Critical Issues in Indigenous Studies

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CRITICAL INDIGENOUS STUDIES

Engagements in First World Locations

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A BETTER WORLD BECOMING

Placing Critical Indigenous Studies

DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE

Raven shaped us; we are built for transformation. Our stories prepare us for it. Find freedom in the context you inherit—every context is different; discover the consequences and change from within, that is the challenge.

—LEE MARACLE (STÓ:LŌ), "GOODBYE, SNAUQ"

STORIES ARE MY STOCK IN TRADE.[1] They are what I study; they are what I produce; they are what I teach. Stories are now and have always been my motivating fascination—how they come together to create other worlds of possibility, what work they do in transforming our relationships to the world and to one another, how stories shape and are shaped by the people who tell them and the realities they inhabit. Increasingly—as a writer, a scholar, and now, as an administrator—I am interested in how the stories we tell reflect or create the basic foundations of knowledge and understanding. How can our stories about place and relationship be mobilized for the resurgence of Indigenous nations and, better, for more just relations between individuals and peoples alike? There is no single answer to such a multifaceted question, but some possibilities are no doubt more promising than others.

I am interested here in the stories of our discipline—Indigenous studies broadly, realized locally as First Nations, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, and American Indian Studies, among more nation-specific articulations—and how

our understandings of place might offer us an opportunity to reorient our relationships to one another in local, regional, transnational, and global contexts and in ways that affirm our distinctive experiences and shared human dignity. Jodi Byrd (2011, 229) provides a useful articulation of such an approach: "Indigenous scholars engaged in indigenous critical theories that draw from the intellectual traditions of their own histories and communities to contravene in, respond to, and redirect European philosophies can offer crucial new ways of conceptualizing an after to empire that does not reside within the obliteration of indigenous lives, resources, and lands." In Jace Weaver's (2010, 8) assessment of the state of Native American studies, he reminds us that this work requires critical engagement on multiple levels, including holding ourselves and our communities to the highest standards of integrity:

> Commitment to Native community does not mean wallowing in victimry and guilt. Nor does it mean presenting the most "Indian" side of everything, in the face of contrary evidence. And it certainly does not mean surrendering our research conclusions to tribal councils. It means service to Native peoples. But it also means being committed to truth, accuracy, and academic freedom. Without these, all the words in the world are worthless to us as scholars and ultimately to those for whom we purport to advocate.

In both cases, the scholar in the field has multiple responsibilities, and these work with an idea of better possibilities, better ideas, better relationships. This is how I understand the "critical" in critical Indigenous studies: an interventionist analytic of transformation committed to and dependent on local specificity within a broader network of relationships, a responsible but not unreflective obligation to community, a fierce commitment to truth, a robust insistence on multiplicity and complexity, and just action toward our human and other-than-human kin.[2] How this is realized will certainly depend on the particular lands, peoples, and histories in relationship; as a result, there will be localized distinctions that are, hopefully, still very much in conversation with broader and more expansive critical conversations.

It is that complicated interplay among place, relationship, and understanding that I want to address in this chapter. These thoughts are inevitably more exploratory than definitive, more invitational than insistent, but I hope they open up some possibilities for meaningful consideration for what it might mean to be doing critical Indigenous studies at this particular time, in our various

places, and to help us find what Lee Maracle identifies in the epigraph as "freedom in the context [we] inherit."

THE QUESTION OF PLACE

In his book *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, Chadwick Allen (2012, xiii) inserts a cautionary note into discussions about comparative Indigenous studies:

> Many Indigenous intellectuals, inside and outside the dominant academy, are understandably wary of global comparative frameworks for Indigenous studies—literary, cultural, or otherwise—when there is so much work still to be done within specific, distinct traditions and communities. . . . The local, having finally won a place at the academic table, becomes engulfed (once again) in the name of the global. Perhaps more so than their non-Native colleagues, some Indigenous intellectuals wonder how a single scholar or even a small group of scholars can possibly know enough to bring together multiple Indigenous literatures emanating from multiple distinct cultures and histories on a truly equal basis. If together equal is the primary goal, they ask, what kind and what quality of scholarship can be produced? Whose interests can it serve?

These are questions of ethical as well as intellectual concern, and Allen goes on to offer a generative model for trans-Indigenous scholarship that attends to the specific as well as to the multiplicity of relationships across and through culture, history, and location.

What captures my imagination here, as in broader commentary about the work we do in Indigenous studies, is how profoundly the idea of place serves as the grounding for other critical considerations, even when it is not explicitly evoked. "Trans-" implies movement, and movement assumes some measure of positionality, even when it is only metaphorical. Yet whether literal or symbolic, representational or physical, place always matters, and for Indigenous peoples—and the forces of imperialism and settler colonialism—it matters profoundly. Perhaps nothing matters more: Indigenous peoples' complex and overlapping sets of relationships, obligations, legacies, loyalties, and languages that deepen as they extend outward in time and space are intimately tied to and dependent on specific places and their meaningful histories. Without these places—on the

land or on the water—the rest of that network begins to unravel. For this very reason colonialism in its myriad forms is fundamentally invested in undoing those relationships to place and imposing new, extractive structures in their stead.

In thinking about what the idea of critical Indigenous studies is—or, rather, might be, as specificity necessitates diverse manifestations—it seems an essential consideration to place the field and its methods, questions, and concerns in relation to the grounded particularities of location, culture, and history, beginning with the local and expanding outward. Of course, there are many ways of understanding place. Too often, unfortunately, it seems to be understood as the nondescript stage on which generic human dramas are played out, rather than the meaningful context for our specific, constitutive relationships. How many of us have experienced the "It's a Small World" version of Native studies, where the focus is on what is easily transferable to a Westernized audience expecting reflections of their own (often very narrow and self-selecting) experience? Where all the world's people apparently speak English, where place is a vague setting without specificity or history beyond that which makes the plot more palatable? Difference in these contexts is only in degree, not in kind, but when we or our students bump up against the inevitable moments of inaccessibility or incomprehension, the blame is often shifted to the author or the translator or the area of study rather than to the inadequacies and presumptions of the lens itself.

One of the challenges, I think, is with the very idea of understanding. Guiding toward and gaining understanding is one of the laudable goals of teaching in any field, and it is one to which I am fully committed as an Indigenous studies teacher and a scholar. But in the academy I think we have elevated the concept of understanding without also insistently holding up humility as its counterpart. Many of us tell our students—and ourselves—that "mastery" (a problematic term) of a subject is the goal, but we forget or choose to ignore that the more familiar we become with any topic, the more mystery will be revealed.

This is the paradox of learning: the more we learn, the less we know. We must learn to unlearn, and to be comfortable with the unknown. This is a central tenet of the elders, poets, scholars, and teachers to whom I look for guidance, and only now am I starting to comprehend it in any lasting way. The language of mastery (and, too often, of understanding itself) is etymologically and ideologically the language of domination; it is the language of knowledge as biddable possession, as subjugation, as exploitation. To base understanding on stripping bare the mysteries of human experience is to treat knowledge as something that

one person or one culture takes from another. It is thus an extractive exercise of epistemic privilege, with violence at its center.

This is the claim of understanding without humility. But what if we put humility back into the relationship? What if we locate our understanding in the place we come from or the place we now inhabit, the histories to which we belong by birth, choice, or circumstance, a place to drop anchor as we reach outward for connection? This is what I try to take from my own studies, and what I try to share with my students and in my professional and personal relationships. And admittedly I too often fall short in that understanding; that, too, is the consequence of acknowledging our relationships to one another and to specific places, for to do so implies that others, too, have their perspectives and locations, and these will inevitably differ from our own. It all gets very complicated very quickly, and it is in the complexity that our humanity is most honestly realized.

Empathy and connection require humility as well as courage. They do not presume total comprehension; they not only recognize the mysteries of our experiences and our relationships but also depend on them. Mystery is not something to be broken open, but something to be acknowledged—sometimes embraced, and sometimes simply left alone. (It seems entirely appropriate to me that the Anishinaabe term for the creative force of the universe is Gitche Manitou, often translated as the Great Mystery. This is not a jealous divine patriarch to be fully known or personified or obeyed, but a profound and ultimately unknowable mystery to be honored.) There will always be things we do not and probably never will entirely understand about one another and perhaps even about ourselves, but these moments of inexplicability or uncertainty, rather than ruptures in the relationship, can be the moments when the most beautiful mysteries of human and other-than-human experience can be recognized and honored for themselves, not for what they reflect of ourselves. To help our students or readers or communities to be comfortable with discomfort, for unknowing to be a space of opportunity rather than fear, for untranslatability to communicate more than just confusion, we also have to be willing to honor the greater and lesser mysteries.

Certainly I am not advocating abandoning the attempt to connect across and through our differences—not only would I be out of a job as a teacher and a writer, but I would live in a greatly diminished and far more violent world. Indeed, the ongoing refusal of so many in the privileged West to make those connections or to engage with other peoples and their distinctiveness in a thoughtful, respectful, and humble way has contributed to much of the exploitation of

and cruelty against Indigenous and other marginalized peoples. Understanding with humility means recognizing the capacity of one another to love, to laugh, to fear, to hurt, and to express all the joys and sorrows of our lived experience. Globalization demands not only the flattening out of these experiences and these differences but also their reshaping into easily exploitable and marketable commodities.[3] This is the most dangerous type of world to consider, one in which difference is deficiency unless it can be polished smooth, rendered sterile, and reduced to something bland and tasteless, something quickly consumed and easily disposed of. And what might remain of our worlds and experiences and lifeways would be the detritus crumbling on the garbage pile of capitalism's excess.

We have to do more than grudgingly acknowledge difference. We have to be willing to give up mastery for modesty, to find the spaces where we do comprehend one another but also to be okay with the mystery between us—and maybe even nurture it. Part of the way we do this is to see the world as more than just the stage and its costumed actors, but as the relationships we build together, and the lives we live apart.

LOCATING OURSELVES

This is where, I think, the matter of place comes in. Though Cherokee in genealogy, heritage, and history, I was born in a small Colorado prairie town that sits in the historical border zone between the territories of the Utes, the Southern Cheyennes, and the Arapahos. Three years later, my family moved back to my mom's hometown in the Rockies, firmly in Ute territory. My undergraduate years were spent in Arapaho and Cheyenne country. Grad school was spent on the lands of the Omaha, Ho-Chunk, Ponca, Pawnee, Iowa, Oto, Sac and Fox, and Oglala and Santee Sioux peoples. In Ontario, where I took my first job, I lived initially in the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of the New Credit and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, then on the shores of Georgian Bay in Wendake, the ancient homeland of the Huron-Wendat peoples, though most Wendat were dispersed by war and famine in the eighteenth century; Anishinaabe and Mohawk people now live there and look after the living lands and the burial sites of those who came before. Now I live on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Musqueam people and regularly travel within and through the territories of the other Coast Salish peoples in the region, notably the Tseil-Waututh and Squamish Nations. I am grateful for my

guesthood in all these places and among all these peoples, and for the opportunity to acknowledge the contexts that have continually made possible my work, life, and relationships.

The point of this geo-genealogy is not to highlight anything special about my experience: every one of us could make a similar list, with some lists shorter, others far longer. And for many—probably most—of us, there would be gaps in our perception and understanding. Indeed, I had to go to books, maps, and the Internet to look up whose traditional lands I was born on, and I am still not entirely sure I have it right in some cases. Sometimes it's clear on whose land we are guests. But in some areas, peoples are displaced, and records were destroyed or dispersed (and are therefore scarce or difficult to access at a distance); in others, claims are contested, sometimes since long before interactions with the settler colonial population. It is not just colonialism that complicates our connections to land and our assertions of belonging—as so many of our old stories and teachings make clear, it is also simply a consequence of being complicated humans with complicated relationships to one another and to the lands with which we abide.

I grew up in the shadow of Tava, or Sun Mountain to the Ute people, known to most Americans as Pike's Peak. The Utes were displaced from the region during the Colorado gold rush, and although Sun Mountain remains significant to Southern Ute peoples, it is, like so many sacred sites, now a site of colonial claim and contestation. As a result, I grew up knowing no Utes or even understanding that we were on Ute territory. But the land nevertheless determined "the context we inherited." We went "down the mountain" for groceries, "up the mountain" to get home. Prairie people were "flatlanders," and we mocked the mountain driving skills of Texans and Oklahomans (even though we were only a generation removed from Oklahoma on my dad's side). I never learned to read a compass when hiking or hunting, because the cardinal directions made little sense if you had a relationship to the place. It was the names and the places that were important: Big Bull and Little Bull Mountains, Poverty Gulch, the Peddler, Cathedral Park. All imported names, but all sites that located us in a context and in an admittedly short history that made sense of the place and our presence there. (There is even Squaw Mountain, a stark reminder of the ugly, violent history that made such dehistoricized presence possible.[4]) Mine was not then nor is it now the depth of relationship that the peoples who have called that land home since time immemorial have with the place, but it is something more than simple points on a map or GPS coordinates.

Indeed, it is the relationships to a place—more than simply the place itself—that we work to understand or struggle through, among, and against each other to articulate. And if this is self-evident on the local scale, with all its entangled intimacies and complexities, how much more so is it when we extend ourselves beyond the local to the regional, transnational, and even global? How do we maintain the depth of local relationship and obligation while also seeing similar richness in the expansive networks beyond the "context we've inherited"?

In each case noted above, I often clearly realize that I do not belong to these lands or their histories, that I am a guest here to listen, learn, and walk gently so as not to hinder those who belong here in their work and in maintaining and sometimes healing their ongoing relationships. And that is as it should be. Only the imperialist feels entitled to claim belonging in all places at all times. (Yet that entitlement betrays profound colonial anxiety, for why else would settlers insist on transforming the places they settle into replicas of where they were by introducing invasive, decontextualized, and often profoundly destructive plants, animals, and lifeways?)

Belonging is about more than privileges—it is about taking up the responsibilities and obligations of the people and the place. It is less a matter of what we choose than what chooses us. Belonging is about being woven into the fabric of the land and its legacies, accepting the knowledge that your future is a shared future, and that you are accountable to those around you. Collaboration is a necessity, not an option; meaningful relationship demands something of us, sometimes everything. Those of us who were not raised in a traditional community or who were not raised with our cultural practices, ceremonial traditions, or languages—as is my experience, and as is often the case for Indigenous peoples in this world of globalized fragmentation and disruption—we are tasked with several responsibilities, including learning what knowledge is given to us and what is not, for not all things are meant for all people. Either way, we generally come to these questions through relationships to the places and the peoples who abide together—and apart.

CONTEXTUAL CENTERS

This is a story I once heard. I cannot remember where it came from, whether I heard it told or read it somewhere; I do not know if it is true or apocryphal, but it captures something worth considering about critical Indigenous studies,

its possibilities, and its challenges, something that will anchor my concluding thoughts on these topics.

In the early days of Gilisi (English) intrusion into the mountains that came to be known as Appalachia, two Gilisi traders visited a town of the Ani-Yunwiya, the Real Human Beings (Cherokees), hoping to create a lucrative relationship of exchange. On the first night of their visit, the visitors heard an account about how that great town was located at the very center of the world. The next day, after exchanging gifts and promises of future trade with their new friends, the Englishmen were guided to another nearby town by two young men from the first community. That second night, the traders were surprised to hear the story about how this second town stood at the center of the world. They were confused that the young men from the first town were nodding in agreement with this claim, although the elders in their own community had insisted that their home site was the world's center. When the traders commented on the apparent contradiction, the young Cherokees were in their own turn confused. "When we're at our home, that is the center of the world," they noted. "But when we're here, in their home, this is the center of the world." The English remained befuddled, which seems the predictable end to this particular story.

The center is not the political halls of Washington, DC, or London, or Ottawa, or Beijing, or Tokyo. The center is not the economic bustle of Wall Street or Bay Street. When I am a guest of the Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i, that is the center of the world, for it is their world, just as Musqueam is the center of the world when I am on the unceded territories of the Musqueam people. To recognize this is to recognize both our connections and our distinctions, what we can share and what we cannot. It is not to imagine there are no challenging questions about belonging, no conflicting claims or histories (the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Huron-Wendat all have claims to Tkoronto/Toronto, the place of the fishing weirs), but this in no way diminishes the importance of the question. But this recognition also means that the terms of the conversation are not mine to decide, for it is not my place.

Robert Warrior (2008, 1685–86) has argued that "the North American turn toward Indigenous studies, as such, is an opportunity to see a field bounded by something beyond treaties, federal recognition, and government-to-government relations. It also exists in the neglected histories of indigeneity in the Americas." Once again, Indigenous studies is a moral imperative as well as an intellectual intervention. I would add further that those histories are the significant localized contexts, the stories and relationships of specific peoples to place. This

is also a highly politicized context, with profound material consequences, as Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005, 598) note: "Contemporary Settlers follow the mandate provided for them by their imperial forefathers' colonial legacy, not by attempting to eradicate the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human bodies, but by trying to eradicate their existence as peoples through the erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self."

Ironically, and understandably, given the assimilative assaults on Indigenous nations throughout the twentieth century, the generally successful institutionalization of Indigenous studies in both Canada and the United States has been the result in part of an evacuation or at least a diminishment of localized specificity in favor of a more generic sense of pan-Native ethnicity. Although most Indigenous studies programs make note of whose lands they are on, it is often much harder to see how the abiding stories of place that undergird that acknowledgment actually determine programmatic priorities. The fact that most faculty teaching in such programs—even when Indigenous themselves—are from outside the localized network of relations in that place also leads toward more generic (though by no means insignificant) curricula. As such, many Indigenous studies programs have struggled to find or maintain an identity, and some are now in a crisis of purpose and relevance as a result.

Add to this mix the very real structural challenges at so many institutions where Indigenous studies is able to find a foothold only through the combined efforts of diverse faculty, staff, and community members with deep and sincere interest in Indigenous topics but with little else in common that connects their work or purpose. In seeking to be intelligible to their institution, and in creating space for Indigenous people, world views, and intellectual productions to be treated with respect, but without deeper roots to the lands and the people with whom they are in relationship, they find a temporary site of security but often struggle to develop a deeper and more sustaining sense of place and belonging. When the structuring logic of the institution is one of universalized knowledge (and identities), is it any wonder that so many programs struggle to articulate the intellectual significance of specificity, even those that are rooted in the very place they live and work? Some programs do it better than others, and we all grapple in different ways with the issue.

Over the past few years I have been in many conversations with Indigenous studies colleagues across Canada about the challenges facing our various programs and the various strengths we possess and the diverse successes we can

learn from. What seems to be a common thread in the successes is knowledge of and commitment to the specific contexts they have inherited. And because those contexts are different, the successes will be different, too. For example, I took on a position with the First Nations Studies program at the University of British Columbia (now First Nations and Indigenous Studies, or FNIS) in part because of its fourth-year research practicum, which puts student skills into a two-term relationship with a local First Nation or Indigenous organization in Vancouver. The practicum has been a great success, and the students coming out of FNIS have an impressive skill set that makes manifest the theoretical and critical education they receive in the classroom among committed and savvy faculty. Here, theory meets practice and is both relevant and transformative. Ethical research methods are embedded in the curriculum from the first year through the fourth to prepare students for this important capstone experience, but the practicum works only because of the specific relationships built over time between faculty, staff, and students in the program and the members of various Indigenous communities and organizations in the Lower Mainland, including our Musqueam hosts. Other institutions do not have the same number of options to draw from, nor do other programs have Aboriginal engagement as an explicit and acknowledged pillar of their university's strategic plan. Though successful, the practicum is also time and resource intensive, and as our program grows, so too will pressures on the practicum. But the values of accountability and service as guests on unceded Musqueam land help determine the larger goals of our work, make us accountable, and remind us that other fires were here before ours, and they are still burning.

Locating ourselves more firmly in place does not, however, mean an inevitable looking inward. Indeed, it often necessitates looking outward, for every nation I know has protocols and traditions of exchange. We are therefore called to look across borders—arbitrary and meaningful alike—to earlier examples of trade, diplomacy, and kinship networks. How might these build from the strengths of our specificities? What conversation can Indigenous studies on coastal territories have with those in other regions with other contexts, histories, and networks of relationships? What exchanges, collaborations, and alliances are possible? Perhaps what we need are centers of Indigenous excellence across the hemisphere, each attentive to its specificities but offering something distinctive to the wider network. What is possible when our stories of purpose come from the specificities of place and experience, not from afar? We need not see this journey as new or frightening, as we will be traveling on tributaries long navigated already. And,

to return to Lee Maracle's words, "the context we've inherited" will include those of the land and the people in more than words and good intentions. But there is much that so many of us have to learn about where each of us are, who we are, what we share, and what distinguishes us—programmatically, institutionally, and individually. In so doing, we offer something transformative to the inherited contexts and the network of relationships for those who come after.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

What does this sense of place and inherited context mean for our work in critical Indigenous studies? I am still sorting through this in my own work in the place I now call home. There is no doubt that we can live in a place for years and not belong to it. I hope to live in this region for many long and happy years, and I fully expect that I will continue to have a meaningful relationship to the land, its peoples, and the territorial protocols that have shaped life and relations here since time immemorial, but it is not my center, no matter how much I love it. Let me tread lightly, and respectfully, and help those charged with the weighty legacy fulfill their obligations as best they can.

But even with the acknowledgment of distance, there comes an acknowledgment of connection; the relationship of the guest is not that of the host, but both presume a measure of intimacy, with distinct and sometimes intersecting responsibilities and commitments. By centering our approach to the world as place in action, and rooting that approach in certain relational principles—respect, reverence, reciprocity, responsibility—we find a different, much more complicated, but ultimately much more meaningful common ground on which to gather. In so doing, we might not understand one another entirely, or fully comprehend the differences that manifest our shared humanity, but on this common ground, in this center of the world, we have a chance to come together, to speak, to sing, to dance, and to learn from and offer our profound respect to those who call this place home and to honor the mysteries that both connect and distinguish us. As Anishinaabe scholar Hayden King (2013) has noted, "While we may all dance to a similar beat, our footwork can take us in different directions. And there is nothing wrong with that."

We do not need to think the same or be the same to recognize our unique beauty; indeed, to seek sameness is to be blind to what makes us deeply, profoundly, and unmistakably ourselves and—as so many of our traditional stories

remind us—to the unique gifts we bring to the world. To seek uniformity is also to separate ourselves from the dizzying diversity of the other-than-human world. We can, and should, learn when to step away or to be silent, for not all things belong to all people, and not all of us have the training or the facility to carry certain knowledge with the respect it deserves. We can, and should, learn when to step forward or to speak up, for there is much work yet to be done, and we are called on to use our specific skills and privileges to good purpose.

Critical Indigenous studies is a relationship: complicated, disorienting, delightful. Perhaps this is how work in the field might help us to realize the possibilities of a better world than the one we have inherited. Perhaps we do this by fully, carefully, and courageously placing ourselves in relationship, in community, in humility, and in the mystery . . . separately, and together.

NOTES

1. This chapter had its origins in two separate talks: one for the Words in the World symposium at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in February 2013; the second was the Michael D. Green Lecture at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in November 2013. I have moved in the first instance from a focus on world literature to the broader field of critical Indigenous studies, but in doing so, I hope this essay retains its relevance to larger intellectual and ethical concerns. I would like to thank my various hosts in both territories for their generosity in allowing me the opportunity to participate in these events. Further, I owe thanks to many others who have helped inform my thoughts on the essay's theme over the past two years: the Musqueam Nation, my hosts on whose traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory the University of British Columbia is located, where I both live and work, especially Leona Sparrow, Larry Grant, and the members of Musqueam 101; the faculty, staff, and First Nations Studies Student Association students at UBC, most especially my colleagues in First Nations and Indigenous studies—Sheryl Lightfoot, Dory Nason, Glen Coulthard, Sarah Hunt, David Gaertner, Johnny Mack, and Linc Kesler, along with Tanya Bob, Candice Yu, Jie Ie Baik, Hannah Butson, and Maize Longboat—as well as Coll Thrush, Margery Fee, Amy Perreault, and Kim Lawson. Any insights herein are possible only because of their generosity and thoughtful assistance; I take full responsibility for any shortcomings, misunderstandings, or errors.

2. Indeed, the latter is a vital concern, as Saulteau legal scholar Val Napoleon (2002, 170) reminds us: "Aboriginal families, kinship groups, communities, and nations must identify who their vulnerable, oppressed members are, and decide whether to continue the oppression. Choosing to end discrimination . . . is the courageous political act of a strong nation." Critical Indigenous studies, to my mind, calls on us to advocate for thoughtful inclusion over reactive and decontextualized exclusion, for the best of our traditions, not for tradition for its own sake. The historical and contemporary context of colonialism and inequitable power relationships matter, but so too does empathy.
3. I am grateful to Alice Te Punga Somerville for the most generative concept of "flattening out," which has been very helpful to my thinking (as has the acknowledgment that some people seem to listen but, because of their "painted-on ears," haven't really heard a thing).
4. According to a story my mother heard when she was working as a tour guide in a local mine, miners in the early days of the Cripple Creek–Victor mining camp found the elaborately dressed burial remains of an Indian woman in a cave on the slopes of what would become known as Squaw Mountain. Her body was apparently exhibited as a curiosity in the district for some time. I have been unable to confirm the details of the story.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CRITICAL INDIGENOUS STUDIES

A(n Intellectual) History of and Prospectus for the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association

JEAN M. O'BRIEN AND ROBERT WARRIOR

THE CHAPTERS IN THIS VOLUME offer compelling assessments of the dynamic synergies at the heart of critical Indigenous studies in the twenty-first century. Stemming in large measure from the development of Native studies as a discrete enterprise beginning in the late 1960s, in turn the product of Indigenous political activism, the concept of putting Indigenous studies scholars in dialogue globally and in a critical vein reached a critical mass in the early twenty-first century. Though Indigenous scholars, and scholarship, have certainly been cognizant of the global dimension of intellectual, scholarly, and political concerns that resonate broadly for a long time, the realization of sustained conversations in critical Indigenous studies is a fairly recent development. These intellectual currents have accelerated the establishment of a professional association that is building a professional infrastructure for these scholarly engagements. As two of the cofounders of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association and its first two presidents, we offer this chapter as a retrospective on the founding of the association, its development over the first several years, and an assessment of how its future and the future of