever a tribe is considered for federal recognition, the Department of Interior also conducts meetings with federally recognized tribes to evaluate the validity of the nonrecognized tribe and the potential effect it might have on other recognized tribes. These tribes, through organizations such as United South and Eastern Tribes (USET), which collectively enacts and lobbies for policies beneficial to most of the federally recognized tribes in the South and East, prey on those without the economic capacity to defend themselves. This preying is done in order to insure that perceived gaming competitors and those who could share in the federal allocation pie are not recognized, thus enabling their continued monopolies on economy generation.
- An Indian community with even a small degree of black ancestry is much less likely to have been acknowledged as Indian than a community with even greater degrees of white ancestry, making it far more difficult for them to establish claims.

Policing Indian blood

- *What can explain these confused policies?* At the root of it all is the issue of black blood, not white or Indian blood. As many Indian studies scholars have pointed out, the genocidal logics of colonialism have shaped U.S. racial policy toward Indian people. Whereas blackness was positioned as the "opposite" of whiteness, Indianness was positioned as being capable of assimilation. Because, as Patrick Wolfe notes, the logic of settler colonialism is elimination, it became important for Indian blood to be able to "disappear" into whiteness.
- While these policies of assimilation were genocidal in intent, we must recognize that Indian communities have also internalized these logics. In an attempt to have themselves viewed as at least one step above the bottom of the racial hierarchy, some tribal communities have strived to distance themselves from blackness. A few of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes that were removed to Indian territory even created laws mirroring white society that forbade the union of tribal members with blacks or tribal freedmen.
- It is unfortunate that these colonial logics that define Indian authenticity as antagonistic to blackness have been internalized within Indian communities. This process can only happen by disremembering our actual histories to remember histories that do not exist. Racist blood politics force Indian people to posit an identity that claims to be untainted by blackness.
- Because the settler logics of the United States dictate that Indianness be in antagonistic relationship to blackness, Indian people themselves then disavow their historical, communal, and genealogical relationships to blackness. Of course, antiblack racism does not exist just among a few tribes.
- Increasingly more Indian scholars are speaking out against antiblack racism. These scholars are pointing out that just because Indian people suffer from colonial oppression does not mean they are not complicit in antiblack racism.

African Cherokees

- One vital thread of African American history centers on the contested connections of African Americans to ‘‘Americanness’’ and to the United States itself. Even though formerly enslaved African Cherokees in Indian Territory oftentimes referred to their biological and socio- cultural relationships with Cherokees in their WPA interviews, these connections became increasingly tenuous for such freedpeople after the Civil War. Indeed, many recently freed African Indians of the Five Tribes engaged in an ongoing struggle to prove their affiliation to the nations in which they had been born and raised.
- Some formerly enslaved African Cherokees who had been born and raised in the Cherokee Nation described themselves as close to, rather than separate from, Cherokees. Having been born and raised among the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Seminoles, some formerly enslaved African Indians identified areas in Indian Territory among Indians as the familiar places of their birth, and Indian cultural ways as their own.
- For freed-people who remembered living within Indian communities in Indian Territory, who recalled the Indian blood that gave them life, who proudly spoke of their bilingual abilities, who carefully prepared In- dian meals and herbal medicines, their experiences do not reflect a divided ‘‘two-ness.’’ Instead, their recollections portray a reality with- out such stark divisions. The extent of their cultural interactions, oftentimes intensified by their blood relations, established a group of persons of African descent whose cultural and social ties were with Indians.



Complex case of African Cherokees

- Without disregarding or discrediting the fact that these persons of African descent were indeed enslaved by Indians, one can still talk about the strong cultural identification between some enslaved people of African descent and the Indians with whom they interacted in Indian Territory.
- It is possible that some enslaved and free African Indians in In- dian Territory used specific cultural manifestations of ‘‘Indianness’’ (namely, clothing, language, and food) as a way of declaring their bloodlines or establishing their blood claim to Indians. Perhaps by exhibiting Indian cultural characteristics, some enslaved and free African Indians accentuated elements of Indian cultures in order to compensate for unsubstantiated blood connections to Indians. At the same time, other enslaved African Indians could have invoked their blood ties to Indians in order to confirm their cultural connection to Indian people. Identifying their racial and cultural connections to Indians also potentially served as a strategic way of claiming an Indian national identity. By so doing, some African Indian freedpeople attempted to gain due recognition as citizens of Indian nations, as well as access to tangible benefits in the late nineteenth century.
- Many African Cherokee freedpeople decided to remain in the Cherokee Nation, Indian Territory, following the Civil War and wanted to be recognized as legitimate citizens of the Cherokee Nation. In their reflections on the post-Civil War period, Cherokee freedpeople asserted that they had received their land allotments and recalled the importance that landownership assumed in Indian Territory.
- Even those who had been forced by their escaping enslavers to leave Indian Territory during the Civil War chose to return to Indian Territory after the war had ended. Their connection to Indian Territory had not been eliminated with their emancipation. To some freedpeople of the Cherokee, Creek, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole nations, it was necessary that they begin their ‘‘free’’ life at home—in Indian Territory.

Complex case of African Cherokees

- Yet, for other enslaved African Cherokees, who were not ‘‘more at home with the Indians,’’ Du Bois’s ‘‘two-ness’’ duly reflected their lives in bondage in nineteenth-century Indian Territory. The daily distinctions between themselves and their enslavers confirmed that they were not deemed equal participants in Cherokee communities; instead, they remained property—objects that could be bought and sold at an owner’s whim.
- Some enslaved African Cherokees refused to identify with Cherokees with whom they resided in Indian Territory. Although living in predominantly Cherokee communities, they renounced thoughts of a collective identity with Cherokee people. Instead, they demonstrated their resistance to such notions of collectivity by committing a range of ‘‘crimes’’ from ‘‘talking back’’ to their enslavers to murdering them in the antebellum period.
    - Running away from their Cherokee enslavers’ farms and plantations represented the most effective course for pursuing their freedom. Rather than embracing Cherokee customs, some enslaved African Cherokees sought to rupture, by any means necessary, the forces that daily denied their personhood and humanity.
    - No matter how much enslavers in the Cherokee Nation suggested that they deemed enslaved people as part of their ‘‘family,’’ enslaved African Cherokees understood that slavery compromised family ties.
- The question of how people of African and Indian descent identified and inter- mingled in nineteenth-century Indian Territory has implications that reach down to the present. Past interactions give rise to broader contemporary questions concerning the identification and acceptance of black Indian people within current-day Indian nations. Just as black Indians continue to be rejected within some Indian communities, the struggle for recognition by descendants of freedpeople who were affiliated with the Five Tribes continues even today.

Tradition

- Tradition is often framed as a representation of the past that indigenous peoples today have preserved and continue to honor through a set of practices. Within colonialist discourse, however, Native traditions are supposed to remain unchanging in order for them to be "authentic."
    - For this reason, the impulse to affirm, reclaim, and revitalize Native traditions has been the subject of much scholarship within the field, regardless of whether this discourse serves Native people or not.
- The investment in authentic tradition is complicated by the systematic removal of Native peoples from their ancestral lands alongside the institutionalized forms of violence that erased Native cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. In many cases, the mixing and adaptation of tradition has been necessary for survival.
- Approaches to understanding Native traditions have changed over the years, with many in Native studies favoring a perspective that acknowledges the kinetic nature of tradition, which might contain elements of Western or white culture. However, because of colonial discourses and stereotypes from American popular culture, Natives are frequently viewed as inauthentic when they do not perform in predictable ways.
- *Tradition*, within colonialist discourse, generally signifies an exotic commodity offered up for consumption, such as powwow dance, Native crafts, and Western films.
- *Tradition* is invoked by Natives and non-Natives alike to police Native behaviors, a process that can sometimes reconstitute colonialism itself. The hunt for tradition can manifest as a hunt for the noble savage, a figure that continues to exist as a foil to contemporary Native culture and life.

Tradition in Native American Studies

- In the 1980s the "invention of tradition" debate pervaded American anthropology and by colonial default, Native studies. Whereas Native scholars may have more access to insider knowledge and oral traditions, the power of archival documents and written accounts given by anthropologists remain privileged in Western discourse, especially where the law is concerned. The power of anthropology to delineate "tradition" in Native communities is, not surprisingly, met with much resistance throughout Native studies.
- Charges that traditions were "invented" by modern Natives caused Native intellectuals to affirm the existence of Native traditions in a "pure" state, in the face of anthropological efforts to quantify and dilute them. The insistence on purity was also an intentional challenge to histories of Native culture being purposely devalued.
    - Anthropologists claimed that Native traditions were becoming hybridized and were less au then tic than they were in the past.
    - Native traditionalists thus moved to reaffirm native traditions by reclaiming their au then tic forms. The risk of this strategy is that it also foreclosed options for how Natives could or should interact with tradition and constructed Natives traditions as static.
- In response to how these debates over tradition and authenticity came to dominate the field, some Native studies scholars have called for what Audra Simpson terms ***ethnographic refusal***. Rather than engage in debates around authenticity, ethnographic refusal entails reconceptualizing Native studies beyond ethnographic representation. Similarly, Eve Tuck has called for a moratorium on "damage based research" in favor of desire-based research that engages indigenous communities in building the world they would like for future generations.

Fugitive Poses

- In his book of critical essays, *Fugitive Poses*, Gerald Vizenor proposes critical criteria for judging the representational images of the Indian in a wide variety of cultural and historical venues, whether created by whites or by Indians.
- Specifically, Vizenor surveys works that represent the American Indian from Washington Irving's *Journal of a Prairie Year* to W. S. Penn's *All My Sins Were Relatives*, from Franz Kafka's stories to Russell Means's recent autobiography, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, from Roland Barthes's cultural theory to Andy Warhol's silkscreens. He subjects a very diverse and sometimes surprising array of representations to his trickster scrutiny and measures them against a yardstick of authenticity.
    - According to Vizenor, trickster is libidinous, greedy, contradictory, always on the move, and immune to closure. For example, he dies repeatedly in stories and simply comes to life again in the next one—he re-creates himself. He is nonlinear, nonrational, and he lives more by intuition and libido than by logic.
    - Because of these traits, Vizenor considers trickster, and indeed the oral tradition itself, to be postmodern or antirational.
- Vizenor writes on the representation of Natives in the print media and in art and film. Vizenor continually criticizes the tendency of the modernist, rational social sciences to see things in terms of binaries, such as "savagism" and "civilization." Vizenor uses the term "indian" to refer to hollow, stereotypical images that evoke the "absence" of the actual Native. "Native" refers to works that evoke a "native presence."
- He takes on those Natives who, he believes, have used the tropes and traditions created by the dominant culture to re-create themselves, as well as those white cultural workers who have created and continue to create representations of the romantic or savage Indian "other."

Reservation Dogs

- created by Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi
- Has all Indigenous writers and directors, along with an almost entirely Indigenous North American cast and production team
- Premise (from *Deadline*): "The series follows the lives of four Indigenous teenagers in rural Oklahoma, as they spend their days committing crime and fighting it. After the death of their friend Daniel one year prior to the events of the series, the gang wrestles with a desire to move to California, the way Daniel dreamed of. But first they need to tie up loose ends in their lives and community, and make preparations to leave."

Episodes of *Reservation Dogs*

1. **"F*ckin' Rez Dogs" (dir. & written by Sterlin Harjo & Taika Waititi)**
2. **"NDN Clinic" (dir. Sydney Freeland) (written by Sterlin Harjo)**
3. **"Uncle Brownie" (dir. Blackhorse Lowe) (written by Sterlin Harjo)**

Next class…

Keywords: Colonialism, Decolonization

- *Native Studies Keywords* pp 271-308
- Ep. 4-5 of *Reservation Dogs*