

Indigenous-Centered Pedagogies: Strategies for Teaching Native American Literature and Culture

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As a reflection on pedagogy, this essay seeks to provide strategic tools for teaching Native American literature and culture to non-native students.¹ My teaching philosophy is informed by the indigenous-centered, decolonial methodologies as defined by Devon Mihesuah who calls for “indigenizing” the academy by challenging the status quo and debating the controversial issues that adversely affect the lives and representations of Native Americans (*Indigenizing the Academy*, 2004). I argue that an indigenous-centered pedagogy and multidisciplinary approach gives students the opportunity to critically examine those instances of cultural tourism and popular media stereotypes that continue to perpetuate gross misconceptions about American Indian identity and culture. In addition, I highlight the ongoing challenges that instructors face when teaching students to “unlearn” Eurocentric histories and dominant national narratives. I have taught Native American Studies courses to a wide range of students from multiple backgrounds and thus, this essay will be based on the various experiences I have had in the classroom at five different institutions in the past eight years (i.e. Ivy League, small liberal arts college, state college, and university).

Interdisciplinary Approaches: English, History, American Studies

As a scholar of Comparative American Studies who currently teaches courses within a traditional department of English, one of the prevalent issues I face when teaching my interdisciplinary courses are students' unwillingness to move beyond their assumptions about specific disciplines. Thus, it is critical to challenge students' assumptions about traditional disciplines, such as History and English, by providing them the tools to critically examine rigid boundaries. I do this in part by asking students to consider the complexities of indigenous identity through a native-centered perspective and consider the importance of self-representation as we examine historical and contemporary representations of Indianness. In addition, I ask them to complicate and challenge generic and confining disciplinary boundaries by reading primary works within their appropriate historical and cultural contexts. I ask them to consider several primary questions throughout the semester: What does it mean to tell a life story? Whose stories and histories are valued and legitimized and whose are forgotten? And how can we problematize the binary constructed between the oral and written traditions by complicating our notions of literacy?

In my experience, one of the most useful exercises is a "freewrite" that I require during the first week of class. That is, I ask students to define the canon of "American" literature and then extend their responses to include reflections on how they have come to understand "American" identity and culture and the dominant national American narrative. They are then asked to define "Indianness," that is, the ways in which they have come to understand and define Native American identity and culture. These core questions form the basis of my class and one of my primary objectives is to provide students historical, theoretical, and practical lenses through

which they can critically examine their worldviews and interactions with both real/lived and imagined/stereotyped perceptions of and about indigenous peoples. This exercise is extremely useful and is followed up at the end of the semester with a reflection essay that asks students to critically examine their own intellectual growth and their previous assumptions of American and Native American identity and culture.

The students' comments and dialogue that are generated from this initial freewrite can be characterized in two ways. First, the majority of students typically respond with a dominant rhetoric that echoes the western-movement narrative and eastern-centered historical origins. They discuss their perceptions of American identity by referring to the concept of the "American Dream," and using such words as "liberty" and "freedom." Second, some students critique this dominant narrative by referring to the concept of "American Exceptionalism" and openly critique long held assumptions and myths about American identity and cultural values. These preliminary writing prompts lead to more complex questions about ideology and preconceived notions about the American national imaginary.

It is my intention with this exercise to frame the major themes and concepts for the course, especially teaching students to become critical thinkers as they respond to each other's notions of Americanness. I then facilitate this lively discussion by interjecting my own responses to students' comments that usually take the form of questions and remarks about the ways in which dominant "official histories" are legitimized by erasing historically underrepresented voices and stories. Since many students enter my courses with assumptions about "oral stories" or "oral histories" as non-reliable sources to relate "accurate" histories, I often utilize this as a point of departure to further critique western-centered notions of history-telling. I underscore the

argument in which historians themselves admit that historical research begins with assumptions. In addition, this “free write” exercise serves as a foundation for building a community within the classroom and maintaining a student-centered pedagogy. Instead of students being passive recipients of lectures, I provide a space where they have an increased awareness and responsibility for their critical comments and dialogue with one another. Although I facilitate the discussions and provide guidance, students are encouraged to respectfully respond to their peers and ask questions. As noted on my syllabus:

It is my hope that as a collective group we can grapple and work through the material to develop an intellectual community that is able to skillfully and respectfully debate pressing issues. This class will require that you regularly participate in class discussions. And although some discussions might evoke strong emotions and debate about particular subjects, we must remember to respect everyone’s opinions and comments throughout the course. This course does not assume that you will have background in Native American Studies. (Portillo)

Course Content: Introductory Courses in Native American Studies

For those of us who teach Native American Studies courses, it is no surprise that the majority of students come to class with no background in the course content and unfortunately have only learned about American Indian identity and experience through distorted stereotypes that unfortunately still continue to plague our national collective consciousness. Therefore, I consistently grapple with the best methodological approaches and choice of texts that will give students, at the very least, an introduction to some of the

major events and stories that have shaped Native American history within the United States. This is further complicated when I am assigned to teach a general survey course that makes it difficult to teach Native American Studies from a tribally specific lens. In such cases, I am challenged to choose a very small sample of “representative” works, which are intended to contribute to students’ knowledge about Native American history and culture in one semester. For this reason, my syllabus always includes secondary sources that are not only accessible, but also works that specifically address these issues in the classroom.²

One of my main learning objectives for introductory courses is to provide students with the ability to enhance their knowledge of Native American literature, history, and culture. And problematize their understanding and experience of Indianness, that is, their thinking, speaking, and actions in relationship to Native American communities. I accomplish this in part by providing students with N. Scott Momaday’s essay, “The Man Made of Words”, and Leslie Silko’s collection of essays, *Yellow Woman and Beauty of the Spirit*. Both writers provide a foundation for students and introduce concepts such as storytelling and the oral tradition from a Laguna Pueblo and Kiowa-centered perspective. Throughout the semester, these concepts are applied to other autobiographical discourses.

In anticipation of students who are entering my courses from multiple disciplinary fields, I provide various primary and secondary sources based on the course level and topic for the class. For example, in my courses on Native Women’s autobiography I teach a mix of well-recognized writers such as Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, Zitkala-Sa, Linda Hogan, and Leslie Marmon Silko, alongside lesser-known works and authors such as Delfina Cuero, Ruby Modesto, Waheenee,

Pretty Shield, and Papago Woman.³ In all courses, I emphasize the socio-historical context and do not simply assign readings for their supposed “aesthetic” value or “legitimacy” within the American literary canon. For example, when assigning Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories*, I also include supplemental readings that discuss the systematic genocide committed against Indigenous people, as it relates to the boarding schools. The following works have proved useful for an overview of this era: *Boarding School Seasons: American Indian Families* by Brenda Child (1998); *Education for Extinction* by David Wallace Adams (1995); and *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* by Andrea Smith (2005). Smith’s work provides students not only with the historical context of the boarding schools, but engages in discussion about the continuing legacies of these institutions in the 21st century and their impact on contemporary indigenous communities. She begins her discussion by reviewing the state-sanctioned boarding schools from the 1880s to the 1980s. And makes connections between different forms of violence perpetrated by the state and society against Native women. She also includes a discussion of the “Boarding School Healing Project”, whose main goal is to provide healing resources for survivors of boarding schools. It is integral for students to realize that Native American history is not simply a story of victimization, but rather a story about survival, resistance, transformation, and healing.

American Indian Identity: Countering Popular Stereotypes

In response to questions of identity, one topic that is frequently raised in my courses is the pervasiveness and perpetuation of Native American stereotypes, especially in popular culture. I argue that it is integral to confront these issues early in the semester in order to provide

students with the necessary tools to critically examine their own misconceptions and biases about “Indianness.” Devon Mihesuah states that distorted images of Native Americans can be found in every medium from TV shows, textbooks, movies, cartoons, commercials, logos, and insignia (*Stereotypes and Realities* 9). Thus, the dominant imagery and understanding of Native Americans, especially the idea of the “vanishing native” with its roots in the 19th century, continues to challenge those scholars who teach American Indian literature courses. My experience in the classroom with such misconceptions is varied and differs depending on the institution and student population. Although a handful identify as indigenous, the majority of my students have been non-native. When they share their initial responses on how they identify “Indianness”, their answers echo internalized assumptions such as: *they* have a strong connection to the land; *they* have lost their languages; *they* are uncivilized; *they* all have casinos; *they* all attend college for free and get government handouts. These are only a few examples of actual responses from students that highlight the ways in which stereotypes and mythologies continue to dominate notions about Native American identity and culture. Since these misrepresentations usually surface in the first two weeks of class, I make sure to provide a space where students can dialogue about these misconceptions. I facilitate the discussion and periodically interject when necessary in order to make clear that these stereotypes are not only problematic, but also highly offensive. I then utilize this discussion as a point of departure to talk about “critical thinking” and make students more aware of their own sociopolitical and subject positions that might cause a disconnect between themselves and the subject matter. I then underscore one of my primary objectives for the course: that is, I ask students to critically examine those instances of cultural tourism and popular media stereotypes that continue to perpetuate gross misconceptions about

American Indian identity by examining Native American history and literature from an indigenous-centered perspective. And throughout the course I explicitly reiterate the following student-centered approach:

It is expected that as a class we will often disagree and rarely come to a consensus about the material. This should be seen as positive, rather than negative. Your participation is key to creating a more dynamic class; one that allows us to learn from each other. I expect everyone to be respectful of their fellow peers and come to class with open minds that will allow for constructive debate and discussions about the material presented in class, especially during student presentations.

(Portillo)

In addition, students may not be aware that even their seemingly “positive” comments that romanticize Indians can be offensive. I attribute some of this to “New Ageism” as well as the more recent depictions of indigenous people in Hollywood blockbuster films (e.g. *Pocahontas*, *Avatar*, and the *Twilight Saga*) that continue to perpetuate indigenous peoples as Indian princesses, noble savages, and shapeshifters. The perpetuation of this imagery and students exoticized descriptions of indigenous peoples occurs more often in my Native American Environmentalism courses where students do not adequately complicate the ways in which the writers are discussing sacred sites, landscape, spirituality, religious rights, and environmental racism. Thus, in anticipation of such responses my syllabus for this course states:

The purpose of this theme-based course will be to acquaint students with social, political, economic and ethical aspects of current Native American environmental issues. And contrary to stereotype, Native Americans do not have a “natural”

affinity with environmentalism, but rather they have lands with a long history of being the dumping ground for toxic chemicals, nuclear waste and uranium tailings. Therefore, through the fields of literature, science, sociology and history, we will think critically about the ties of culture to place, the nature of cultural relationships to specific animals and environment, health concerns, cultural genocide and sovereignty. (Portillo)

One book I consider essential for any introductory courses in Native American Studies is Mihesuah's *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities*, where she asserts, there is "no other ethnic group in the United States [that] has endured greater and more varied distortions of its cultural identity..." (1996). Her book is extremely accessible for all levels and provides readers with counter narratives to some of the most egregious stereotypes about American Indians. For my advanced level courses, I require Mihesuah's books, *Natives and Academics: Research and Writing about American Indians* and *Indigenous American Women: Decolonization, Empowerment, Activism* (1998, 2003). In addition, I utilize the works of Paula Gunn Allen (*Sacred Hoop*, 1996; *Off the Reservation*, 1998) and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (*Anti Indianism*, 2001) to explore further and frame the major issues surrounding Native American Studies as a discipline.

Another text that has been useful for discussions about Indigenous identity, are Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird's edited anthology, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, which not only introduces students to creative writers from multiple tribes, but also discusses the contentious issue of "blood quantum" and questions of authenticity. As we read these works, I underscore the importance of complicating simplistic definitions of Native American identity and emphasize

that each primary text should be read from tribally specific histories and perspectives. Therefore, I assign secondary sources from Cook-Lynn, Mihesuah, and Allen who all complicate Eurocentric notions of indigenous identity. I then provide further background material to discuss the differences between government-imposed definitions that determine which groups are federally recognized. This is especially relevant when teaching in regions where local tribes continue to struggle for federal recognition.

Documentaries & Storytelling: Testimonies of Survival and Healing

In addition to written works, I utilize documentaries to supplement the primary texts. These visual representations provide students with another method to critically examine Native American literature and culture. In particular, “The Residential School Experience: A Century of Genocide in the Americas” produced by Rosemary Gibbons and the “The White Man’s Image” produced by Christine Lesiak, provide students with the ability to compare and critique the ways in which history is told and by whom. Both of these works give an overview of the “Indian Boarding Schools Era,” but relate the information through extremely different lenses. Thus, each documentary provides students with the ability to critically examine and question the ways in which Native American history is (re)presented, (re)written, and (re)righted. In fact, this comparative approach to reading, screening and listening to multiple stories from various points of view, and through different genres gives students the tools to also examine their own positionalities and interrogate long-held assumptions about American history and historiography. By including interdisciplinary materials students are provided with a tangible way to think about the ways in which narratives are constructed and rethink the notion of

absolute truths. More importantly, this pedagogical approach echoes the defining characteristics of “communal storytelling” as defined by Silko, who states, “The ancient Pueblo people sought a communal truth, not an absolute truth. For them this truth lived somewhere within the web of differing versions...” (32). That is, “...there are no pure truths, but rather only stories, many stories.” (33).

More importantly, documentaries that include testimonies are inherently significant to better understanding the importance of the oral tradition and storytelling as a means of survival and healing. For example, when teaching the history of the boarding schools, I emphasize that such colonialist projects of cultural and physical genocide, the very idea of “killing the Indian, and saving the man” as instituted by Richard Henry Pratt are not simply ideologies of the past, but rather legacies that persist today and are manifested in different forms of institutionalized racism and discrimination against contemporary native communities. In her discussion of boarding schools and the case for reparations, Smith argues that “[t]oday, the effects of boarding school abuses continue to play out throughout indigenous communities, largely because these abuses have not been acknowledged or addressed by the larger society. As a result, silence continues within Native communities preventing Native peoples from seeking support and healing as a result of the intergenerational trauma” (52). The documentary, “Our Spirits Don’t Speak English” produced by Rich-Heape Films, a Native-owned film company, is also a valuable tool that gives voice to the survivors and relates an indigenous-centered perspective of these institutions. In the classroom, the multiple testimonies included in “Our Spirits” are even more profound than the written works, because students have the opportunity to listen to the words of survivors, storytellers, poets, and community activists. In my experience, the oral and

visual representations of “history” and “lived experience” are equally important as the written works and contribute to an indigenous-centered pedagogy where the oral is privileged over the written.

The use of testimonies is especially pertinent to underscore the oral tradition as a legitimate way in which to “record history.” For example, in their creative works and essays, writers such as Wendy Rose, Silko, Bird, and Harjo discuss the importance of memory as it relates to language and history telling within their own communities, whether this is through song, ritual, prayer, storytelling, or writing. In the introduction to *Seven Hands Seven Hearts* by Elizabeth Woody, who is of Yakama, Warm Springs, Wasco, and Navajo descent, she discusses her own struggles with the loss of language. She states that it was “U.S. government policy, until just a few years ago, to eradicate all Indian languages. . . . I am a part of the generation in which this language massacre reached its final stage: I learned only English” (14). But she also recognizes that those “older languages are active in my brain” (14). And now she is of the generation in which the possibility of regaining those languages has occurred. “It is through my own story and the stories of my family and my circle of people that I become whole. . . . The skill of telling and listening was ‘handed down’ a legacy from a very ancient art form of imparting and storing knowledge and wisdom. It requires patience to listen to hours of “testimony” (13-14). She challenges Western notions of literacy and interpretation as she articulates her understanding of specialized knowledge, as that which also requires one to “listen to hours of testimony.” Thus, as teachers of Native American history and literature, it is crucial that students not only read works by contemporary writers, but also listen to various forms of the oral tradition, whether this is through film, documentaries, or even taped recordings.

Teaching and Practicing Storytelling in the Classroom

In all my courses, I emphasize the importance of listening to others and especially “hearing” what each person says as we collectively grapple with material that at times may become emotionally charged. For this reason, I insist that each class counter traditional structures of a university-classroom environment where chairs are usually lined up in rows. Instead students are asked to create a “talking circle” where they can converse with one another through an indigenous-centered model. In addition, my courses underscore the importance of bringing in one’s lived experience to the discussion as a way in which to “build communities” within the class and provide students alternative models to engaging scholarly articles and/or creative works. Students’ stories and testimonies become sites of specialized knowledge that inevitably creates a more dynamic class and open dialogue where students can contribute more freely to the discussion. This pedagogical approach provides an ideal model for courses where testimonies, life stories and autobiographies are central to the course content. It must be noted that the integration of one’s own “life story” or even a student’s testimony to supplement class discussion will depend largely on the class dynamic as well as the instructor’s background and ability to facilitate this information appropriately.

An assignment that parallels this pedagogical approach to storytelling and has worked successfully is one where I ask students to participate in “role-playing.” This creative assignment differs from a typical analytical paper and asks that students take on the personae of someone who has been affected by the boarding school experience. For example, they can write in the voice/personae of a child or an adult who attended one of these schools (this voice may be

historical or contemporary). They may also choose to write from the perspective of someone who worked at the boarding schools, such as a “friend of the Indian.” These assignments can take the form of short stories, letters, poems or journals. I encourage students to utilize the multiple articles, documentaries and especially Zitkala-Sa’s *American Indian Stories* as models for their own creative works. This assignment is designed to challenge students to merge their critical and creative capacities.

In my experience of teaching Native American women’s writing, I have found multi-genre identity-based anthologies especially useful for introductory courses. For example, *Through the Eye of the Deer* edited by Carolyn Dunn and Carolyn Comfort and a *Gathering of Spirit* edited by Beth Brant gives students access to various writers, many of whom are lesser known. I argue that these multi-genre collections are communal “life stories” that participate in community building between contributors and readers alike. *Through the Eye of the Deer* anthologizes works that retell traditional stories in a modern context. The retelling of these stories follows the oral tradition, which are not necessarily fixed or unchanging. The editors state that the stories “have been reshaped in the telling and retelling over the years; yet, the essence of the stories, the essence of what was true and still is true for American Indian communities remains an integral part of the narratives...” (xi). Another anthology, *Sister Nations: Native American Women Writers on Community* edited by Laura Tohe and Heid Erich, echoes similar themes such as Native American women’s roles in the community. As noted earlier, *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* edited by Harjo and Bird is useful for discussing not only the experiences of Native American women, but also the inherent difficulties of publishing an anthology that purports to

“represent” Native Americans. This anthology painstakingly chooses and includes over eighty writers from fifty different nations, both well-known writers as well as first time contributors.

Decolonizing the Academy: Building Bridges with Elders and Community Activists

In addition to assigning articles that broaden the student’s understanding of the unique experiences of Native Americans in relationship to the history of colonialism, genocide, and patriarchy, I also emphasize how these primary and secondary sources are in every way connected to living communities. It would be a disservice to students if these works were taught in isolation to their socio-historical contexts and disconnected from native voices. This pedagogical approach to teaching is crucial to not only building bridges within the classroom between students, but also building bridges with indigenous communities and the academy. Similar to my teaching philosophy, in *Red Pedagogy* (2004) Sandy Grande calls for decolonizing the academy, a crucial model that is needed to achieve any type of intellectual sovereignty, especially when teaching courses that seek to teach Native American Studies. She argues that the sociopolitical and material conditions of American Indian communities should not be obscured by questions of identity and authenticity. She states, “[a]s we raise yet another generation in a nation at war, it is even more imperative for schools to be reimagined as sites for social transformation and emancipation...” (165). I agree, that as educators of Native American studies during the 21st century we must consider our classrooms as sites of consciousness raising, where students feel empowered to enact social change. The relationship between Native American communities and academia has historically been contentious and, therefore, these tensions must also be emphasized since classes are taught within the confines of the academy, and, therefore,

within an institution that has historically (mis)represented or outright silenced the voices, stories and histories of American Indians. One approach to building bridges is to invite guest speakers and encourage students to become actively involved in social justice organizations within the community.

This methodological approach, that is, integrating service-learning and guest speakers, is not difficult because regardless of region there are always active members of the community and multiple organizations working and advocating for social justice of indigenous people. By actively engaging local communities and foregrounding their voices in class, one can counter the tendencies to essentialize accounts of Native American history that continues to erase contemporary issues. For example, Grande argues for a liberatory project that destabilizes the isolationist narratives of nationalism and cultural chauvinism (118). She calls for an “indigenous theory of subjectivity” that “addresses the political quest for sovereignty, the socio-economic urgency to build transnational coalitions, and creates the intellectual space for social change” (118). Although not every institution provides support for guest speakers, I would argue that inviting elders and members of indigenous communities to share their knowledge with a class is an integral component in any course on Native American Studies. In my experience multiple speakers have provided invaluable information to students as they discuss their personal experiences about contemporary issues facing Native Americans. And these “talks” provide students with the ability to better contextualize the course content.

For example, while teaching at a liberal arts college in Ohio, I worked with a Native student organization that invited several speakers to campus. The first was Beatrice Long Visitor Holy Dance, a member of ‘The International Council of the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers from

the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, who spoke about the “Past, Present and Future of Lakota Culture.” In addition, we invited Mary Jane Buckshot from Cleveland, Ohio, who spoke about her own “Boarding School Experience” and relocation to Cleveland during the 1960s. Her discussion centered on the “Indian Relocation Act of 1956,” that was part of the U.S. government’s Indian termination policy which imposed assimilation and resulted in cultural genocide. She especially lamented the loss of language and cultural traditions that resulted from relocation and her boarding school experiences. In addition, my students and I also worked closely with the leader of the American Indian Movement of Cleveland, Ohio, Robert Roche, who was also the founder of the Indian Education Center located in the city. More recently, in my courses at the University of Texas, San Antonio, I have invited members of the Texas Indigenous Council to speak about the current issues facing the indigenous communities in southern Texas. And I have worked collaboratively with the “Women’s Studies Institute” at UTSA to bring in such speakers as Deborah Miranda (Chumash/Esselen), creative writer, scholar-activist; Margo Tamez (Lipan Apache/Jumano Apache), activist-scholar and co-founder of “Lipan Apache Women Defense;” Linda Sue Warner (Comanche), educational leadership; Rosemary Gibbons (Mimbres Apache/Chicana), activist-filmmaker, and member of the “Border School Healing Project (BSHP);” and Misty Thomas (Santee), director of social services at Santee Sioux Nation. In preparation for these visits, students were assigned articles, creative works, and essays by the speakers. In addition, they screened relevant documentaries about the specific tribes and regions to be discussed by the visitors. The preparation of students before welcoming guests to speak is essential to assure that students actively engage in substantive and respectful dialogue with the guests. These types of interactions provide students with the

opportunity to hear scholar-activists discuss the ways in which they are working towards social justice for indigenous peoples and listen to their stories about indigenous identity.

The support and resources given to invite speakers varies depending on the institution and therefore, it is crucial to establish meaningful and sincere relationships with local indigenous communities regardless of region or school. This is especially critical for instructors teaching at colleges and universities that do not support Native American studies or do not have established NAS departments and programs. In fact, it is imperative that as scholars of Native American studies we continue to counter dominant paradigms that perpetuate romanticized notions of Indianness in and outside of the classroom. Grande aptly underscores this point and argues that we abandon essentialist accounts of Indian history usually framed as good vs. bad and more importantly, that we counter distorted myths that invisibilize American Indians in the 21st century (103). As Linda Hogan states in her memoir, *The Woman Who Watches Over The World*, “Few people outside of our cultures can comprehend the depth of the pain, despair, and, for many of us Native peoples, anger. To other Americans, this history, if thought of at all, belongs to a far past, but in truth these events are recent and remembered.” (79). Thus, centering indigenous perspectives and voices in all aspects of the classroom provides students with the tools for rethinking western-centered concepts of temporality, history, storytelling, truth-telling, and language.

Conclusion

As a teacher-scholar-activist, one of my primary objectives in all courses is to value each student’s expressions and emphasize collective dialogue. I believe that courses are more

productive if students feel empowered by linking their personal narratives to academic discussions and course content. This approach to teaching is guided by my belief that every student has the intellectual and creative capabilities to become potential teachers. I enter each course with a commitment to develop students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills as well as their appreciation for the course material. In addition, my approach follows the philosophy that it is possible to "build communities" within the classroom where students do not feel isolated and are provided the skills to engage in collaborative learning. My interactive classroom methods are shaped by indigenous-centered models, where extensive dialogue and exchange of ideas creates a dynamic learning experience. I guide students through the material by providing the necessary socio-historical background to primary texts and allow them to become active producers of knowledge. I strongly believe that it is our responsibility as educators to be conscious of how our teaching methods inevitably contribute to the multiple ways in which students will leave our classes with newly acquired knowledge about Native American literature and culture.

Notes

I am grateful for the comments and suggestions provided by Dr. Norma E. Cantú, Dr. Ben Olguín and the reviewers of *The CEA Forum*.

¹ The terms utilized to define Indigenous peoples are complex and an extensive discussion regarding nomenclature is beyond the scope of this essay. I will utilize tribally specific names whenever possible and “American Indian/Native American/Indigenous” interchangeably. Since self-identification and self-naming is inextricably linked to cultural sovereignty, the historical and contemporary debates surrounding nomenclature should always be discussed in any course in Native American studies.

² The following Native American theorists are useful for addressing these complex issues: Jack Forbes, Robert Warrior, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Philip Deloria, Shari Hundorf, Devon Mihesuah, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith.

³ I base my definition of “well-recognized” and “lesser-known” on the secondary sources produced about these works. Obviously, some of these works will be more familiar to others depending on the audience. My experience from teaching undergraduates is that most students are unfamiliar with any of these writers and narratives. [Zitkala-Sa. *American Indian Stories*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003; Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins and Mary Tyler Peabody Mann. *Life among the Piutes Their Wrongs and Claims*. microform : Cupples, Upham, G.P. Putnam, Boston, 1883; Linda Hogan. *The Woman Who Watches over the World: A Native Memoir*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001; Leslie Marmon Silko, *Storyteller*. New York: Arcarde Pub., 1981.; Delfina Cuero, and Florence Connolly Shipek. *Delfina Cuero: Her*

Autobiography, an Account of Her Last Years, and Her Ethnobotanic Contributions. Ballena Press Anthropological Papers. Menlo Park, Ca: Ballena Press, 1991; Ruby Modesto and Guy Mount. *Not for Innocent Ears: Spiritual Traditions of a Desert Cahuilla Medicine Woman*. Angelus Oaks, CA: Sweetlight Books, 1980; *Papago Woman*, (1936),ed.; Ruth M, Underhill, *Pretty-Shield Medicine Woman of the Crows*, originally published as *Red Mother*, (1932),ed. Frank B. Linderman and *Waheenee: An Indian Girl's Story Told by Herself*, (1921), ed. Gilbert L. Wilson; Truman Michelson, "The Autobiography of a Fox Indian Woman," (40th Annual Report of the *Bureau of American Ethnology* ---1918-1919), 295; Truman Michelson, "Narrative of an Arapaho Woman," *American Anthropologist* 35 (October-December 1933), 596.]

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