Reclaiming
Native American
Cultures

Proceedings of the
Native American Symposium

edited by
Annette Trefzer and Robin L. Murray
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Southeastern Oklahoma State University
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Professor Alfonso Ortiz

1939 - 1996
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PREFACE

Robin L. Murray
Eastern Illinois University

This project—Reclaiming Native American Cultures—stemmed from several successful attempts to highlight the diversity of culture, and especially the preponderance of Native American cultures, in Southeastern Oklahoma. Beginning in the fall of 1995, a Native American Studies Committee was established which implemented a Native American film festival and coordinated a lecture and discussion featuring issues surrounding repatriation of Native American artifacts. The success of these programs and of those implemented by the university—a Native American art exhibition and a performance by a Native American dance troupe—encouraged us to pursue a larger project, and Southeastern Oklahoma State University's Native American Symposium came into being.

The first Native American Symposium far out-distanced our expectations. Our efforts up until the fall of 1996 had focused only on Native Americans in the region. Our first symposium expanded our vision across regions as well as disciplines. The theme of this symposium, "Speaking Allowed/Aloud: Native American Voices Past, Present, and Future," prompted responses from scholars on both coasts of the United States and from disciplines ranging from literature to psychology. This symposium proved such a triumph that our committee, with the university's encouragement, tackled a second symposium the following fall. This symposium, "The Beating/Beading of Many Hearts: Reclaiming Native American Cultures," extended the boundaries established by the first symposium. Presenters represented areas as far away as Alberta, Canada and disciplines even more various than before.

The "voices" transcribed into the articles in this collection illustrate the range of papers read at both symposiums. They also emphasize the themes of each symposium as interpreted by each keynote speaker. These proceedings therefore do not only preserve the tone of the presentations in each symposium; they also reflect and, we hope, serve as a testimonial to the wisdom of our keynotes, Alfonso Ortiz and Richard Erdoes. The work begun by Alfonso Ortiz and continued after his passing by his colleague, Richard Erdoes, can also help us translate the theme of this volume, "Reclaiming Native American Cultures," and its importance to both indigenous and non-indigenous persons.
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Our keynotes, Ortiz and Erdoes emphasize the need to "reclaim" Native American cultures in their cooperative project, American Indian Myths and Legends, where they note that "the effects of white culture on many regions, with the notable exception of the Southwest and the Plains, and to a degree the Northwest, have been devastating, with whole bodies of Indian literature erased, or warped beyond recognition in their contemporary representations" (xii). Ortiz and Erdoes also stress the importance of reclaiming those cultures when they assert that "most industrialized people, eyes ever on the clock, fragmented by the pressing problems of a split-second, microchip society, have little time or inclination, it seems to speculate on the communal nature of the universe" (xi).

But reclaiming that which is Native American is not enough. We must recognize and acknowledge the plurality of "cultures" that are characterized as Native American. According to Ortiz and Erdoes, cultures, as represented by their legends, "vary according to a people's way of life, the geography and the climate in which they live, the food they eat and the way they obtain it" (xiii). At the same time, however, "cultures overlap and influence each other, not only when people of different tribes live in adjacent territory, but even when they encounter each other through migration or trade over long distances" (xiv).

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Work Cited

Acknowledgements

Encountering Native American cultures, through the symposiums and the works included in this volume, has influenced our views of the world and its cultures. We are thankful to have participated in this project and grateful to all who made it possible. Engaging with Native Americans and their cultures has enriched our lives.

We could not have published these proceedings without the help of our fellow committee members, those from the inaugural symposium, Corie Delashaw and Elbert Hill and Sandra Garrett, and those who joined them and us the following year: Doris Andrews, Brad Cushman, Jane Gainey, Elizabeth Kennedy, Chad Litton, Faye Mangrum, Andrew Robson, and Chunmei You. We owe much to the wisdom of the representatives of the Choctaw Nation, Sue Folsom, and the Chickasaw Nation, Jefferson Keel, whose contributions to our committee were invaluable.

We are especially grateful to our keynote speakers, Alfonso Ortiz and Richard Erdoes. We will sorely miss Ortiz, our first keynote speaker, and we are thankful for Richard Erdoes’ commemoration of his colleague and friend at the 1997 symposium. We believe that Ortiz’s legacy will live on through the voices in this volume and in symposiums yet to come.

We were fortunate to have a number of outstanding reviewers on this project: Eric Anderson, William Anderson, Cecile Elkins Carter, William DeReuse, Brooks Flippen, Susan Gardner, Lisa Hill, Clara Sue Kidwell, Chad Litton, James Pate, Randy Prus, and Andrew Robson. We owe much to our colleagues’ attentive readings and their critical suggestions.

We are also thankful for the institutional support and confidence we received from James Pate, former Dean of Arts and Letters; Doris Andrews and Andrew Robson, the chairs of our department in 1996 and 1997 respectively; Joe Wiley, Vice President of Academic Affairs; and former university president, Larry Williams and current president, Glen Johnson. The proceedings and the symposiums from which they originated could not have been possible without the financial support of the university and other outside sources. We first would like to thank Jack Robinson and the Organized Research Fund committee for awarding the grants we proposed. We would also like to acknowledge the grants awarded by the Red River Arts Council and the Oklahoma Foundation for Humanities, and the contributions from businesses in the community.

And, finally, we are grateful to our secretary, Teresa Anderson, for her untiring efforts to compile and complete this project. Without her this volume would not exist.

A.T. AND R.L.M.
INTRODUCTION

Annette Trefzer
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Alfonso Ortiz repeatedly challenged us to open "a new dialogue, a kind of creative mutually rewarding partnership between Indians and sympathetic historians" and scholars. He had in mind a "partnership" between Indians and non-Indians that would lead to a more accurate revision of the stories we tell about ourselves and our nation. Intended as a response to Ortiz’s invitation, this collection of essays marks, we hope, the beginning of such a crucial partnership at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. Located in the home of the Choctaw Nation, Southeastern Oklahoma State University hosted the Native American Symposium for the first time in 1996 when students and scholars gathered to begin a dialogue about Indian issues in various disciplines such as politics, history, literature, anthropology, and art. This collection seeks to preserve some of the discussions and to share them with more colleagues, Indian and non-Indian, for purposes of further dialogue.

We begin this dialogue in Part One with an introduction to strategies of representing Native American cultures in museums. Many museums currently undergo a reorientation to include tradition-sensitive Indian perspectives in their exhibitions. In "Reclaiming Artifacts Through Oral History," Clifford Crane Bear shares his knowledge of oral history to interpret three artifacts in the Glenbow Museum. He explains that the artifacts are not dead objects or past relics but "living, breathing parts" of his culture. As a member of the Siksika Nation, he emphasizes the need for museums to let Native people talk about and experience their cultures. Crane Bear argues that tribes should be involved in interpreting museum collections because they have access to cultural knowledge crucial for interpreting the significance of such artifacts which academics outside of the culture often lack.

Like Clifford Crane Bear, Annette Fromm emphasizes the importance of involving Native Americans in correctly representing museum artifacts. After briefly surveying museum projects that are planned in cooperation with Indian people, Fromm reports on how the Sam Noble Oklahoma Museum is integrating "Native American Voices" into the exhibition work, and how museum policy has responded to the integration of a local knowledge base. She argues that collaboration with Native Americans has rapidly changed the function and organization of cultural exhibitions. With planning committees composed of
tribal representatives and museum staff, Fromm sees the positive development of a grass roots network that increasingly lets Native people tell their own stories.

Finding a voice and being heard is also an important topic in Native American literature. In Part Two, Barbara Cook examines the complex relationship between Indian feminism and "mainstream theoretical feminism" for Indian women who have an allegiance both to their tribal communities and to a feminist sisterhood. Cook interprets the journey of the female character in Paula Gunn Allen's _The Woman Who Owned the Shadows_ as a healing process which requires the recovery of "woman-centered spiritual traditions." According to Cook, Allen emphasizes the importance of tribal legends, oral tradition, and story telling as a "form of curing ceremony in Laguna Pueblo traditions." Hearing and remembering the ancient traditions and understanding the past is essential to the recovery of the novel's protagonist as well as to the tribe as a whole.

Also concerned with the search for identity and the codes of tribal selves is Melissa Hearn who examines John Oskison's historical writings as an inquiry into Cherokee culture. Hearn investigates how Oskison's Cherokee background affects two of his historical novels, _A Texas Titan_ (1929) and _Tecumseh and his Times_ (1938). Hearn argues that Oskison used the story of Sam Houston in _A Texas Titan_ as "a platform for representing Cherokee accomplishments, values, and history." This novel contains the seed for an even stronger advocacy for Native rights in _Tecumseh and his Times_. Romanticized portraits of Tecumseh were not unusual, but Hearn thinks Oskison's perspective was unique because he tries to bring Cherokee history into the story of this Shawnee leader by representing "perhaps disproportionately" the historical connections between the two tribes. By discussing Oskison's contrary impulses--his journalistic and fictional goals--Hearn shows that the tales we tell and the politics we profess are inextricably linked.

In Part Three on history and mythology, Ginger Davis examines federal Native American policy, particularly the controversial resignation of Commissioner Charles Burke of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Burke's assimilationist policy clash with the reform efforts of his political rival John Collier, who advocated Indian self-determination. When Commissioner Burke resigned from the BIA, "tendered amid cries of maladministration and scandal," he accused Collier of having conspired against him. After shedding light on the exact role that Collier played in Burke's resignation, Davis concludes that it was the end of assimilationist policies combined with Burke's unpopularity that spelled the end of Burke's administration rather than any personal attacks that Collier might
have mounted against Burke. As careful examination of Congressional records and news publications show, Collier’s ambitions to gain the position of Burke were mostly political and ideological, not personal.

Pressure to assimilate has always had a disastrous impact on the fate and lifestyles of Native peoples. Carlon Andre and Carole McAllister examine the ways in which French foreign influence on the Chitimacha of Louisiana altered and disturbed their oral traditions. Using the sacred legend "The Great Spirit Makes the World," Andre and McAllister demonstrate that the once harmonious whole of this text was fractured by patriarchal Christian influences. These cultural influences changed the matrilineal social structure of the Chitimacha and the (female) gender of the "great spirit" into a tale more in accordance with the Christian creation myth in which the creator is male and women have submissive roles. As a result, female spirituality and power were erased from the legend. Through a close textual analysis, the authors reveal the cultural hybridity of this myth and uncover references to Native American sacred belief and practices such as the purification rites. Andre and McAllister also suggest that re instituted as female, the "Great Spirit" corresponds to Thought Woman whose creative powers restore the text to its harmonious whole. The authors conclude that by imposing Christian patriarchal ideas on Native American belief systems, both Indian religious traditions and female traditions were erased from the sacred texts that are the life blood of the people.

In Part Four on Native American Languages, Anthony Webster examines the "situational" nature of Sam Kenoi’s telling of "Coyote and the Whitemen" in Chiricahua Apache to linguist Harry Hoijer. Webster argues that this text is not just about Chiricahua culture; it is Chiricahua culture and follows specific "received standards for a Coyote narrative." At the same time, the narrative is also "situational" which means that its linguistic devices are dependent on the interaction between storyteller and audience. Webster’s linguistic analysis seeks to discover what can be recovered from the "realtime, momentbound, fleeting narration." Webster concludes that this narrative is best understood as "a point of multiple contact" between cultures, and he suggests that Kenoi’s Chiricahua narrative reveals traces of cultural resistance to the "whitemen" about whom and to whom it is told.

Language is also the focus of Kimberli Lee’s essay on Mari Sandoz’s Crazy Horse. Lee argues that Sandoz’s major creative breakthrough came when she realized that she needed to rewrite Crazy Horse from an Indian perspective. Sandoz’s narrative revisions, including changes in point of view and vocabulary, successfully alter the narrative so that it conveys more closely an image of Lakota culture during the late nineteenth century. Lee provides many vivid
examples of the Sandoz's revisions such as her inclusion of Lakota place names, phraseology, and figures of speech, as well as her use of the oral tradition and its "miniature lessons." All these techniques combine in Sandoz's book to convey a striking sense of "Indianness" for the reader.

Part Five concludes our collection with two essays on Indian oral history and traditions. Deborah Mitchell examines the rare legend of a "snake-man" found in some Native American tribes. Through interviews and research, Mitchell discovered that about thirty different tribes have tales of a snake-man, and that in the Creek tribe alone ten separate version of the legend exist. Her examination of the similarities and differences among tribal legends leads to the question why the stories share common and even particular details. Mitchell hopes that her study might lead to a better understanding of narrative cross currents among many different tribes, and she addresses claims of skeptics who might think that the common narrative threads could be coincidental.

Like Deborah Mitchell, Jerry Lincecum also set out to discover a mystery and in the process detected his family's contribution to preserving Choctaw oral history. In his essay, "Chahta-Imnataha and the Choctaw Bible," Lincecum assumes the personae of his great-great-great grandfather, Gideon Lincecum, who was born more than two hundred years ago. Lincecum draws upon the elder's writings to explain how he obtained a Choctaw oral tradition in Mississippi by interviewing a tribal sage over an extended period of time. Gideon Lincecum came to Chahta-Imnataha to solve the mystery of the Mississippi earth-mounds, but he came away with a lot more: a traditional account of the history and customs of the Choctaw people.