



Introduction

by Ned Blackhawk, Professor of History and of American Studies

The ten curriculum units that comprise this volume, Contemporary American Indian history, range widely across the scholarly landscape of Native American Studies. Together they collectively provide various ways of teaching, contemplating, and engaging the subject of American Indians and U.S. history. Each draws upon published scholarly works and uses their respective findings to explore more focused areas of interest, nearly all of which are connected to concerns that have emerged from years of classroom instruction. Several draw upon primary sources from the early twentieth century. Others draw upon existing textbooks and/or curricular standards to expose the limits of current pedagogical approaches to both U.S. history and American literary study, while others discuss ways of incorporating Native American history into diverse classroom environments.

Drawing upon a range of approaches to the field, this Institute seminar focused upon the contemporary political history of American Indians within the United States, beginning with two prominent texts about the various forms of urban as well as reservation activism that helped to determine the course of post-WWII American law and policy. Fellows in the course engaged legal and policy questions, particularly those relating to the Termination policies and practices of the United Government. Officially declared as U.S. national policy in 1953, the process of “terminating” American Indian tribes’ unique political, sovereign status under federal Indian law and policy took nearly a generation to reverse. Surveying the many activists, leaders, and community members engaged in challenging these processes characterized our first sessions together, while subsequent seminars explored the more contemporary concerns of Indian history. Ranging from discussions of museum studies to readings about the changing economic history of Native America in the 1970s and 1980s, these sessions helped to extend the themes from the earlier discussions into more contemporary eras. Several American Indian documentaries, films, novels, and photographic works helped to deepen our discussions. Such works included Sherman Alexie’s *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, selections from Louise Erdrich’s *The Round House*; Chris Eyre’s *Smoke Signals* and *Skins*, Mary Kathryn Nagle’s *Sliver of a Full Moon*, the photography of Horace Poolaw, and the 12 short films made about Great Lakes Indian life and culture, *The Ways.Org*. Such works helped to provide insights into the more experiential nature of Native American history as well as expose some of the challenges of contemporary Native American policy formation in modern America.

Such discussions occurred in seminars held largely in the Native American Cultural Center at Yale. Visits to museums also helped to deepen the class experience, including visits to the Yale University Art Gallery as well as an all-day field trip to the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, the world’s largest tribal museum. The Pequot Museum visit included presentations about Native food sovereignty from regional tribal members as well as visits to the museum’s extensive permanent exhibitions and film screenings.

Each fellow teaches in a range of school districts, ranging from Tulsa to San Jose, and including other metropolitan school districts, such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Richmond, and Pittsburg. Accordingly, fellows brought unique and varied perspectives to the relative familiarity or lack thereof of Native American history within their existing classrooms, schools, and districts. All of the units are geared towards either high school or advanced middle grade students.

Danielle Greene's "The Constitutional Crisis of Cherokee Removal" surveys the changing legal dimensions of federal Indian law and policy in the early Republic. This unit connects with common core themes of emphasis found in the state of Virginia's curricular codes and explores the varying aspects of Andrew Jackson's failures to follow the U.S. Supreme Court's rulings in favor of the Cherokee Nation.

Jo Anne Flory's "Rewriting the Narrative of American History: American Indian Identity and the Process of Recovery" examines sets works about Indian history and by American Indian authors. It uses three particular works to explore the historical eras surrounding their production and connects several of them with the historical development of Oklahoma, particularly the expansion of Tulsa where she teaches.

Ludy Aguada's "Dreaming from the Margins, Living in the In-Between: Identity, Culture, and the Power of Voice" compares contemporary Native American works of fiction by Louise Erdrich and Sherman Alexie. It connects important themes within each text with the changing nature of American Indian law and policy, identifying the legal themes such animating fictional accounts.

Travis Bouldin's "Interpreting Movements of American Indian Activism" overviews four varying activist movements for Indian rights. It particularly compares and contrasts the American Indian Movement and the National Congress of American Indians and their respective and often differing approaches to the policies of Termination and Relocation. He links such activist histories with efforts to pedagogical efforts within his 8th - grade classroom in American history.

Patricia LeAnn Hodge's "Relationships of African Americans and Creeks in Oklahoma to 1936" focuses on the changing forms of membership and recognition within American Indian communities in Oklahoma, particularly within the Creek Nation and its shifting and increasingly racialized forms of citizenry and recognition. Such racial formations in the early twentieth century were new to the Creek communities, particularly regarding their long-standing relationships with both Free Black communities and Afro-Creek members within the Nation. She traces this complex history through the early twentieth century processes of statehood and to the New Deal, exposing new ways that the federal government eventually came to legislate such forms of membership and recognition.

Tara Ann Carter's "First and Second Wave Native American Literature" explores distinctive phases of American Indian literary production. In a generally recognized period of cultural and creative production termed by one scholar "The Native American Renaissance" authors such as N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko all explored individuals coming to terms with and/or struggling to find appropriate forms of cultural identity within an increasingly modernizing American society. Her project continues such analysis into the twenty-first century and locates in particular Sherman Alexie's work in more ambiguous and ambivalent ways, in what she terms "second wave" forms of literary expression.

Ashley Pate's "The Menominee Journey to Self Determination" provides an in-depth assessment of one tribal communities' efforts to ward off the legal challenges of Termination and to have their sovereign status with the federal government "restored," in a process known as restoration. Identifying how Menominee leaders, such as Ada Deer, navigated the challenging legal and political channels of both Wisconsin and Washington,

D.C., her unit identifies under-recognized forms of civil rights activism and struggles for political justice within rural, reservation areas.

Michael McCellan’s “Agents of Change: How American Indians Helped Change the World in Only Seven Years” assess the Seven Year’s War of the Eighteenth Century. Examining how American Indian diplomacy and affairs shaped the evolving conflict between France and England in the imperial struggle for supremacy in eastern North America, his unit exposes the centrality of Indigenous peoples, politics, and power to the composition of Revolutionary America.

Barbara Prillaman’s “Indian Boarding Schools: A Case Study of Assimilation, Resistance, and Resilience” provides an overview of the varied ways that U.S. policy targeted American Indian children and education. Showing both the detrimental and resilient forms of adaptation initiated by Native peoples in the face of such forms of assimilation, she provides a series of sociological approaches to understanding and/or re-casting understandings of American assimilation more broadly.

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