

A Final Note

This volume is, we hope, a step in the proper direction for the development of Native American studies. Contributors have attempted to present problems and prospects for Native American studies, for many problems are to be overcome, but many prospects also are to be realized. History is history, but history is remembered. Native American studies emerged in certain ways for certain reasons. Good or bad, the legacy of the past is with us. To the detriment of Native American studies today, that legacy means that it is more a political phenomenon than an intellectual one. Perhaps this volume will convince some otherwise, or at least suggest its intellectual potential and its importance.

Native American Studies in the Twentieth-First Century

As we near the end of this century, it is worthwhile to contemplate the future of Native American studies in connection with the future of the people to whom this scholarship is devoted. If Native Americans had vanished, as most observers in the late nineteenth century expected, it seems altogether likely that this volume would not exist. At most, Native American studies would be an arcane academic topic not too unlike other fields devoted to long-extinct cultures.

Long before Native American studies appeared in the course catalogues of colleges and universities, historians, anthropologists, and other scholars

devoted considerable energy to studying Native Americans. In view of this tradition, one may wonder why Native American studies has appeared in the academy only in recent decades. In part, the answer to this question lies with Native Americans themselves. Defying expectations, Native Americans did not disappear in this century and are actually far more numerous today than a century ago. Indeed, the vibrancy of Native American studies as a subject of intellectual discourse stems directly from the vibrancy of modern Native American communities, be they reservation, rural, or urban.

As we have seen, it is no coincidence that Native American studies appeared in academe at a time when Native American communities themselves were asserting their place in American society. The civil rights movement was successful in opening institutions of higher education to racial and ethnic communities that had historically been all but excluded. As numbers of minority students, including a small number of Native American students, pursued their studies of history, culture, and science, they found their own people profoundly absent, their contributions to society ignored, discounted, or appropriated. Native American students in particular found that their people were ignored or at best minimized (in history) or treated as relics and specimens (in anthropology), despite five hundred years of contact and struggle for the western hemisphere. Knowledge about contemporary Native American communities was entirely missing from disciplines such as sociology and political science.

The students' response was to demand the representation of their people in the curricula of postsecondary education. When these demands were ignored or rejected, the students' frustration escalated. One of the first outbursts occurred at San Francisco State University in 1968, where a strike initiated by African-American students was soon joined by students of many racial and ethnic backgrounds, including a small group of Native Americans. Administrators at San Francisco State reluctantly acceded to the students' request for an ethnic studies program. In the process, they created the first Native American studies program in the nation, followed shortly by others at the University of California's Berkeley, Davis, and Los Angeles campuses, the University of Arizona, the University of New Mexico, and the University of Minnesota. These programs were grudgingly incorporated into university life, but were also perceived by most as marginal, staffed by marginal faculty, teaching marginal students. The program at the University of California at Davis was literally located at the farthest edge of campus in temporary buildings.

Underfunded, understaffed, and generally unsupported at most institutions, Native American studies struggled to survive and has done so now for three decades. In that time, journals have been established, books and monographs published, curricula and academic majors developed, and Native American studies, as an academic field, has moved toward the intellectual mainstream, though it is not there yet. As we approach the next century, it is a good time

to contemplate the academic challenges that will confront Native American studies in the decades ahead.

What Should Be Done?

Argued, discussed, and documented here, the study of Native Americans and Native American studies have much to offer to traditional disciplines, though the disciplines may constrain both. English and comparative literature have embraced Native American literature, with mostly positive results for all, though one might question the impact of some Native American literature upon Native Americans ourselves. Native American languages are important for Native American studies and, of course, for Native Americans as well. Linguistics is, however, only part of the academic solution. Anthropology has long embraced the study of Native Americans; yet its effects have been mixed for Native Americans and Native American studies, and both have had to distance themselves from the discipline. American history has yet fully to consider Native Americans as relevant, let alone important, actors in American society at virtually any point in time. Until our society and its history fully legitimate Native Americans as agents in history, then all will continue to suffer, and Native American studies will remain an illegitimate academic offspring.

Native American studies ought to be much more than the typical study of Native Americans within existing disciplines. Individual disciplines are important in the study of Native Americans, and together they are very important. Nevertheless, the disciplines remain limited in their ability to encompass Native American experiences, either traditional, historical, or contemporary ones. The chapters in this volume offer guidelines for the future of Native American studies—particularly those in Part 1, which articulate questions faced uniquely by Native American scholars, students, and peoples. Population and identity issues, the trauma of history, literature and writing literature, history and writing history, language, sovereignty, epistemology and religion, kinship and family, science and technology, and repatriation of human remains and cultural objects are among the more important topics; but this is not an exhaustive list.

Native American studies' ambitious objective is to understand Native Americans, America, and the world from Native American perspectives and thus broaden the knowledge and education of both Native Americans and non-Native Americans. Its accomplishment will require Native American studies to develop its considerable intellectual potential in the next century, and colleges and universities to recognize the educational and intellectual legitimacy of Native American studies, neither of which has been done to date. Native American studies is still hindered by romantic, fantasy-based, and stereotyped notions about, lack of appreciation and respect for, and even an unwillingness

to accept Native Americans. It is also still hindered by the fact that colleges and universities have typically failed to consider Native American studies as a serious intellectual endeavor. At the same time, some people who teach in Native American studies departments fail to appreciate or even understand the system of higher education; sometimes they even fail to appreciate or understand Native American peoples, especially traditional or tribal ones. Some Native American studies faculties are even today dominated by non-Native Americans or Native Americans too distant from Native America. To appreciate and understand both academe and Native American peoples and their diversity are critical for Native American studies. It makes no sense to be involved in higher education if one is unwilling to embrace the values and objectives of higher education; it makes no sense to be involved in Native American studies without a realistic understanding of Native Americans. Native American studies needs to develop the intellectual richness of Native Americans and their societies and cultures, and incorporate it into colleges and universities in ways understood by both academe and Native Americans. This, of course, is no easy task.

Some Suggestions

The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars held at Princeton University in 1970 was a landmark event.¹ It established a national agenda for the study of Native Americans; the report of the convocation lists seventeen resolutions passed, covering such areas as Native American participation in the study of Native America, communication between Native American groups, support for educational endeavors at various levels, an examination of the newly emerging field of Native American studies, and support for Native American arts and artists.² Another national convocation, in 1970, was focused on Native American water rights, though education, Native American studies, and other issues were considered as well.³ Two and one-half decades have passed since the Second Convocation; it seems time for another to consider issues in the study of Native Americans and Native American studies, as did the First Convocation. The initial resolution passed at the First Convocation was "to continue the Convocation as an annual event";⁴ Alfonso Ortiz said, "As Native American scholars we have an enormous responsibility which we must come together and carry out."⁵ We have not done this; because we have not, others have too frequently determined the course of Native American studies.

Major national universities must make commitments to developing Native American studies as a major academic endeavor equal to other endeavors on their campuses. Resolution 12 of the First Convocation "called for a conference or workshop to be organized to undertake an examination of the current and proposed Native American Studies programs in the universities of Canada

and the United States, composed of both Indian and non-Indian representatives of the institutions of higher education involved in such programs.”⁶ To our knowledge this was never done, although conferences on Native American studies have been held. In a 1980 conference, participants acknowledged the difficulties of incorporating Native American studies into major institutions, particularly the Ivy League universities.⁷ They also acknowledged that it is in the interest of academe and larger society for Native American studies to “accept its conception of society and scholarship, so as not to present it with any challenges”—even though “it is precisely this challenging role which ethnic studies can and must take.” Therefore, “this is reason enough to promote Native American Studies programs of all types, at all kinds of institutions of higher learning.”⁸ A national conference bringing together important Native American scholars and intellectuals with deans and other administrators from major universities to consider intellectual issues in Native American studies and its incorporation into universities would be extremely helpful to the development of the field.

A broad national scholarly and professional association for Native American scholars has been discussed for some time, and various attempts to found one have been made. At one conference of directors of Native American studies held in 1980, “the strongest area of agreement was the necessity of forming more numerous and more effective linkages between Native American scholars in universities.”⁹ Some half-dozen conferences of Native American professors have been held over the years; yet little resulted from them, and many prominent professors have not attended.

Native American studies cannot “heal itself,” it seems; major assistance is undoubtedly needed. It would be helpful if major foundations promised to develop the rich intellectual potential of Native American studies, including consideration of the experiences and problems of Native Americans in contemporary America. Resolution 17 of the First Convocation stated that foundations should “not support with funds any program or activities for or about American Indians and Native Peoples, which are not directed and controlled by Indian groups, organizations or tribes.”¹⁰ Over a quarter of a century later, reaffirming this is still necessary. A national program to fund research on Native Americans and Native American studies, with funding decisions made by leading Native American and other scholars familiar with Native American studies and Native American tribal people, would be desirable. A related national effort might be made to attract highly qualified young Native American students into graduate programs in areas important to Native American studies; concomitantly, an effort might be made to encourage bright young scholars of Native Americans in various disciplines to become involved in Native American studies, at least intellectually if not organizationally as well.

Ultimately, the future will and should be determined by those involved in

Native American studies, particularly the Native Americans involved. This group must include substantial numbers and proportions of Native American scholars doing the finest scholarship. As we look back over three decades of Native American studies, it sometimes seems that the Crow chief Plenty Coup was right when he said, “He loves His white children most.” Plenty Coup advocated the importance of education for American Indians to overcome their disadvantage in American society. He noted that the Great Spirit gave Indians “patience and love of home and children,” but not knowledge of “how to do the many wonderful things His white children are doing.”¹¹ Those involved in Native American studies have yet to do all the wonderful things their colleagues are doing in the traditional academic disciplines and other scholarly areas. Eventually they must do so. And they should do so in ways that make sense to Native American peoples themselves.

Notes

1. For the proceedings of this convocation, see *Indian Voices: The First Convocation of American Indian Scholars* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1970).
2. *Ibid.*, 378–82.
3. For the proceedings of this convocation, see *Indian Voices: The Native American Today: A Report on The Second Convocation of American Indian Scholars* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1974).
4. *First Convocation*, 378.
5. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, ed., *Final Report from the Round Table of Native American Studies Directors in Forming the Native American Studies Association* (Albuquerque, N.M.: Native American Studies Association with the Institute for Native American Development, University of New Mexico, 1980), 33.
6. *First Convocation*, 381.
7. Ortiz, *Final Report*, 13, 20–21.
8. *Ibid.*, 20–21.
9. *Ibid.*, 22.
10. *First Convocation*, 382.
11. Annette Rosenstiel, *Red and White: Indian Views of the White Man, 1492–1982* (New York: Universe Books, 1983), 158.