

# Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

OLLI, SPRING 2022

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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

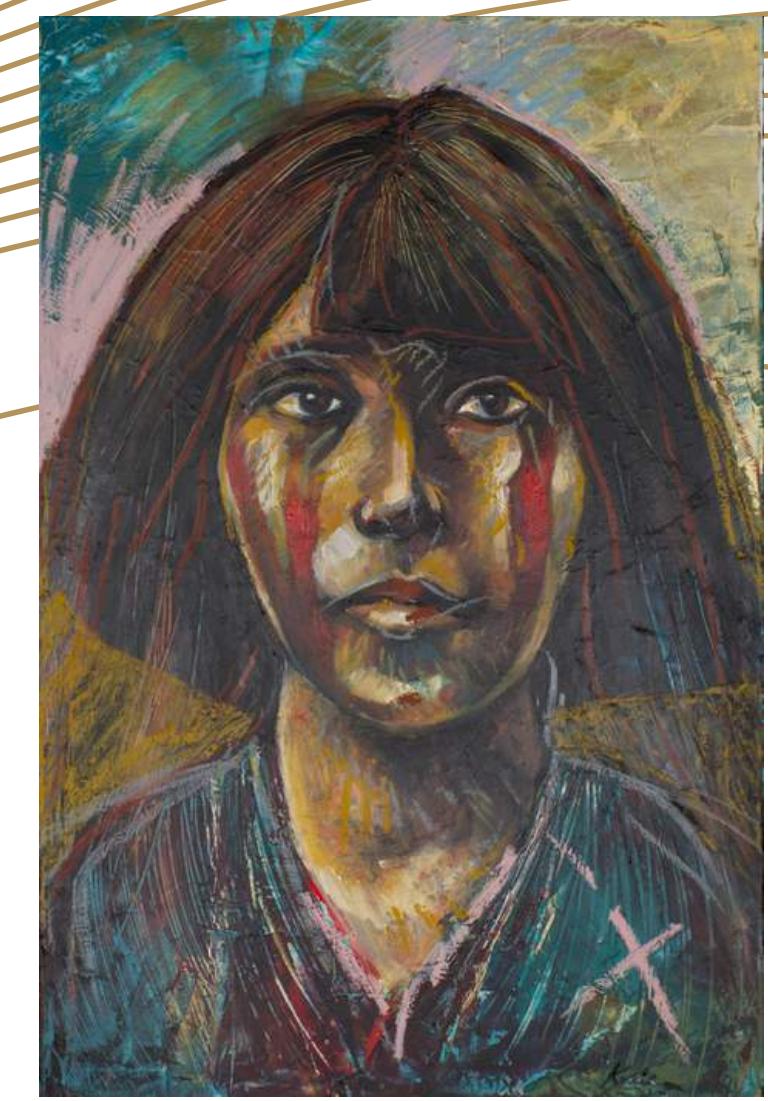
Week 9 – Keywords: Literature, Art

Week 10 – Keywords: Queer, 2-Spirit or, previously (derogatory), berdache

Week 11 – Keyword: Resistance

Week 12 – Keyword: Race

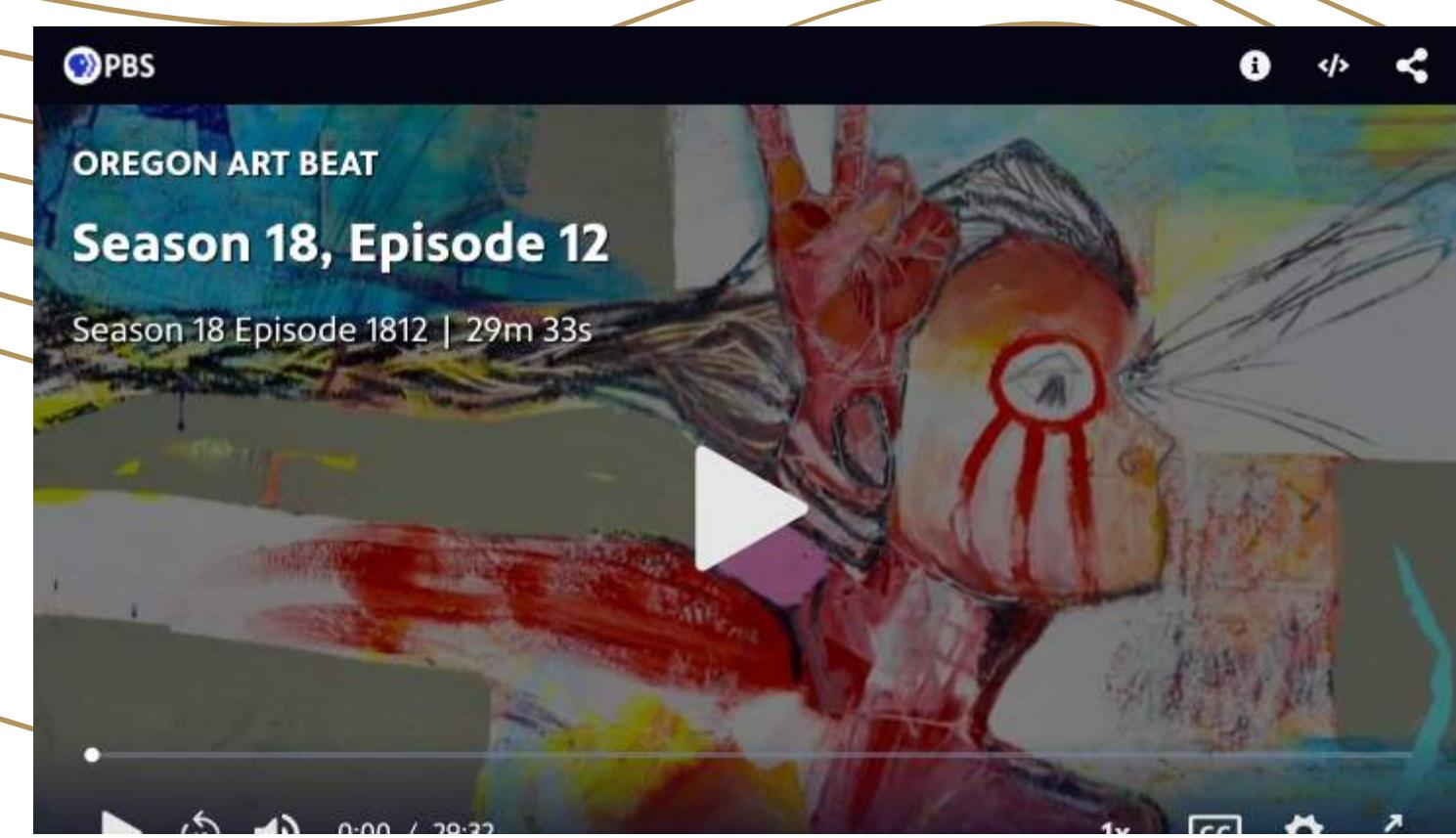




**Above:**  
*After Boarding School: In Mourning* (2011)  
oil on canvas, 36" x 24"

**Right:**  
*G'EE'LA (Earth in Klamath)* (2018)  
monoprint, 22" x 15"

**Ka'ila Farrell-Smith**  
Klamath Modoc



The conceptual framework of her practice focuses on channeling research through a creative flow of experimentation and artistic playfulness rooted in Indigenous aesthetics and abstract formalism. Utilizing painting and traditional Indigenous art practices, her work explores space in-between the Indigenous and western paradigms. Ka'ila displays work in the form of paintings, objects, and self-curated installations.

# From "Land as Pedagogy"

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

Nishnaabe scholar Wendy Makoons Geniusz translates the word *gaa-izhi-zhaawendaagoziyaang* as “given lovingly to us by the spirits.” This describes the gift of maple sap and the process of making sugar so perfectly. This spring, while tapping a stand of maple trees, I remembered that the story of Binoojiinh is one of my favorite stories. It’s one of my favorites because nothing violent happens in it. At every turn, Binoojiinh is met with very basic, core Nishnaabeg values—love, compassion, and understanding. They center their day around their own freedom and joy. I imagine myself at age seven running through a stand of maples with the first warmth of spring marking my cheeks. I imagine everything good in the world. My heart, my mind, and my spirit are open and engaged, and I feel as if I could accomplish anything. I imagine myself grasping at feelings I haven’t felt before, that maybe life is so good that it is too short, that there really isn’t enough time to love everything.

In reality, I have to image myself in this situation because as a child, I don’t think I was ever in a similar situation. My experience of education from kindergarten to graduate school was one of coping with someone else’s agenda, curriculum, and pedagogy, someone who was not interested in my well-being as a girl, my connection to my homeland, my language or history, or my Nishnaabeg intelligence. No one ever asked me what I was interested in, nor did they ask for my consent to participate in their system. My experience of education was one of continually being measured against a set of principles that required surrender to an assimilative colonial agenda in order to fulfill those principles. I distinctly remember being in grade three at a class trip to the sugar bush and the teacher showing us two methods of making maple syrup: the pioneer method, which involved a black pot over an open fire and clean sap, and the “Indian meth- od,” which involved a hollowed-out log in an unlit fire with large rocks in the log to heat the sap up—sap that had bark, insects, dirt, and scum. The teacher asked us which method we would use, and being the only Native kid in the class, I was the only one who chose the “Indian method.”

# From "Land as Pedagogy"

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

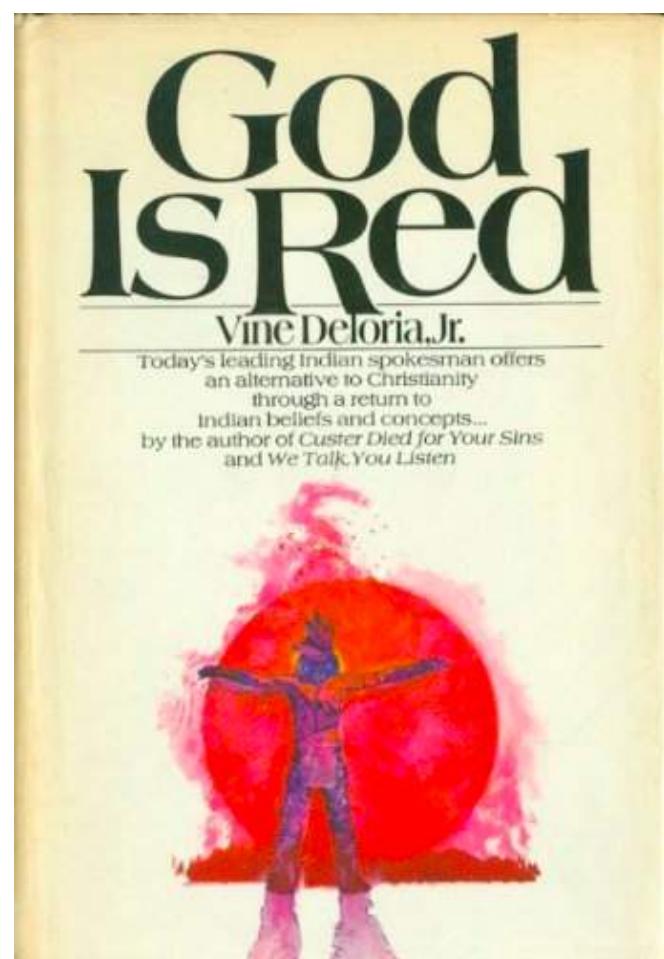
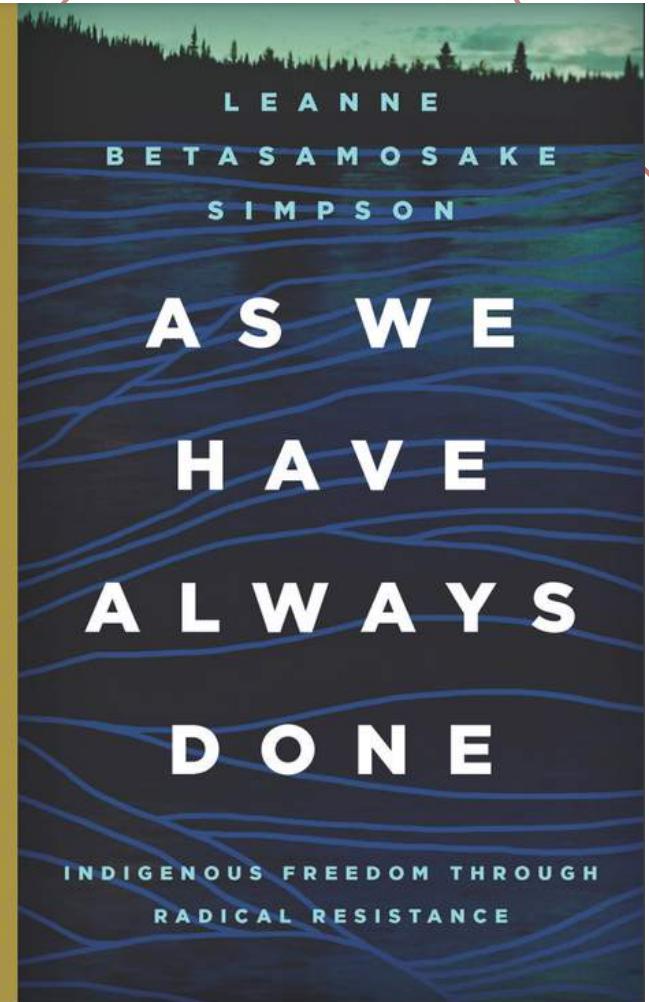
Things are different for this Binoojiinh. They have already spent seven years immersed in a nest of Nishnaabeg intelligence. They already understand the importance of observation and learning from our animal teachers when they watch the squirrel so carefully and then mimic its actions. They understand embodiment and conceptual thought when they then take this observation and apply it to their own situation—by making a cut in the maple tree and using a cedar shunt. They rely upon their own creativity to invent new technology. They patiently wait for the sap to collect. They take that sap home and share it with their family. Their mother, in turn, meets her child's discovery with love and trust. Binoojiinh watches as their mama uses the sap to boil the deer meat for supper. When they taste the deer and the sweetness, they learn about reduction, and when their mama and they go to clean the pot, they learn about how sap can be boiled into sugar. Binoojiinh then takes their elders to the tree, already trusting that they will be believed, that their knowledge and discovery will be cherished, and that they will be heard.

Binoojiinh learned a tremendous amount over a two-day period—self-led, driven by both their own curiosity and their own personal desire to learn. They learned to trust themselves, their family, and their community. They learned the sheer joy of discovery. They learned how to interact with the spirit of the maple. They learned both from the land and with the land. They learned what it felt like to be recognized, seen, and appreciated by their community. They came to know maple sugar with the support of their family and elders. They come to know maple sugar in the context of love.

To me, this is what coming into wisdom within a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg epistemology looks like. It takes place in the context of family, community, and relation. It lacks overt coercion and authority, values so normalized within mainstream, Western pedagogy that they are rarely ever critiqued. The land, Aki, is both context and process. The process of coming to know is learner led and profoundly spiritual in nature.<sup>5</sup> Coming to know is the pursuit of whole-body intelligence practiced in the context of freedom, and when realized collectively, it generates generations of loving, creative, innovative, self-determining, interdependent, and self-regulating community-minded individuals. It creates communities of individuals with the capacity to uphold and move forward our political practices and systems of governance.

# Where's the theory in that?

- Simpson reads the story as "a theoretical anchor whose layered and diverse meanings are revealed over time and space within individual and collective Nishnaabeg consciousness."
  - She writes that "A 'theory' in its simplest form is an explanation of a phenomenon, and Nishnaabeg stories in this way form part of the theoretical basis of our intelligence."
  - Yet, theory in Nishnaabeg epistemology is notably different insofar as it is re-established, regenerated "through embodied practice and within each family, community, and generation of people."
  - Rather than a practice of mere intellect or scholarship, theory in Nishnaabeg epistemology is "woven within kinetics, spiritual presence, and emotion. It is contextual and relational. It is intimate and personal with individuals themselves holding the responsibilities for finding and generating meaning within their own lives."
- Vine Deloria argues in *God is Red* that Native studies poses an epistemological challenge against the academy itself by offering a counter to Western epistemology and methodology, which are based around surveillance and compulsory assimilation (genocide) since the university arises at the very time of Christianity's violent expansion and anthropology's secular but nonetheless racist method of watching, documenting, and categorizing Native populations for consumption by academics and the general public.

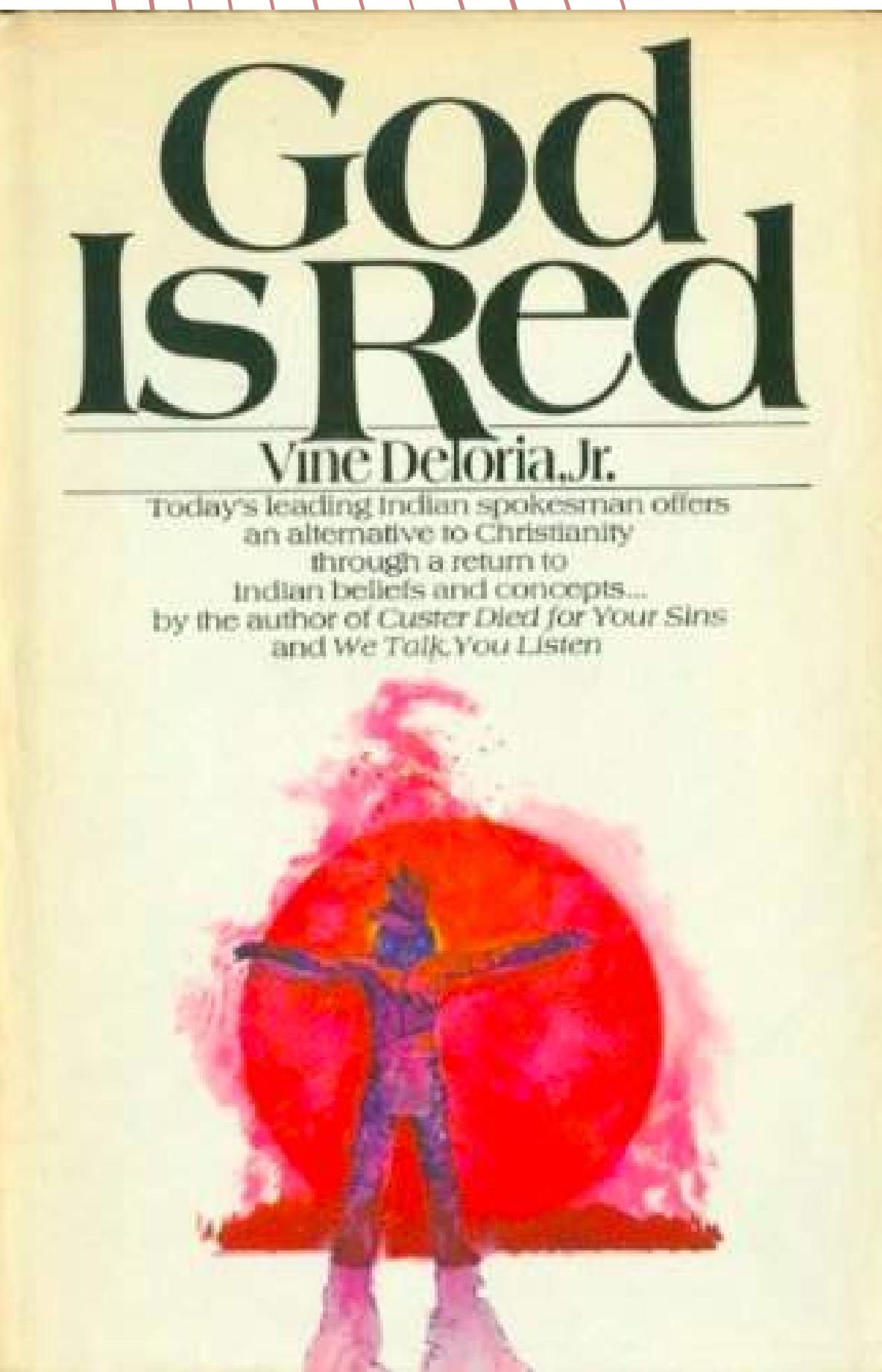


# Contentiousness in studying Native epistemology

- According to Winona Wheeler, in Cree culture, "all knowledge is not knowable because knowledge is property in the sense that it is owned and can only be transmitted by the legitimate owner...You can't just go and take it, or even go and ask for it. Access to knowledge requires long-term commitment, apprenticeship, and payment" (Stevenson, "Every word is a bundle").
- "Within Indigenous contexts, contexts that are never properly 'post-colonial,' the sovereignty of the people we speak of, when speaking for themselves, interrupt anthropological portraits of timelessness, procedure and function that dominate representations of their past and, sometimes, their present...sovereignty matters, as a methodological issue in and of itself, but such mattering also engenders other ethnographic forms: namely refusal. And this form of refusal is not to operationalise nor to genuflect to recent formulations of alternative methodology such as "radical indigenism"--something that is neither radical nor indigenous but rather, in the name of "tradition," structuring yet another expectation of a culturally "pure" indigenous subject. Rather, it is my proposition that to think about "sovereignty"--a construct which is always a bestowal and as such is deeply imperfect but critical for these moments in Indigenous/Settler-State relations--is to think very seriously about needs and, basically, involves a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in" (Audra Simpson, "On ethnographic refusal").
- "Critics of Native literary nationalism have faulted Native specialists with a fundamental naiveté, claiming we argue that Native perspectives are pure, authoritative, uncontaminated by European influences. This misses the point. Native viewpoints are necessary because the "mental means of production" in regards to analyzing Indian cultures have been owned, almost exclusively, by non-Indians. Radical Native viewpoints, voices of difference rather than commonality, are called for to disrupt the powers of the literary status quo as well as the powers of the state—there is a link between thought and activism" (Craig Womack, *Red on Red*).

# Turn away from the West

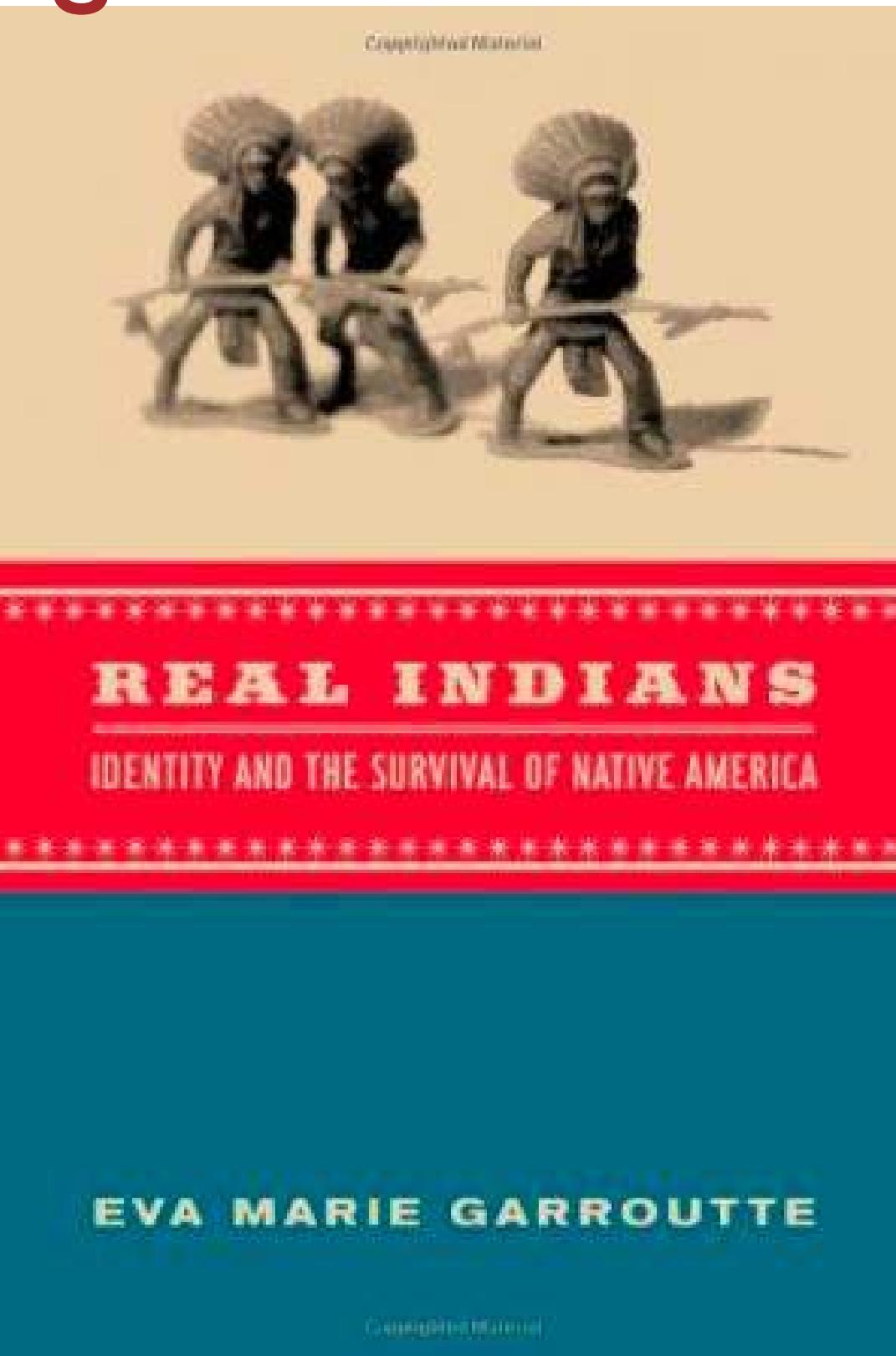
- "If one were to take the last two thousand years and the events of that period as representative of the validity of the Christian religion in bringing peace on Earth, then there would be little question that the religion is incapable of invoking any significant peaceful change in people or their societies."
- "Christian theology also had a direct influence on the development of the manner in which Westerners conceived the nature of the world. In the development of Christian theology, the two Greeks Plato and Aristotle were highly influential...The history of humankind appears as a rather tedious story of the rise and fall of nation after nation, and the sequence in which world history has been written shows amazing parallels to the expansion of the Christian religion."
- "We are faced today with a concept of world history that lacks even the most basic appreciation of the experiences of mankind as a whole. Unless other cultures and nations have some important relationship with the nations of Western Europe, they have little or no status in the interpretation of world history. Indeed, world history as presently conceived in the Christian nations is the story of the West's conquest of the remainder of the world and the subsequent rise to technological sophistication."
- "Western European peoples have never learned to consider the nature of the world discerned from a spatial point of view. And a singular difficulty faces peoples of Western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space."



# Radical Indigenism

## a new epistemological framework

- "[**Radical Indigenism**] is intended not as a scholarship performed strictly by Indians, but as one in which Native peoples can see themselves and in which Natives—scholars and nonscholars alike—can participate. It is a scholarship in which questions are allowed to unfold within values, goals, categories of thought, and models of inquiry that are embedded in the philosophies of knowledge generated by Indian people, rather than in ones imposed upon them."
- "researchers must align themselves with indigenous communities in ways that are often unusual from the perspective of the academy, and often costly in terms of individual advancement there."
- "Radical Indigenism presupposes that Indian peoples possess complete philosophies of knowledge and models of inquiry that include not only the sources just named but also knowledge that is received through ceremonial means: through dreams, through communication with the nonhuman relatives that inhabit the universe, through collective ritualized seeking of spiritually faithful communities, and through interactions with land and language for which the conventionally defined academic disciplines have no name and no place. It will likely ask the academy to allow for different constructions of the 'observable,' of the relationship between mind and body, of the nature and powers of language, of the meaning and utility of 'subjective' knowledge and of unique (nonrepeatable) events—and much more."





"Solidification" Leanne Betasamosake Simpson



Watch later



Share



**"Solidification" by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson from her album *Theory of Ice* (2021)**

Visualizations by Sammy Chien of Chimerik似不像, an interdisciplinary collective of performance, art & technology

Next week...

# Keyword: Literature, Art

- Selections from *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through: A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry* (2020) ed. Joy Harjo with Leanne Howe, Jennifer Elise Foerster, and Contributing Editors
- Two essays from *Native American Performance and Representation* (2009) ed. S.E. Wilmer
- "Indigenous Futurisms in North American Indigenous Art" by Kristina Baudemann

