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FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry
UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, CONNECTICUT

We celebrate the new name of this publication. The American Philosophical Association has authorized changing the name from APA Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy to APA Studies in Native American and Indigenous Philosophy to emphasize that work printed in this venue—as in all the previous newsletters—is anonymously peer reviewed in the case of professional-level submissions, and reviewed for specific educational merit in the case of student contributions. As such, having your work published here should count positively in hiring, tenure, promotion, and admissions decisions.

We open the issue with a poem, “Made With Love,” by Spelman College student Valencia White. We have often opened with poems, invocations, or descriptions of artistic practice. Our decision to do so demonstrates a core principle of many Indigenous philosophies, namely, that reality is multifaceted and includes the poetic as its own force. Beauty and the ethical implications of Walking in Beauty are real. As such, a metaphysics that fails to recognize this, or an epistemology that fails to provide resources for understanding and working with this dimension of reality, are, from an Indigenous perspective, signs of a partial and therefore inadequate philosophy.

The poem is followed by a letter from Committee Chair Andrea Sullivan-Clarke (Muscogee) of Windsor University that thematizes a resilience that, along with the creative response to the poetic dimensions of our world, is a hallmark of Native American and Indigenous philosophical practice.

This issue has two sets of offerings that work together to demonstrate implications of the Native American/Indigenous intertwining of epistemological and ethical principles. The first, by Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, intervenes in conversations about epistemologies of ignorance from an Indigenous philosophical perspective. She explicates, then critiques suggestions found in some of that work that members of systemically oppressed communities consider capitalizing on the patterns of ignorance perpetuated against them as a form of political resistance. While these suggestions may be well-intentioned, they betray some fundamental misunderstandings of the cohesion of norms demanding epistemological and ethical responsibility in Indigenous philosophy.

The second set consists of a course assignment devised by Shay Welch of Spelman College for her undergraduate course in Native American philosophy. It is followed by three examples of undergraduate work in response to the assignment. Student authors are Naima Castañeda Isaac, Simone Madden, and Valencia White. In her course, Welch asks students to work with the principles of Native epistemology in ways that are congruent with its philosophical practice. In the process, she exemplifies how these principles both ground and integrate inquirers as full-bodied persons—relationally embedded in communities with specific locations, bearing both historical weight and creative possibility to which members are responsible and responsive. As Welch’s assignment demonstrates, a distinct strength of Native American philosophy is that it rejects the methodological sundering of our capacities as inquirers, knowers, and builders and instead demands an integrated response. Since so much of Western academic practice demands self-fragmentation and self-alienation, students met this assignment with some trepidation. They were stretched, but their work demonstrates the richness that marks philosophical inquiry, in its deepest and ultimately most abiding meaning, as the response to the call of Wisdom and the reckoning with that call in our lives.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in Studies in Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We invite comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional, and community concerns regarding Native American and Indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats. As noted, work is anonymously peered reviewed. For scholars needing further information about acceptance rates for their professional records, please contact the managing editor.

In all cases, references should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website. Please submit
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material electronically to Agnes Curry (acurry@usj.edu). For consideration for the spring 2023 issue, please submit your work by January 15, 2023.

POEM

Made With Love: Poem and Description

Valencia White

SPELMAN COLLEGE

MADE WITH LOVE
One thing I can say for certain: my grandma knows how to cook
And she didn’t learn it from a recipe book
There is no scientific method for her mac n cheese
And cornbread doesn’t come with a hypothesis
Her palate doesn’t need testing tubes
The formula for her baking consists of hard work and care

Her momma taught her how to cook with love
Told her that she didn’t need any measuring cups
And to season until her soul told her to stop
Her momma showed her how to make something out of nothing and to make it with passion
How to make food taste like it was blessed by the heavens above
How to cook for the whole family, and to do it with ease

But still, her food is always evolving
Her recipes are dynamic
Shaped by the ingredients around her
She takes what she’s learned and makes it uniquely hers

See my grandma knows how to cook
Because she cooks to make her family smile
To see us laugh around the dinner table
To see our eyes light up the minute she tells us food is ready
Cooking for my grandma is a selfless act
No matter what was going on, she always made sure we were fed

You know, I want to know how to cook
How to dance around the kitchen in a flawless choreography
Perfectly cooking thanksgiving dinner with finesse and ease
So I learn from my grandma as much as I can
I take in her tips and tricks
Hoping that one day, just like her, I will truly know how to cook

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My poem, “Made With Love,” analyzes the concept of Indigenous knowledge and how it relates to the Black experience in connection to cooking. This poem relates to the concept of Indigenous knowledge because I talk about how knowledge comes from ancestors and is passed down from generation to generation. I talk about this in regards to my grandma learning from her mother, and her teaching me how to cook. Additionally, one of the qualifications for something to be viewed as knowledge for Indigenous people is that cooking must be done with an ethical purpose. My grandma cooks with the purpose of bringing joy and feeding her family, which is ethical, and there is only positive intent behind her actions. Native knowledge is also shaped through experience and observation, which my grandma did with her mother and I do with her as described within the poem. My grandma ultimately knows how to cook because of the experience she has: she knows more than anyone else in my family. Another key factor is that this knowledge was attained in an ethical way and there was no harm in the creation of this knowledge. Lastly, my grandma's knowledge of cooking could be defined as knowledge in accordance with Indigenous qualifications of knowledge because it is not restrained in a way that Western knowledge requires for something to be knowledge. Western sciences and knowledge often require strict validations or procedures in order for it to be considered “real knowledge,” and once defined cannot be changed. My grandma's cooking is constantly evolving and her knowledge is not static: there is always more to be learned.

I am adding to the Native concept of knowledge because I am showing that Native philosophies are often ingrained within our lives and this fact goes unrecognized. When told how Indigenous knowledge is created, a lot of people would immediately disregard that as weird or untrue. The example of cooking proves that many people actually do have conceptions of Indigenous knowledge within their lives, but they just don’t recognize it. The idea of passing recipes and certain cooking techniques from generation to generation is something that many people have in their families. I think it is also interesting to note how the Native conception of knowledge is more normalized in terms of cooking, but it is not recognized in other fields, when cooking and baking are technically chemistry (in accordance with Western knowledge). Although recipes are often suggested, they are not required in order to make a good dish, and I would argue that recipes are just lab reports and use scientific methodology because of the steps, trials, and materials that must be described in order for something to be considered a legitimate recipe. Therefore, it is seen as okay in Western knowledge to use the Native conceptions of knowledge in regards to cooking because when one has the experience and has learned from their elders, they are viewed to be experts in whatever they are cooking.

Additionally, cooking is such an important part of Black culture, and the ability to pass down the capability to make soul food or cultural food is common in a lot of Black families. The idea of cooking with no recipe is a sentiment that many Black families share because the recipes have been cooked so many times that it is almost muscle memory. It is a trait that has managed to not become colonized and has stayed constant since before slavery. I think it’s important to recognize parallels between Indigenous cultures and Black culture because it shows the history that is behind some of the things that Black people just consider to be normal. It reflects the idea that knowledge is maintained
through experience, action, and observation, and that many fail to recognize that this is how knowledge was originally maintained and defined. There are a lot of conversations within the Black community regarding returning to one’s roots or being connected with one’s ancestors. I have shown that cooking is one of the ways you can do that because cooking is an example of knowledge that Black people have that actually comes from their ancestors, especially in regards to soul food. I believe that cooking is one way that Black people are really able to connect with their ancestors and don’t even notice it.

One of my favorite movies is *Smoke Signals* and one of my favorite lines comes from the radio DJ who tells his listeners, is that “It is a good day to be Indigenous.” Many times, I tell myself that, especially when the items on my to-do list are checked off or when I have had a meeting with my Indigenous colleagues. Something about being in their company recharges my batteries and keeps me going until I can return home to Oklahoma.

Many would think that after a couple years of a pandemic with a virus that keeps mutating and affecting our lives in significant ways, it might be strange to say that it is a good day to be Indigenous. True, we have not attended many APA meetings, or we may not have held many sessions, but we have adapted and are looking to grow as well as thrive. Yes, there are events in the world that negatively impact Indigenous people all over the globe—the slaughter of people so that corporations and countries may take the land, the militarized policing of those standing up for the environment, and the location of mass graves connected with the colonial policies of residential schools to name a few.

It is not easy to be an academic when so many events in the world demand your attention and energies. But being Indigenous means also to be resilient. It means to adapt, to stay true to oneself and maintain one’s relations. We may not have had the typical production in a normal year, but we have returned with ideas, plans, and visions of the goals that we want our committee to implement in the coming year. To that end, we have created an APA community that is open to all those seeking to be a part of our group; please join us! We invite those who have Indigenous research to please submit to our new APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy. We encourage our fellow committees, especially those representing historically marginalized groups within philosophy, to collaborate with us in developing panels, sessions, and projects.

As I embrace the final year of being chair, I think it is a good day to be Indigenous because, like our ancestors, we are still here, and we are moving forward. We have new members willing to take up the projects and provide fresh insights and experiences that will take us in a new and yet very familiar direction. It is exciting to begin my last year—it is also a good day to be Indigenous.

NOTES


ARTICLES

Strategic Ignorance: Is It Appropriate for Indigenous Resistance?

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

WINDSOR UNIVERSITY

In Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana reveal there is more to the phenomenon of ignorance than is generally assumed. According to Sullivan and Tuana, “ignorance is often thought of as a gap in knowledge, as an epistemic oversight that easily could be remedied.”

Described in this way, ignorance is not a desired state, and once we discover that we lack a critical piece of information, we immediately attempt to remedy the situation. In cases of racial oppression, however, ignorance can also play a more calculated, and thus more pernicious, role. In some instances, “a lack of knowledge or an unlearning . . . is actively produced for purposes of domination.”

Those holding power can use ignorance in ways to oppress others and preserve the status quo.

As a tool of oppression, ignorance can assume different forms. It might be the result of an intentional act to prevent a group’s access to knowledge acquisition, such as preventing girls from going to school so that they may not receive an education. In a similar vein, it may assume the form of removing Indigenous children from their home and forcing them to attend residential school. In this way the United States and Canada intended to deal with their “Indian problem” by forcing them to assimilate while preventing Indigenous children from learning their traditional knowledge.

Ignorance may also result from the intentional creation of “informational niches” that lead to a society’s “collective amnesia.” One example of the intentional creation of a state of ignorance can be found on the historical websites of state governments, like the one for the state of Indiana. According to the website, Indiana was the historic homeland of many Native American tribes including the Shawnee, Miami, Wea, Potawatomi, Delaware, Wyandot, Kickapoo, Piankashaw, Chickasaw and others. These tribes were removed from the state through a series of treaties in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

Although the information notes that the tribes were removed from the area, it reads as though the Indigenous inhabitants signed treaties and left of their own volition. It makes no mention that tribes, like the Potawatomi, were forcibly escorted by the US Army from their homelands and...
made to undertake what is referred to as the Trail of Death. The historical description also assumes the legitimacy of the treaty-making process, even though there were many underhanded dealings by Indian agents and government officials to gain access to Indigenous land for non-Indigenous settlement. Other examples of informational niches that aim to whitewash the racist history of the United States include statues honoring leaders of the confederacy and even Mount Rushmore, a monument to four former American presidents built into the sacred land of the Lakota. 7

Although the above examples of controlling knowledge access and social memory attest to the power of dominant groups in society, ignorance is not solely a tool of the oppressor. In fact, an interesting point made by Alison Bailey is that some instances of ignorance can be exploited by individuals from historically marginalized groups. For example, the white ignorance possessed by members of the dominant society can be used by oppressed people to conduct a form of resistance to their oppression. In this paper, I consider Bailey’s account of strategic ignorance (the exploitation of a dominant group’s ignorance about racial injustice) as a possible method of Indigenous resistance. My worry is that Bailey’s endorsement of strategic ignorance fails to consider Indigenous epistemologies that are connected to the land and emphasize such values as harmony, balance, and beauty. 8 As a result, I claim that strategic ignorance, generally speaking, is not a viable resistance measure for the Native American and First Nation communities of Turtle Island (North America). I conclude by addressing two possible objections to my critique: the use of trickster methodology in Indigenous narratives and the support of ethnographic refusal by Indigenous activists and researchers. Having addressed these objections, I conclude by suggesting that recent Indigenous resistance, which relies on being someone that one’s ancestors would recognize, also runs counter to Bailey’s view.

THE LOGIC OF IGNORANCE

Bailey’s strategic ignorance as a tool of resistance relies on Maríá Lugones’s account of two types of subjects and the logics associated with them: the pure subject (a unified identity) and the fragmented subject (one whose identity is reduced to a racially marked one). 9 Members of the dominant society (predominantly white and colonizing) rely on the logic of purity to understand identity. Per this logic, members of the dominant society have identities that assume the essence of “the abstract individual of classic liberal theory.” 10 That is to say, the “accidental” properties, such as race and sex, are separated from the identity, leaving behind the unified identity of a rational decision-making subject. 11 Bailey explains that given the logic of purity, “reason essentially defines human nature.” 12 However, members of marginalized groups (notably members of racial groups) are not understood to be unified subjects. Instead, each racial identity is fragmented; “there is no hybrid self,” which pales in comparison to the multiplicitous identity described below. 13 Individuals belonging to the dominant society, or those who have internalized the dominant assumptions about race, are unable to consider a racial individual as having a pure identity. Thus, anyone relying on the logic of purity cannot appreciate the multiplicity of a mixed-race individual, and thus attribute the stereotypes associated with that identity to the individual. 14

Bailey cites as an example of the logic of purity at work the use of blood quantum as an identity associated with being Native American. 15 The degree of Indigenous “blood” or racial lineage of an individual is one way the US government assigns a racial identity to Native Americans. In fact, most Americans do not know that members of federally recognized nations must carry a card, a Certificate Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB), which is issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the Department of the Interior and attests to the amount of Indian blood the individual possesses. This card must be provided when a Native American applies for programs as part of the federal government’s trust responsibility and treaty obligations. According to the logic of purity, individuals meeting the blood quantum requirements are deemed strictly Native American and not the rational decision-making subjects assumed in most theories of social contract theory. 16 According to the logic of purity, Native American identities are fragmented; they are “tainted” by their heritage. Incapable of escaping the stereotypes that are assigned (either implicitly or explicitly) to their race, Indigenous people are prevented from being conceived of as rational subjects by those in the dominant social group. Instead, they are assumed to be lazy, wild, primitive, or any number of other stereotypes used against Indigenous people.

Bailey notes that, for Lugones, there is another logic for understanding identity; it is referred to as curved logic, taking its name from an emulsion (a non-homogeneous solution whose parts do not separate). 17 Running counter to the logic of purity, this type of logic recognizes the accidental properties that comprise an individual’s social identity and enables the user to see individuals as “complex multiple subjects.” 18 Using curved logic, one has a more robust understanding of identity, and unlike the logic of purity, it does not attach stereotypes that lead to social hierarchies based on identity. Bailey notes that neither logic is more superior than the other; each is useful in its own way. 19 For example, there are times when it may be useful to think of every individual as a pure, unified subject when theorizing about decision-making, and at others, it may prove useful to appreciate the multiple knowledges associated with different identities, such as when an Indigenous person can bring their unique perspective to solving an environmental concern. For Bailey, it is better to rely on both logics—to “keep the logic of curdling superimposed” on the logic of purity. 20

Unfortunately, in terms of race, those in power rely almost exclusively on the logic of purity. As a result of its power, the logic of purity enables its users to “erase, dismiss, distort, and forget about the lives, cultures, and histories” of oppressed people. 21 Epistemically, members using the logic of purity fail to see how the world really is; they are actively ignorant. 22 Given that in most cases, ignorance is something to be avoided, one might assume that society would seek to actively challenge their assumptions about the world, or perhaps guard against being misled by their beliefs. That, however, is not the case. As Bailey describes,
the logic of purity is comfortable. It preserves the hierarchy of power on which a racial or colonial society depends.

To challenge the status quo, Bailey suggests that oppressed people use the logic of purity to their advantage—more specifically, they should exploit the "logic of purity . . . in resistant ways." This is a significant departure from what we normally think about ignorance. In most cases, the response is to directly engage those who are ignorant by informing them of their deficiency. For example, if someone is not familiar with the treatment of indigenous children in the residential schools, I would try to show them historical accounts and testimony from survivors. But when the individuals who hold the power are resistant to change, the challenge is made even more difficult. Exploiting the logic of purity enables those who are oppressed to resist their oppression while at the same time preserving their sense of self. An example might be to invoke a "calculated slow down" while doing work. Those in power would chalk up the slow down to laziness—while those working slowly have the satisfaction of getting over on the boss. Those who are oppressed are often depicted as victims, which prevents others (and sometimes even themselves) from thinking about their situation in a more sophisticated way. Bailey’s solution draws on Lugones’s theorizing of oppressed people as oppressed resisting subjects in order to reframe the lives of victims of oppression. No longer thought of as passive and unable to change their circumstances, oppressed resisting subjects can take control to actively change an oppressive society.

In order to actively resist, those who are oppressed must draw from their knowledge of multiple worldviews, specifically, those knowledges that they use to navigate the world. Indigenous people describe day-to-day living as walking in two worlds because they avail themselves of the epistemological resources contained in the traditional and the colonial worldviews. According to Bailey, oppressed individuals rely on multiple knowledges to navigate the master’s house under the gaze of the oppressor and are able to do so without being truly seen. One who is oppressed draws from these different knowledges while “walking through his neighborhood, attending his schools, or working on his assembly line.” While those who are oppressed suffer from not being truly seen, Bailey also notes that the oppressor can be a victim of the logic of purity as well. If the oppressor fails to accurately know their world, then it would seem that their attempts to preserve the status quo makes them vulnerable to individuals who can exploit that vulnerability.

Oppressed resisting subjects, according to Bailey, make use of the “dominant misconceptions [about race] as a basis for active creative responses to oppression.” They accomplish this by playing into the logic of purity and its attendant stereotypes and prejudices. For example, Bailey describes instances of strategic ignorance committed by Black domestics who “accidentally broke [their employer’s] china while dusting or pretended they could not read when confronted with their employer’s questions about civil rights literature.” By exploiting the ignorance of those in power, oppressed resisting subjects are able to conduct a “a kind of underground ‘guerilla’ battle.” Strategic ignorance is successful in these cases because it feeds into the biased expectations of the oppressor. For example, the actions of the Black domestics are seen by the oppressor as being consistent with the stereotypes associated with the identity; the person is clumsy or ignorant.

Exploiting what the oppressor does not know showcases the role for logic of curdling. Bailey points out that it shows “how oppressed resisting subjects, as agents can animate their ambiguity as a tool for resistance.” The notion of multiple identities, as highlighted by the logic of curdling, enables a more robust interpretation of the acts of resistance: “the maid’s actions are ‘clumsy’ on purpose” and the person feigning the inability to read is wisely dumb. While playing into the stereotypes of racial ignorance may feed into the prejudices of the oppressor, it can also divert the attention of the oppressor from methods of survival utilized by marginalized individuals and communities. Thus, Bailey points out that the logic of curdling offers “techniques for survival, or they can be consciously cultivated into art of resistance and transformation.”

In spite of its diversity, we must not ignore that deploying strategic ignorance can come at a great cost for the oppressed resisting subject. The oppressed resisting subject must always be aware of the dangers associated with the acts of their resistance. Walking in two worlds requires an expenditure of resources such as time and energy. It can be exhausting (mentally and physically) to know the two worlds and the ways of navigating through them successfully. Bailey admits that oppressed resisting subjects must also attend to the context in which their resistant actions are carried out. For example, they must know their “employer’s mood” for one thing, and be aware of indicators like body language and tone of voice. A broken dish may result in something more serious than an eye roll from one’s employer or a docking of one’s pay.

Bailey suggests that strategic ignorance could be used in ways that might “undo white ignorance.” White ignorance relies on the logic of purity to not truly see people of color as fully equal of consideration. However, white ignorance also prevents the oppressor from seeing their own identity. The logic of purity acts as a filter that prevents the oppressor from being mindful of the properties that comprise their actual identity. That is to say, in light of intersectionality and situated knowledge, every identity is “multiple.”

Under the influence of the logic of purity, however, the oppressor will fail to understand this. If such is the case, then perhaps exploiting strategic ignorance might induce a change in the oppressor’s perceptions.

Through strategic uses of ignorance, Bailey seeks to undermine the stereotypes and prejudices of dominant society. One example that she uses to make her case is that of Frederick Douglass. Douglass wanted to learn to write, and in order to learn the letters of the alphabet, he challenged white boys by stating that he could write letters better than them. Naturally, the boys would take up his challenge because they believed themselves to be superior. According to Bailey, Douglass exploited what the white boys did not know about “black character” and Douglass was able to learn how to write additional letters, a trick
that could only succeed if his opponent underestimated him. Bailey offers an interpretation of Douglass’s daring by proposing that “hopefully [he] challenged the white boys’ existing perceptions while also boosting his sense of self.”

If the acts of oppressed resisting subjects are to change society, then strategic ignorance must be able to affect the oppressor’s reliance on the logic of purity by “superimposing” the logic of curdling.

STRATEGIC IGNORANCE AND THE REIFICATION OF STEREOTYPES

Although the use of strategic ignorance is believed to empower those who are oppressed, I am not as confident as Bailey regarding the transformative outcomes of strategic ignorance. I worry that the dangers of playing into the stereotypes and prejudices of the dominant society have not been fully considered. It stands to reason that reinforcing what the oppressor believes they “see” through the logic of purity would only serve to reify those stereotypes and prejudices. While Bailey mentions this objection, she fails to engage it fully, opting to entertain the possibility of using the reification of stereotype as part of the living-two-lives rhetoric. Although the limits of this paper prevent me from satisfactorily addressing the reification of stereotypes, I disagree that playing into the use of stereotypes would significantly contribute to the ease of living in two worlds, and I do not think this is what Indigenous people intend when they speak of their experience. Given that there are some extremely harmful stereotypes associated with racial identities, there must be a very good reason to advocate for their use. For example, in the documentary A Good Day to Die, police assumed that the Indigenous protestors occupying the Department of the Interior were violent given the warrior stereotype; they misunderstood that when an Indigenous protestor said it was “a good day to die” they meant they were willing to give up their lives for the cause. The stereotype caused the police to misunderstand the motives of the protestors and to see them as a threat to their lives. I am not convinced that the use of stereotypes would promote the use of the logic of curdling among those in power; some may incite violence.

Consider a second example concerning Douglass. In 1854, he crafted an eloquent response to the architects of race science in his address, “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered.” Douglass argues,

The evils most fostered by slavery and oppression, are precisely those which slaveholders and oppressors would transfer from their system to the inherent character of their victims. . . . By making the enslaved a character fit only for slavery, they excuse themselves for refusing to make the slave a freeman. A wholesale method of accomplishing this result, is to overthrow the instinctive consciousness of the common brotherhood of man. For, let it be once granted that the human race is of multitudinous origin, naturally different in their moral, physical, and intellectual capacities, and at once you make plausible a demand for classes, grades and conditions, for different methods of culture, different moral, political, and religious institutions, and a chance is left for slavery, as a necessary institution.

In spite of his skillful use of reason and rhetoric, Douglass’s speech did not receive uptake in the community of race scientists. If reason and eloquence is unsuccessful at gaining uptake, then how might his views be more likely to reach an audience if he adopts a stereotypical identity consistent with the logic of purity? Would they learn more if he acted uneducated or less articulate?

In addition to the presentation, consider Douglass’s claims; if we assume the differences of different races (as is posited by the logic of purity), then we will not be in the position to argue against the oppressive treatment of those believed to be inferior. Other examples of the recalcitrant nature of the logic of purity can be found in white society’s need to revise the articulate speeches by people of color, such as Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” and Chief Seattle’s 1854 Speech. In each case, the language in which the speech was given was changed to reflect biases concerning people of color. In the case of Truth’s speech, it was given the stereotypical speech reminiscent of the Black characters in Gone with the Wind. Chief Seattle’s speech was changed to project a noble savage image and was taken for use by environmentalists. While these changes were made to make the speeches more palatable or consistent with societal expectations, I suggest that the changes also reduced the speeches’ impacts on society because it is easy to dismiss the voice of a caricature. Given society’s lack of reaction in the face of Douglass’s counterevidence and the intentional revisions of speech to be consistent with racist expectations, I fail to see how acting in accord with racist stereotypes would yield more than broken china or the confirmation of the inferiority of people of color in the minds of the oppressors when they are guided by the logic of purity.

In addition to the above worry, I hesitate to promote the use of strategic ignorance on behalf of the Indigenous people and communities of Turtle Island. The epistemology of ignorance, particularly the willful maintenance of ignorance, is located within a non-Indigenous worldview and fails to engage with an Indigenous epistemology. This omission prevents those advocating for the adoption of strategic ignorance from considering whether such methods are consistent with the values of the Indigenous worldview. As we shall see, strategic ignorance does not make sense for many Indigenous communities because its utilization violates the obligation to preserving the harmony and balance with one’s relations.

INDIGENOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES AND WAYS OF BEING IN THE WORLD

When I speak about Indigenous epistemologies, I do not intend for my explanation to be applied to every Indigenous group on Turtle Island. Rather, I am referring to those communities who have epistemologies that have shared some epistemic “principles.” For example, there is a shared principle of relatedness in several of the epistemologies of Turtle Island and it addresses how one
should act/be in the world. Indigenous individuals are born into a community that includes nonhuman relations, such as spirits, rocks, rivers, members of animal species, etc. To know that we are all related introduces obligations to those with whom we stand in relation. Indigenous people do not stand outside of the world, but they are participants in the "meaning-making of the world." As Burkhat describes, "How we [Indigenous people] behave, then, in a certain sense shapes meaning, gives shape to the world. In this way, what we do, how we act, is as important as any truth and any fact." There is a normative sense associated with living in the world. According to Viola Cordova, "the universe is a good thing—the goodness is inherent in the fact that the moving, living universe operates on the principles of balance and harmony." Given that what humans do, as an acting part of the universe, contributes to the creation of the world, individuals are obligated to act in those ways that "maintain balance" and harmony. If what I imagine has implications for the harmony and balance of the universe—if "I am responsible for adding to the world a new thing"—then I am doubtful of the exploitation of ignorance as a strategy that is consistent with the values of the Indigenous communities that affirm this unique way of being in the world.

In crafting my objection, I do not draw from Western moral theories; I do not claim that deception is always wrong or that an individual would be acting contrary to a greater good. Instead, I seek to call attention to the fact that the epistemologies of ignorance are grounded in a framework of Western epistemology, where the values seem quite different. For example, Burkhat notes that Western epistemologists believe that all questions should be asked and the more knowledge, the better. However, Indigenous individuals—who are raised on the stories and narratives that contain the metaphysics, epistemology, and values of their people braided together—stand in relations and thus, they incur obligations as a result of having those relations. The point is to fulfill obligations, so every question need not be asked.

Donald Fixico (Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, Seminole) describes the activity of being in the world, using the Navajo ethos. Fixico explains, "Within the circle of life, a continual effort for balance is the purpose for individuals and communities." What matters is the kinships (relationships) and so the knowledge that contributes to their development and continuance is the focus. If the end is to live and fulfill one’s obligations, then Indigenous people do not need to know everything, and therefore, it does not make sense to ask some questions. How to act is not learned from a moral theory, but it is a reasonable practice, working from the metaphysics and epistemology to infer how to live. Individuals are expected to act in specific ways that promote balance and harmony; yet, there is also an expectation within the community that each member will autonomously learn how to live. The questions that focus on how one should be in the world are the only questions worth asking.

Given the above, it makes sense to ask whether the exploitation of white ignorance by playing to a stereotype is consistent with Indigenous values. The question I must consider is whether by playing to a stereotype I contribute to the balance and harmony of relations—but it is not solely the relation with the individual who is ignorant that matters. I must also consider whether my actions interfere with the well-being of others in my network of relations. Assuming that adopting a stereotype may "educate" someone who is ignorant, that same stereotype may harm those for whom I set an example; it may harm our youth. Depending on the stereotype, it might also harm other members of the community as well. For example, if I adopt a stereotypical warrior behavior, who is to say this would not lead to the harm of those who are protesting a pipeline? If the public assumes that Indigenous protestors are dangerous, responding with military force becomes justifiable in the court of public opinion.

Using a Western worldview, particularly the epistemology, as the frame for the problem of epistemologies of ignorance omits the consideration of values external to the Western framework. While it is not surprising that those who advocate for adopting strategic ignorance would suggest that individuals exploit the ignorance of racists to inform and change society, part of me feels that such advice is not fully in the interest of Indigenous individuals. I question the motives behind proposing that Indigenous people adopt Bailey's strategic ignorance. Are those who claim to be the allies of Indigenous people and ask us to adopt strategic ignorance doing so from a place of good intention, or are they really asking Indigenous people to teach and enlighten them—to do the work that should be done by others or themselves?

Bailey suggests that she would "like to see the project of undoing white ignorance as part of a broader coalition of resistance that include strategic uses of ignorance by people of color." I must ask whether this is the type of relationship that she wishes to have with an Indigenous person or community. As someone who seems to be well-intentioned with respect to the oppression of people of color, and who also admits to having ignorance, does she want to learn in that manner? Surely, she would rather have a relation that is more authentic than the presentation of a stereotype even if that stereotype is employed for her benefit. Another worry about Bailey’s recommendation is that it seems to place the burden of changing society on those who are already working on resistance. Granted, strategic ignorance would be part of a larger program of resistance I am sure, but the workload of people who are combatting oppression, including colonialism, is quite heavy. Surely, we should not add more work for them to do. Not only does the request to use strategic ignorance as a part of resistance seem to place the burden on the shoulders of people of color, but it also comes across as a demand regarding how the task should be accomplished. This runs counter to the Indigenous respect for autonomy that I mentioned earlier.

Lastly, the call for people of color to adopt a particular practice neglects to appreciate their differences. This is analogous to Indigenous feminist challenges to white feminism. Indigenous feminists understand their first objective of resistance to be decolonization, which does not align with the agenda of white feminists. While people
of color experience racism in today's society, the concerns of Indigenous people differ because being Indigenous is not just a racial issue; as co-signers of the treaties, Native American and First Nations are sovereign nations with a special status. An Indigenous identity is not merely racial. It is political, spiritual, and cultural. While we may have experienced oppression as other groups have, our particular experiences vary in significant ways.

**TRICKSTERS, REFUSALS, AND IGNORANCE**

In this section, I consider two possible objections to my claim that strategic ignorance is not consistent with Indigenous values. The first objection calls attention to the presence of tricksters in the oral tradition of Indigenous communities. Stories are critical to how Indigenous people locate themselves in the world. They teach, guide, and contain those values that are important to the people, such as harmony, balance, respect, etc. Gerald Vizenor (Minnesota Chippewa) claims that "within any Indigenous story there is both a trickster and a tragic element at work."66 If stories contain the philosophical thought of Indigenous people and my claims rest on the values contained within those stories, then what sense might I make of the presence of tricksters, such as Coyote, Raven, or Iktomi? I propose that the presence of these elements in the stories are not there to encourage the listener to adopt a trickster relation with others. Instead, the presence of a trickster in Indigenous stories "serve[s] to show the irony of living in an uncertain world."67

Burkhart discusses this view in his book; he states that "Indigenous tricksters teach their relatives about the contours of locality and so help them put their feet back on the ground."68 Stories containing the actions of tricksters often reveal how not to act. For example, the story of Coyote in "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us" reveals that Coyote has lost touch with the world by wishing for the rain so that he may exact his revenge on a group of prairie dogs who were poking fun at him. Unfortunately, Coyote fails to realize that he is also affected by the rising waters.69 Burkhart explains that Coyote forgot his place and especially his connections/relations with all things.70 Stories about tricksters do not recommend that the listener mislead or fool others. Rather, their role is to instruct the listener in what not to do. The story about Coyote provided by Burkhart is instructive. It serves as a reminder to not forget how we are related to all things; it speaks about our place in the world.

Another example of the use of the trickster methodology can be found in Burkhart's book on Indigenizing philosophy. He claims that his use of a trickster methodology enables the reader to "see the conflict of locality and delocality" as regards to the Western worldview in philosophy.71 Burkhart further explains that "seeing myself as Iktomi in his stories and in attempts to find meaning in my own life opens up space for me to find meaning that [Iktomi] could not.

Tricksters do not necessarily provide explicit instructions for how to live. Rather, the listener infers how to live. Thus, tricksters often reveal our foibles as humans and help us to think about different perspectives. We can consider the less virtuous actions of the trickster without committing ourselves to their course.

Given the sophisticated grounding of the trickster methodology in Indigenous stories, I think that someone using it to support a call to adopt strategic ignorance has much more work to do. They must provide an account of exactly how the presence of tricksters in Indigenous storytelling provide support for their claims. In addition, they must also provide the details as to which people these stories apply. If it is the case that only a few communities do invoke trickster stories as a way of being in the world, then Bailey's argument will still not apply to those who do not use stories in that way. Without a full account, trickster stories do not provide a serious endorsement to support Bailey's method of strategic ignorance.

The second objection that I consider is the epistemic refusal to provide accurate testimony as briefly described by Angie Morrill (Klamath) in "Time Travelling Dogs (and Other Native Feminist Ways to Defy Dislocation)."72 Morrill states that "Every story is not for everybody."73 She draws on an example provided by Greg Sarris, who described the cautions made by his Pomo Great-Grandma Nettie and Old Auntie Eleanor.74 They warned the children in the family not to talk to those outside the community, and if they did talk to them, to exercise caution as to what they told them. Sarris notes that sometimes the children heard their great-grandma and aunt tell unfamiliar stories to "the professors" who came to visit.76 If the women told stories that were highly embellished or were ones created to satisfy the biases of the researchers, then that is the type of refusal I have in mind. Morrill notes that instead of confiding personal stories to outside researchers, "refusal is a choice and a strategy."77

To withhold information, to withhold stories, is not the same as using a stereotype to educate someone on what they neglect to see or appreciate about racial injustice. Unless it is the performance of a stereotype that is well known in the dominant community, the Indigenous person who refuses to relay their stories and their experiences is not participating in strategic ignorance. Morrill notes that the refusal is really one of self or community protection, "You may claim to know me; you may claim my story for yourself, use it as evidence, or produce it as a truth."78 There is a danger associated with sharing everything with another, especially a non-Indigenous researcher or a person of the dominant society.

As additional support, Morrill also cites Audra Simpson's (Kahnawake Mohawk) research on ethnographic refusal.79 According to Simpson, anthropologists have historically, if not currently, taken Indigenous voices and processed those viewpoints through "analytics that interpreted their aspirations in ways that were not their own."80 Simpson points out that anthropologists who are outsiders to the community may seek knowledge and assume that the community should share their knowledge with them, but often the answers provided by the community do not satisfy the anthropologists and so they either interpret or embellish their findings.81 As a result, communities quickly reach their "collective limit," or what Simpson suggests is code for "let's just not say."82 Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) notes that researchers have studied Indigenous communities on behalf of higher institutions and the
federal government with the focus of research being to solve the “Indian problem.”
Unfortunately, as Eve Tuck (Unangax) and K. Wayne Yang point out, the “promised
effects of participating in social science research have been slow to accumulate” and the stories “considered
most authentic in social science research are stories of pain and humiliation.”

These types of stories, according to Tuck and Yang, are the ones that get the funding, the ones to be published,
and the ones that seem the most “authentic.”

But when this type of research poses harm, directs the narrative of
Indigenous lives, and provides no assistance to those who have become objects of study, then it is reasonable for
community members to advocate for ethnographic refusal.

It is not applicable solely to the Indigenous communities
being studied, but Simpson suggests that it should also
apply to the Indigenous scientists who are now doing
research in their communities as well.

This objection does share a similarity with Bailey’s strategic
ignorance. There is a sense of protection of the self, a
preservation that Bailey believes is acquired by realizing
the multiplicity of your identity when enacting strategic
ignorance: you know better. However, like the objection
concerning trickster methodology, ethnographic refusal
does not explicitly propose adopting stereotypes to
challenge racial ignorance.

Neither the use of trickster methodology nor ethnographic refusal are stereotypical—
they are part of being Indigenous.

Ethnographic refusal is an example of communities and individuals restoring
the balance and harmony to a world that is adversely affected by colonial research.

This research distorts reality, asserting a power imbalance that perpetuates the
marginalization of Indigenous people. Refusal is a strategy of
Indigenous resistance, but it is not intended to instruct
those holding epistemic power, at least not according to
the Western understanding of instruction.

**RESISTANCE AND INDIGENOUS VALUES**

The Native American and First Nation people of Turtle
Island were believed to be primitive, savage, and, as
Carl Linnaeus described, “stubborn, easy to anger, and
difficult to civilize.”

As a result of these racist stereotypes (among others), those in the dominant society believed
the perceived inferiority of Indigenous people was real.

Colonial policies that were based on these stereotypes
included the forcible removal of Indigenous people from
their ancestral lands, the removal of Indigenous children
from their homes, the creation of residential schools to
assimilate Indigenous children, the termination of tribes as
well as legislative attempts to destroy aboriginal rights, and
the objectification of people (as objects of scientific study
and experimentation).

These are only a few of the historical policies and injustices against Indigenous people justified
by a logic of purity. While I have not mentioned the current
crimes that Indigenous people encounter today, I argue
that the historical policies and dangers they pose provide
ample reason for not playing into racial stereotypes.

Many of these policies were conducted by those who believed
themselves to be acting in the best interest of Indigenous
people and they took their support from the racial hierarchy
that resulted from the logic of purity. Breathing life into
dangerous stereotypes may usher in future colonial
policies, especially given the political atmosphere of both
the US and Canada.

That is not to say that I do not think other forms of Indigenous
resistance are possible. Rather, some recent forms of
Indigenous resistance happen to be more consistent
with the values of the Indigenous people on Turtle Island
than strategic ignorance.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) proposes a radical Indigenous
resistance that does not play into stereotypes.

Instead, this resistance is comprised of what makes the people
who they are. Simpson asks a simple question, the answer
of which indicates the framework for the resistance: “Do
my Ancestors recognize me as their own?”

The type of resistance endorsed by Simpson entails the reclamation,
and continuance, of the cultural practices and traditions
that gave rise to the survival of the people in the face of
the above historical colonial policies.

As Simpson explains,

when my indigeneity grows, I am more connected.
I fall more in love with my homeland, my family,
my culture, and my language and more, in line with
the thousands of stories that demonstrate how to
live a meaningful life, and I have more emotional
capital to fight and protect what is meaningful to me.
I am a bigger threat to the Canadian state and
its plans to build pipelines across my body,
cut my forests, contaminate my lakes with
toxic cottages and chemicals, and make my body
a site of continual sexualized violence.

A critical part of Simpson’s radical resistance is the
presence of the communal narratives that contain what is
truly important for living a life that must engage with the
colonial worldview on a regular basis. As Fixico notes,
one “of the various values that Indian people hold in high
esteem” is relationships.

Relationships help Indigenous people find their place as well as “understand the world and
universe.” As a result, Indigenous people gain experience
that contributes to their well-being by participating in
a community and, to use the title of Simpson’s book, doing
As We Have Always Done.

There is a part of strategic ignorance that I have yet to
consider and that is when we adopt a Socratic-like response
to an act of racial injustice like a microaggression.

For example, suppose that a non-Indigenous person has no
issue with using terms like redskin or squaw, and they
admit to someone that they do not see the offense.

An appropriate response might be to ask, “What do you mean
by that?” with the hope of having them come to realize the
error of using such terms. If an Indigenous person asks this
question, it seems as though they are feigning ignorance.

In fact, one might be pressed to say that they are adopting
a stereotype of ignorance. This appears on the surface to
be a case of using strategic ignorance to inform or teach
someone.

However, this seems to me to lack the specificity associated
with a stereotype—shouldn’t everyone question someone’s
use of pejorative terms? Is questioning only the prerogative
of those who are offended by the use of offensive terms?
It seems to me that I should speak up as an ally to correct someone when their choice of words may cause harm even if those particular terms do not apply to myself, and I would hope that others would correct someone using the above terms too.

Another way of looking at this example, however, is to also claim that asking, "What do you mean by that?" is an Indigenous response and not a stereotypical one. Even though I am appearing to adopt a façade of ignorance in asking the question, I am doing so respectfully. I recognize that you are an autonomous being and that we stand in relation with each other. I do not teach you in a way that is insulating or demeaning. Rather, I encourage you to arrive at the answer on your own. This seems to me to be consistent with the views on teaching provided by Lee Hester (Choctaw). According to Hester, respect is a value that impacts how we treat one another, especially when teaching. He points out that correction is part of education, but "Correction implies that one person knows what is correct and the other person does not; even worse, that one person acts correctly and the other does not." For Hester the worry is when we feel superior to those we are teaching and fail to treat them respectfully. I realize that this may not make sense in the Western worldview—but as I understand it, how I teach you matters. If I tell you how to act, what to say, and what to know—then I have disregarded your authority. I underestimate your ability to arrive at a socially just response. So, when pressed, I am going to respond that this is not a case of strategic ignorance because I am not adopting a stereotype when I question someone about why they hold a socially unjust belief. Instead, I am keeping with the value of respect.

If one considers the importance of relationships, one can see how the use of strategic ignorance is not suitable for an Indigenous way of being in the world. Fixico describes that "the negativity of life is chaos and disorder. Chaos is an Indigenous way of being in the world. Fixico describes why they hold a socially unjust belief. Instead, I am keeping to not adopting a stereotype when I question someone about authority. I underestimate your ability to arrive at a socially just answer, and fail to treat them respectfully. I realize that this may not make sense in the Western worldview—but as I understand it, how I teach you matters. If I tell you how to act, what to say, and what to know—then I have disregarded your authority. I underestimate your ability to arrive at a socially just response. So, when pressed, I am going to respond that this is not a case of strategic ignorance because I am not adopting a stereotype when I question someone about why they hold a socially unjust belief. Instead, I am keeping with the value of respect.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T

Mvto! (Thank you!) to the members of the UW Feminist Philosophy Reading Group (Dr. Tim Brown, Dr. Karen Emmerman, Dr. Sara Goering, Dr. Darcy McCusker, Dr. Michelle Pham, Dr. Sam Sumpter, Dr. Paul Tubig, Natalia Montes, Erika Versalovic, Erica Bigelow, Jer Steeger, Nic Jones, and Kayla Mehl), the 2022 Emmanuel College Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, and the anonymous reviewers of the APA Studies on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy for their comments regarding this manuscript. I am humbled by the generosity of all those who contributed to making this article better.

N O T E S


2. Sullivan and Tuana, Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance, 1.


4. Another way of looking at this example, however, is to consider the testimony of Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs. Scott stated: I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone. . . . Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill.


8. Before going further, I must note that I am not speaking for all Indigenous people or nations. Instead, I am proposing that for the Native American and First Nations communities/individuals whose share similar values (e.g., balance, harmony, and beauty) will not find Bailey’s call to adopt strategic ignorance compelling or appropriate.


10. Alison Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance," 83. See also Bailey’s discussion of Charles Mills’ racial contract and social contracts on pages 78-82.


16. It is not merely the dominant society which relies on the logic of purity. Members of marginalized groups may also buy into this logic, especially when internalizing the dominant society’s assumptions about race.

53. My use of the word "principles" is not intended to capture the Western meaning of the term. Rather, I use the word in the same manner as Brian Burkhart, who noted that "in calling these ideas principles, I do not mean to give them special philosophical status. In American Indian thought, they are simply ways of being." See Brian Burkhart, "What Coyote and Thales Can Teach Us: An Outline of American Indian Epistemology," American Indian Thought, ed. Anne Waters (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 16.


57. Cordova, "Ethics from an Artist's Point of View," 254.

58. Cordova, "Ethics from an Artist's Point of View," 254.


63. Cordova, "Ethics from an Artist's Point of View," 173.

64. Bailey, "Strategic Ignorance," 90.

65. I would like to thank Dr. Tim Brown for bringing up the issue of respectability and how that is associated with Brothet Rabbit stories and so this stresses the difference between social groups who have experienced colonization. I hesitate to use the term "authentic" when discussing Indigenous issues because it poses its own misunderstandings and expectations. Perhaps a better term might be "genuine" or "honest"?


71. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, xxiii.

72. Burkhart, Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land, xxiii.


76. Sarris, 82, quoted in Morrill, "Time Traveling Dogs," 3.

77. Morrill, "Time Traveling Dogs," 16. Admittedly, this response assumes different forms of refusal, but it is a strategy for not participating in the further oppression of Indigenous communities. Fixico also describes a similar scenario, recounting Russell Mean's grandmother's advice regarding how to respond to the questions of anthropologists. See Donald Fixico, The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge (Oxfordshire and New York: Routledge, 2003), 132–33.


82. Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal," 77.


85. Tuck and Yang, "Unbecoming Claims," 813.

86. Providing this type of explanation does not open up the opportunity to support strategic ignorance as a method for restoring balance and harmony. Recall that Indigenous ethics leaves decision-making to the individual and not to some universal principles. Admittedly, it may be the case that an individual could arrive at the method of strategic ignorance in an isolated case, but it would not be a method adopted by a large number and it would not be to coordinate with other people of color as Bailey suggests (90).


89. Betasamosake Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 179.

90. Betasamosake Simpson, As We Have Always Done, 182–83.


93. I must thank Dr. Sam Sumpter for this interesting issue. I am not sure I have dedicated enough discussion to do it justice and look forward to working on it further in the future.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION: NATIVE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY, SPRING 2022

Shay Welch

SPELMAN COLLEGE

FEATURED STUDENTS:

Simone Madden

Valencia White

Naima Castaneda Isaac

In spring 2022, I changed up the assignment format for the final project for my Native American Philosophy course. Typically, I have three performances for the students to present original philosophical arguments in a style that is more akin to Native American modes of knowing and knowledge sharing. At the end of the semester, I have the students write a larger research paper so that they have an opportunity to deliver an assignment that is in accordance with their Western philosophical training. This semester, in addition to the performances, I had the students create performative art projects that carried their own original
contribution to Native American studies. One of the unconventional interjections that I added to this project was that the students incorporated the Innovation Lab to construct their art projects. Our Innovation Lab is a creative space where students use an array of high-tech instruments to develop original creations. The Innovation Lab is often used for computer science and other related STEM courses. But students of all fields are slowly being required to have some knowledge about tech ventures, and our college is regularly promoting the Innovation Lab as an important space for students to develop new skills. I decided that it would be interesting to combine the humanities, art, and technology so that the students were able to gain a wider range of creative knowledges in a space that is shared by students and operates on a community learning structure. The Innovation Lab is for students and the students are required to learn how to use these technologies largely on their own with help from each other and a few student assistants.

Students are always nervous about having to do performances for their philosophy assignments. This anxiety became amplified when I required the use of the Innovation Lab. But I regularly tell them that this is not an art class; the projects are not held to the standards of an art class. The purpose of their doing art and performance for doing Native philosophy is to help them learn how to engage in non-Western knowledge practices, which are creative and offered with community and harmonious intentions for learning as a journey.

These student projects reveal how philosophers can be creative and the manifold ways in which they can picture their own philosophical ideas being represented through performance. I believe the students did an amazing job and provide an exemplary model for how to engage in Native epistemological practices both analytically and creatively.

We read four books for this class: *Indian from the Inside* by Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb; *The Dance of Person and Place* by Thomas Norton-Smith; *American Indian Thought*, edited by Anne Waters; and *Native Science* by Gregory Cajete. Students used three of the books for their general knowledge of the Native American philosophical worldview, but they all seemed to favor Cajete’s book for their guiding resource on doing Native performance and art as knowing.

**Student project description on the syllabus:**

*Final performance using Innovation Lab: 30%*

Get wild.

The students were also required to do a five-page write-up about their projects to help them explain their pieces. They were required to give the background philosophy that they were using for their art, why they chose their art piece, what their process was in creating the art and how they incorporated the Native philosophy, and what original philosophical idea their art contributed to the Native philosophy discussion.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**Project Description**

**Simone Madden**

**SPELMAN COLLEGE**

**INTENTION**

For our final showcase, we were tasked with coming up with a creative project. While this is extremely out of my comfort zone, I know now that I would not be able to learn about Native American philosophy without the creative aspect. Throughout this semester, we have never veered away from the subject of art and how it plays a significant part in Native culture. Although there are many types of traditional Native art, I decided to focus on fashion. For my project, I was intentional about finding Native American fashion designers. I was inspired by a lot of the work I came across, and also surprised at the amount of amazing artists who aren’t recognized publicly.

**PROCESS**

**Background:** The first part of my project consisted of research. I was not aware that there are Native American fashion designers who are just as prominent as some of the mainstream designers I’m used to (Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Vera Wang, etc.). While I found a lot of collections that I liked, a lot of them were clichéd and included a lot of feathers and turquoise. While at first glance I didn’t really see a problem with this, the further along we got into our readings, the more aware I became of its problematic aspects. In Western society, minority cultures are often diminished to the clichés or “norms” within the culture, as if those are the only things their culture is good for producing. Although there is no specific obligation, black and brown people should aspire to showcase things within their culture that don’t fit the status quo for the further advancement and acknowledgment of their communities. I finally came across a Shoshone-Bannock beadwork artist by the name of Jamie Okuma. She creates beaded shoes, and her work has been published in many high-fashion blogs. Jamie has also been commissioned to create pieces for many museums around the world. Because of this, I decided to create my own beaded pair of boots. I’m very imaginative, so I created my own prompt: Pretend that Jamie Okuma asked you to create a pair of beaded boots to feature in her runway show.

*Inspiration from class readings: After continuous research and class discussions, one point in our reading stuck out to me in. To have a culture explain how they understand
the world would never make sense in a Western-dominated society because we (as a culture) determine what is factual to us. This setlist of “truths” prevents us from effectively perceiving anything outside of those boundaries. A good philosopher should be able to recognize when there is wisdom within cultures they can’t comprehend easily. Great philosophers will be able to display wisdom that will be perceived universally. Both Hester and Turner agree that Native American philosophy must be done in a way that is recognizable to the dominant culture. Being able to educate or showcase your culture all while staying within the realms of what the dominant culture is actually willing to participate in is a hard balance to manage. While Hester and Turner are referring to the way philosophy is done through knowledge/legal frameworks, basically stating that Native American scholars should not have the end goal of getting Westerners to understand their knowledge, but putting more emphasis on protecting it and passing it down to willing learners so that the culture doesn’t die, I think this same belief can be transferred over to the fashion world because it is impossible to get everyone to see the value of your work and understand your vision when your upbringings are completely different. While the biggest names in fashion are immigrants, their work is very popular in the US. I think the reason many Indigenous artists aren’t able to reach the same level is because the appeal isn’t there. Indigenous persons alone are already labeled as extinct by many Westerners. When the cliché turquoise and feathers combo is prevalent in Native designs, they’ll be labeled as archaic and not taken seriously. I think Jamie does an excellent job of creating elaborate Indigenous-inspired pieces, while also keeping up with the Western vibe. Her pieces have been recognized by high-fashion companies because of her ability to balance this (for example, beading over a pair of Louis Vuittons).

Half of my boot was inspired by chaos theory. The sensitivity of the structure of the world is impacted by everyone and everything within it. One action can have significant reactions. I can best make sense of chaos theory when thinking about space. While we know a lot about space, there is still so much that is undiscovered. The design for the boot on the astronomy side has beads scattered very chaotically. When things disturb the balance of a set structure things explode and take on new forms. This happens over and over again. I also took into account the chapter on Native astronomy in Cajete’s Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence. Much like everything else, it is Native belief that celestial beings are active participants in the world, which affects everyone and everything connected. Everything is interconnected and the events that take place in the sky affect everything that happens on Earth.

Navajo creation stories vividly describe how the creators (man, woman, coyote) formed the world and heavens in an intentional way, meant to sustain the life birthed within it. The moon and the sun are often referred to in pairs. The sun provides information used to form time, and also points out cardinal direction. The moon complements this by allowing the sun to set, which in turn forms our knowledge of days, months, and years. It is Indigenous belief that the sky is home to heavenly bodies, which are considered relatives. Indigenous peoples use their knowledge of the sky to influence their views of ethical behavior and other cultural standards of being. Even though we read this chapter near the end of the semester, I thought it was important to represent the celestial beings that are critical to Native American societies’ knowledge of community (evolving creation stories), architectural structures, and world order through my beadwork.

The beading: To keep up with the many ethical beliefs in Native culture, I tried to limit my waste as much as possible in this project. How the materials were obtained are just as important as where they came from. Although I had to order the beads off of Amazon, I did obtain the boots and the fabrics I used from Goodwill. This was so that I could limit my carbon footprint within this project as much as possible. I also did research to decide what designs I wanted to include on the boots. Oftentimes there are certain patterns or symbols that have specific meanings in Native culture. The specific designs I incorporated were flowers, beaver, space and celestial beings, and different fabric designs. I looked at many videos and tried different methods of beading to find out what method would work best for me. Some of the methods consisted of sewing the beads directly onto the boot, but it was hard to reach the point of the shoe from the inside. I also tried sewing my designs onto a piece of fabric and then transferring to the shoe with needle, thread, and glue. Ultimately, I decided to glue the beads on because of their small size. It was hard to thread the needle every time I needed to sew on a new color.

Struggle points: Within this project, I had to jump over a lot of hurdles. I had no idea what I was signing myself up for when I decided what to do for my project. My original plan also consisted of laser printing a pair of beaver earrings. After I figured out the laser cutter would not be up and running for the duration of my project, I wanted to include beaver in the boots. Beading takes incredibly long and it’s not as easy as the YouTube tutorials make it seem. After I figured this out, I decided to cut my project down to beading one boot instead of a pair. Not only did this take a tremendous amount of weight off of my shoulders, but it aligned with the ideas of ceremonial art we read in previous chapters. Creating art is time consuming and you have to put everything into it to create the finished project. I realized the project couldn’t be its best if I had to bead a pair of boots. Beading overall is very hard. I had to think quickly on my feet, and I decided to glue the beads on. While this was still very time consuming, I wasn’t pricking...
and poking myself constantly. I also got bored with just using beads later on in the project, so I thought it would be cool to switch some things around and use different fabrics as well. For this half of the boot, the main struggle was coming up with new designs to add. I had to go back to the drawing board to figure out what colors or symbols that would add value to my project.

Original Contribution: While my original thought was to recreate one of Okuma’s designs that I had come across during my research, I later decided that wasn’t “original” at all and goes against much of what we have learned this semester. Art is taken very seriously within Native American culture and often has significant meaning. What’s significant to Okuma comes from her background, and we do not have the same story. To make sure the boots fit my story, I was intentional about picking certain designs that were significant not only to me, but also things that we have talked about during class that my classmates can relate to. This brings up the idea of interconnectivity. Ceremonies and other traditions are used to strengthen the connection of our relationships with each other, nature, and the rest of the world. Taking part in various ceremonies is a way to categorize and create new pieces of knowledge. I think it was significant that I included my classmates in my thought process while creating this project because our showcases have certain ceremonial attributes. Making sure that I included specific designs makes them feel included. In our readings, they often say that transformations don’t happen until you are in the act of performing with that specific symbol. I think this is true for our showcase as well. Performances with symbols also makes it easier to understand the knowledge presented to us. It adds value, almost like putting a name to a face.

One of my main focuses was to incorporate a beaver into my project in some way, shape, or form. I feel like beaver has been essential to our understanding of many big concepts that were out of reach when we started the class. Not only is beaver an example of personhood, a Native concept that requires continuous awareness, but they are also specific to our class. Much like sacred knowledge within the Native community, no one would be able to understand the meaning beaver has to our class. Another main focus goes back to celestial phenomena. In Native culture, creating art is a lengthy process. They breathe life into art the same way they talk about the land. This can be done through prayer, song, and dance. While I didn’t sing or dance, I did take a lot of time to think about what family members to include as stars in my project. They are represented by different color beads. While the sky acts as a compass, I picked certain people that I felt paved the way for me to include in this project.

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Final Project Description

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For my Native philosophy final project, I created a woven basket inspired by the Ohlone tribe in Northern California because that is where I’m from and I wanted to honor the people who inhabited the land before me. I was inspired by the importance of learning from and respecting one’s ancestors which are valued within Native beliefs. Although I am not directly related to the Ohlone tribe, I wanted to learn more about the people who originally cultivated and thrived off the land. Originally, I wanted to create a piece of clothing or jewelry. However, through conducting research on the Ohlone tribe I learned that they are very well known for their woven baskets, which made me change what I wanted to make in collaboration with the Innovation Lab. I discovered that for the Ohlone people, baskets can hold many meanings, but I drew my inspiration from the fact that the baskets they make can represent their lifestyle in connection to nature and their relationship to the spirit world because this is something that I learned about extensively in class. I chose this topic because humans’ relationship with nature and recognizing how important it is to respect the natural world because of the impact that our actions and choices have is one of the things that really stuck with me throughout this course.

After deciding this, I began exploring my options on how I was going to create this basket. I first thought I was going to 3D print the basket but ultimately ruled out this option as it would take too long. After examining the materials available to me at the Innovation Lab, I decided to use vinyl to weave a basket. I chose this option because there was a lot of vinyl for me to use with a different range of colors and textures which is an aspect the other option didn’t have. It is also a very malleable material, and I thought it would be easy for me to weave a basket out of it. Initially, I was slightly intimidated at the thought of making a basket and genuinely had no clue where to start. But everyone at the Innovation Lab was supportive and gave me good advice throughout this process. Throughout the process of creating this basket I was also able to push myself because I was really unsure of what the final product would look like and I do not consider myself to be a really artistic person. I
had to believe in my own creativity and be fully committed. Additionally, the more time that I put into creating this basket, the more passionate I became about the process. I really got into weaving the basket. The process of deciding how I wanted to weave the vinyl took a couple of tries, and I had to create a smaller basket as an experiment for how I wanted the final one to turn out because I wanted to test out my technique before I started on the final product. The process of creating the final product took me about two weeks as I would spend about six to eight hours every week in the Innovation Lab cutting out pieces of vinyl, weaving them, and planning out what colors I wanted to incorporate next. I had to be very intentional to make sure that I had enough space to incorporate all the colors I wanted to because I had a limited amount of space on the basket to execute my intended design.

I decided to create a design that represented the interconnectedness of the soil, plants, and sky. Each one of these aspects is represented through different colors within the basket. I started with different shades of brown (representing the soil), transitioned to green (representing plants), and then transitioned to blue (representing the sky) at the top. I chose to incorporate the colors in an ombre pattern to represent the relationship that all these aspects hold with one another and to show that they all rely on each other in order to thrive. I also wove in silver and gold vinyl to represent the spirituality that is within all these elements and to represent them as other than human beings.

Throughout my creative process, I tried to honor the twelve steps of artistic creation when making the basket. I drew from the first step of preparation by making sure I did extensive research. I also reflected on the concept of time by making sure I completed it in a timely manner and provided myself with enough time to give my full effort. I believe that I also exemplified the concept of “intrinsic well-practiced belief” within my project because I was able to express the Native beliefs accurately and truthfully with my basket. I also put an appropriate amount of will into my project because I was able to fully understand the repercussions of what I was agreeing to create and the purpose of what I was going to make. I planned out fully what I wanted to create and was devoted to successfully completing it. Additionally, I used the step of packing a symbol because my art has a metaphorical meaning to it. By completing it I honored the step of completion, and I will eventually use the step of giving away because my basket will be a tribute to this Native philosophy class. Lastly, the step of aesthetics and appreciation of intrinsic meaning is shown within my basket because the aesthetics and value of the basket are related directly to what it means.

The basket I made is a way for me to respect and appreciate the earth because it is a tribute to nature and represents how natural elements are beings as they play an important role in ensuring the well-being of humans. Plants specifically exemplify the Native belief of life-seeking life because as plants live their lives, they simultaneously support all life. It is important to maintain a balance and harmony with relationships with nature because life is dependent on mutual reciprocity and giving back what has been taken from nature. I exemplified the concept of reciprocity but specifically within nature, by transitioning between the different aspects of nature and having them flow together. I wanted this basket to show the importance of nature within Native beliefs as these beliefs are often rooted within the focus of participating with nature and doing so in a respectful, ethical manner. This basket also represents the Native relationship with the earth for knowledge. All three aspects I chose have a direct relationship with each other and thrive off each other, so I think that it is a good representation of how the Native belief of interconnectedness works. My basket also shows how connecting with the land is important because the Ohlone people have lived there for so long that it becomes a part of their soul and spirit, and this is represented through the gold and silver running up the sides of the basket. I also wanted to reflect on how these natural elements relate to a Native conception of persons as it includes non-human spirits and other than human beings through the incorporation of gold and silver. Because art is used to pass on knowledge, I wanted to show this in my basket by conveying Native beliefs.

My original contribution to Native philosophy is demonstrated through the materials I used because Native art, and specifically baskets, are normally made with natural materials and plants. I incorporated modern materials in my design as a way to demonstrate how Native concepts and beliefs can be used in a way that is still respectful and meaningful. I believe that I accurately portrayed Native beliefs around interconnectedness, nature, and spirituality through my project and I was able to contribute to native philosophy by using vinyl as my artistic medium because it is a different expression of native beliefs, but the act of creation still followed Native elements. I was able to adapt the traditional Native concept and origin with the tools that were available to me. Since my creative process did use some of the twelve steps...
of artistic creation but in a more unconventional way, I showed how Native beliefs can be adaptable to different environments. I think that a lot of people are scared to be offensive by using Native beliefs or techniques within their art or even life in general and don’t want to be disrespectful to Native culture, but this project is an example of how one can use Native concepts to learn and spread knowledge if it is respectful and ethical. I think that the importance of ethics and knowledge is something that I was able to fully grasp while making this basket because I was utilizing Native knowledge to create my project and I was able to complete it in a way that followed these Native values. Although the concept of respect and ethics when attaining knowledge is often applied to nature and how people treat it, I think that it is applicable in this case as well because I was able to gain knowledge about how to learn in a respectful way and not overstep any boundaries while simultaneously trying to spread knowledge about Native philosophy. I think that this project contributes to Native philosophy and beliefs because it transforms what I have learned with unconventional materials as well as demonstrates how to apply knowledge ethically and respectfully in correspondence with Native beliefs.

Overall, I believe that this process was able to bring me a lot closer to understanding the process of creating and gaining knowledge in accordance with Native ideals, particularly as expressed within art. Previously, I have always viewed art as a form of expression, not necessarily to convey and gain knowledge. The concept of learning through experience was really solidified for me throughout this process; the more that I engaged with the project the more I was able to understand this, because I would adapt my technique as I went as I discovered the most effective way to weave. Additionally, I was able to learn firsthand some of the processes that are involved when creating Native art because I wanted to create a piece of art that took inspiration from Native beliefs and baskets. I believe that I was able to effectively create a piece of art that reflects the history of where I’m from, incorporate Native philosophies, and contribute original ideas to Native philosophy.

**A Virtual Reality Vision Quest**

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I just want to preface this and say that this semester overall has been a transformative journey for me, so I felt like it was right to do a vision quest. Me making this world is a ceremony of art where I find and use my creative spirit. The virtual world begins with a ceremony done with an elder who is a healer, a storyteller, an artist, and a giver and seeker of knowledge. The sweat lodge is also a sacred place because of the ceremonies and wind of the speech that the participants speak that grounds them in that place and makes it sacred. I look for symbols and metaphors along the way; most are plants, stars, and animals. Each door holds a world that looks different because one is on a journey and is bound to see different nature and things in their life. Also, the changing of the environments symbolizes

the chaotic nature of the universe; the sojourner (whoever has the Virtual Reality (VR) goggles on) is living in that chaos and finding the “little” things that connect to each other and that help them make sense of the world around them and of themselves. Because of circularity as a world-ordering principle, time is cyclical, and so the sojourner returns full circle to the sweat lodge to the elder and tells them what they learned. The person that existed before the vision quest is still the person who exists after their transformation because each impacts each other and one’s future depends on their past. Animals, plants, the stars, the moon, and the sun have souls and knowledge that the VR vision questor learns from and that guide and protect them in their journey, and through this journey, the VR vision questor learns to respect them always.

The process of my inherent ceremony of art is more important than the actual product. Here I will talk about the process I did, including the twelve steps of a journey to art creation that Gregory Cajete outlines in *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. First is “preparedness” to immerse oneself in the process. We had talked about our performances in class and I thought about it for a while so that I was prepared with an actual outline. I also had to learn how to build in Horizon Worlds, so I watched videos and made draft worlds so that I was fully prepared. With the sources step, the Oculus goggles were attained from the Innovation Lab at Spelman. I “adhered to the cultural patterns in Native American science” to build my world using the concepts of chaos, relatedness, circularity, symbols, sacredness, ethical participation, and gifting. With regards to timing, my intuition told me when to start building and when to stop. I didn’t really have set times—I just really had to be in the mood to build because it was hard. My room was the best place to build because I had my notes, my water, and my books to help me. “Letting go and becoming” was also necessary for my process because I had to be extremely creative since I was literally building everything from shapes (spheres, cubes, cylinders, pyramids). I had to really let go and just let the creativity flow. “Appropriate will” was used in my process because I had a specific intention (to make a vision quest for class but also to think through a transformative time in my life) that gave a good context to my preparedness and work. In my world, I packed “symbols” to try to convey meaning. Some of the symbols of the animals I used were based on the specific meaning that Native peoples have for animals, like the fox as a trickster. I also used the symbol of the butterfly and packed it with the meaning of transformation but with specificity to the transformation caused by a journey. I also included Bad Bunny’s song “Antes que se acabe,” which is another kind of symbol in my life that I guide my life...
on. He says that there will always be good and bad days, and that to smile, you sometimes have to cry. With my vigil, I had to be very patient and intentional with every little thing and this was necessary because I was making the world from scratch. I made the sad worlds dark and foggy and was even intentional with making the trees in each world different to make the journey subtly chaotic. I had to research specific ways that animals and plants interact with each other, like bees, trees, and spiders. So I was very intentional with every detail in the world. The completion of my project involves it being ready to use, so I had to finalize everything to make sure that I could cast it to my computer screen so that it had the potential to make everyone see and experience it. In “giveaway,” my project will enter into communities where it will be recognized and symbolized both in class and in Horizon Worlds (because other people can visit my world). My art might be used many times, but it will be most significant if the people experiencing it know the purpose and context of my project. As for “Aesthetics and appreciation of intrinsic meaning,” I hope that my project and creation will be used and honored for the purpose that was intended so that many people over my lifetime or generations will be able to learn from my project.

In making this project, I learned that everything I do has an impact and is important, and I feel like I related that to other classes as well. I used constructive realism to construct a world logically and ontologically. The world I created is constantly being empirically verified by the questor and also other people that visit the world. It is nonempty because it is grounded in sense perception. It has utility because it was used for me to gain knowledge and also has significance for the rest of the people who come into contact with it. It makes sense under a Native American framework because every aspect of it is guided by principles that I learned about, and so it is within a cultural frame of reference. My world is creative, unfixed, and a work in progress because I can always edit it and everyone who comes in contact with it will take a different meaning from it. The world I created is alive and is a part of me and a part of any other person who embarks on the journey that I made. My world version is similar to that of an actual vision quest but definitely has its own twist that relates more to me. For these reasons, my world is a well-made world.

I myself am being transformed by my project because imagining what a vision quest and a journey would be like for me and my life made me think about the things I would write in my journal before, during, and after the mental hospital. In a way, my being in the hospital was transformative because I was taken away from the normal routines, responsibilities, and constructs of the world and was left to think about my thoughts, myself, and the world, similar to a vision quest. So, through that transformation, I came out with knowledge that has impacted me, and I realize that I will always be on a journey in search of knowledge and meaning for myself and for the world. During the times while in the hospital that we were allowed to go outside, I felt like the sun was a part of me because it felt so good and would literally change my mood, and so that changed my choices. I ritualized bead-making because beading outside in the sun made me the happiest I had ever been; so it really made me think about how connected I am to nature and how the ceremonies and rituals I perform ground me in different places. The vision quest in the VR world tries to reflect that in the sense that the questor is connecting to the people around them and letting their knowledge heal them; they are really seeing the ways in which they are connected to others and how each impacts and participates with each other. I take knowledge of my experience from the hospital and from creating a vision quest to make me be more appreciative of the “little” things which really aren’t that little: in a Western mindset, we ignore those things, but tuning into those small things and nuances really makes all the difference. I learned that everything matters because everything that I do has an impact and I have to respectfully participate in the world with everybody. Not hating yourself and finding things that make you happy is super important. If you don’t have that, you might not respect other people and you won’t feel connected to them or like you matter or that your choices matter. And I think that Native American philosophy helps a person with their self-image in that every person is important because they can impact the world in their participation and everyone has knowledge and a sacredness. Like in the books we read, they talked about how plants, animals, the cosmos, and places were sacred but in saying that, it’s also like saying that you are important and sacred and your acknowledging and accepting that actually contributes to the harmony and balance in the world.

The symbol I bring back in the Virtual Reality vision quest of the butterfly is something that symbolizes my transformation. It’s
a gift that I give to the elder because they gave me the gift of knowledge through the ceremony of the vision quest to me, so I reciprocate with a gift. Butterflies in my life also have meaning and I feel like are my symbol. This project is an original contribution to the world because I don't think that there's anything like it in the VR world. Also, I feel that my original contribution is that with mental health, the idea of a vision quest generally (because I did not actually go on a real vision quest but kind of made my own) can greatly improve someone's life. I think that the sacredness of self is also critical in one's own life and in their contributions to the rest of the world.

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