



## **On Native Grounds: Studies of Native American Histories and the Land**

An NEH Summer Institute sponsored by the Community College Humanities Association,  
in residence at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**June 12- June 30, 2017**

### **Intellectual Grounding of the Institute**

by

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Ethnohistorical study of Native American histories and cultures has become, in the last generation, not only a growing academic field of scholarship and teaching in its own right, but has become indispensable to the practice of more general fields of study such as American Studies, American and global history, comparative religion, and art history -- and a more Native-centric approach has dramatically transformed studies in anthropology and archaeology, and political and legal history as well. This new centrality of Native perspectives, which is transforming so many humanities disciplines, is not a matter of political correctness, but of scholarly commitment to pursue more complete, more inclusive, and more nuanced research and teaching.

Our ten Visiting Faculty Scholars will share with the Summer Scholars their groundbreaking ethnohistorical research and legal/legislative historical research in a series of seminars on topics concerning Native American issues of land, sovereignty, culture and identity. Their work focuses on the negotiations, arrangements, and accommodations that different Native American groups have historically made, first with representatives of the European colonial enterprises of Early America, and then, in the national era, with the federal, state, and provincial governments of the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. In these studies, they also take into account the lesser-known stories of the trade, treaties, and negotiations that Native groups have made among themselves. The work our Visiting Faculty will present spans in time the 16<sup>th</sup> century contact era to the present, and ranges from studies of national scope, to regional studies focusing

respectively on the Great Lakes, the Southwest and *Comancheria*, and the Pacific Northwest Coast

### **Ethnohistory and Native American Studies: New Paradigms**

Formerly regarded as peripheral to the old master narratives of the “winning of the West” and the “frontier thesis,” as famously promulgated by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, the field of Native American Studies has grown exponentially in the past two generations, now emerging as an indispensable component of American history and American Studies, “as a new and substantial paradigm,” as one scholar has recently phrased it, grounded “in the experiences, history, and contemporary struggles of the indigenous people in the United States and elsewhere.”<sup>1</sup> Our Institute Visiting Scholar Michael Witgen ([Red Cliff Ojibwe] History, and American Culture, University of Michigan) summarizes the compelling need to accommodate, intellectually, the new realities encompassed by new conceptualizations of American history:

Writing western history as the story of the emergence and evolution of a Native New World... demands a reconceptualization of the field. First, this approach would require scholars to rethink the concept of a founding story for North American history. Rather than focusing on the ways in which empire shaped early post-contact history, *we ought to tell a story that reflects the historical experience of the majority of the continent's peoples.*<sup>2</sup>

Our 2017 "Native Grounds" Institute is intended to bring Summer Scholar participants actively into the current discussion of issues involving the methodologies of ethnohistory -- issues that have recently been freshly explored and critiqued in the anthology *Transforming Ethnohistories*, edited by Sebastian Felix Braun (2013) -- but with a special emphasis on three crucial regional interaction spheres as case studies: the contact-era and post-contact-era cultural histories of the Great Lakes; the Greater Southwest; and the Pacific Northwest Coast. These three widely differing contact zones, each involving a European encounter other than the one most familiar to most students: the Anglo-Native American zone of the Eastern Seaboard from

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<sup>1</sup> See Duane Champagne, “The Rise and Fall of Native American Studies in the United States,” in *Native American Voices: A Reader*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, edited by Susan Lobo, Steve Talbot, and Traci Morris (2010): 16.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Witgen, “The Native New World and Western North America,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 [2012]: 292-3 (italics ours).

New England through the Deep South. Instead, here the three interaction spheres involve initial contacts between Native American Worlds and enterprises initially driven, respectively, by French, Spanish, and Russian colonial and missionary enterprises -- until eventually each was succeeded by British, Mexican, American, and Canadian colonizing and nationalizing endeavors. And while the Native cultures and the dynamics of the encounters were significantly different in each of the three zones, there were and are also many similarities and analogies to explore as well.

### **This Land Is Your Land**

Formerly regarded as peripheral to the old master narratives of the “winning of the West” and the “frontier thesis,” as promulgated by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, the field of Native American Studies has grown exponentially in the past two generations, emerging as an indispensable component of American history and American Studies, as a new and substantial paradigm. In particular, ethnohistorical study of Native American histories and cultures has become, in the last generation, a growing academic field of scholarship and teaching in its own right. At the same time, a more Native-focused perspective is transforming many humanities disciplines, not as a matter of political correctness, but of scholarly commitment to the pursuit of more inclusive and nuanced research and teaching, and is central to current re-assessments of the themes of common good and common ground in American cultural history. As our previous Institute scholar Ned Blackhawk [Western Shoshone] put it in the AHA-sponsored publication, *American History Now* (2011): “Once an afterthought within a broader intellectual horizon, American Indian history has emerged from the shadows of neglect and reclaimed a central place in the canon of U.S. history. Future studies in the field will... highlight the distinctiveness of that lived experience (392). But, as Blackhawk also noted in *Violence Over the Land* (2006), telling the American story more inclusively faces the distinct intellectual challenge of “Reconciling the dispossession of millions with the making of America... an endeavor that requires re-evaluation of many enduring historical assumptions” (p. 3).

Within this endeavor, the story of the land is understood as central to Native American histories, as it is central to the histories of all indigenous peoples. This is no longer just a truism, but a principle embedded in the definition of Indigeness by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, to the effect that the distinctiveness of an indigenous people is inseparable

from territory. The thought is succinctly expressed in the very title of T. J. Ferguson and Chip Colwell-Chanthaphonh's 2006 study of tribal traditions in Arizona: *History Is In the Land*.

**Ethnohistory as a Transformative Discipline**      The new turn in American History and American Studies toward a more Native-centric perspective has largely been driven by the interdisciplinary field of ethnohistory. The sequence of presentations by our Visiting Scholars directly reflects a set of academic questions growing out of the sixty-five year evolution of ethnohistory as an academic discipline, which, at its core, represents a very conscious combination of the disciplines and methodologies of history and anthropology as applied to the study of indigenous cultures. Ever since the founding of the American Society for Ethnohistory in 1953 and its journal *Ethnohistory* in 1954, scholars actively engaged in the field, and others from outside the field, have debated and critiqued the issues involved in combining the traditionally document-based diachronic procedures of history, with the traditionally field-based synchronic approach of anthropology, including the latter's emphasis on oral tradition and on participant/observer eye-witnessing. The two methodologies do not blend easily, but their application has produced some dramatically new readings of American studies and American cultural history, and has stimulated the design and content of this "Native Grounds" 2017 Institute.<sup>3</sup>

For example, with regard to one of our three regional foci, the Southwest, Pekka Hämäläinen, in *The Comanche Empire* (2008), takes a stance of looking at developments in the Greater Southwest not as a northern periphery of New Spain or the new nation state of Mexico, nor of the expanding Anglo-American "frontier," but rather takes its perspective as a Comanche-centric history, "from *Comanchería* outward." A comparable shift in perspective and positionality occurs in the work of another of our Institute scholars engaged in the study of the Southwest, with Tracy Brown's idea in *Pueblo Indians and Spanish Colonial Authority in Eighteenth-Century New Mexico* (2013) of "Puebloization" as an alternative concept to the usual histories of Pueblo acculturation and "compartmentalization." Brown traces here not the familiar

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the special issue of *Ethnohistory* edited by John Wunder (54:4, Fall 2007) generated our first round of "Native Grounds" scholars in 2015 and 2016, including John Wunder himself, and Michael Witgen, Ned Blackhawk, Kathleen DuVal, and Gray Whaley, along with others notable scholars, such as Daniel Richter and legal historian Stuart Banner.

textbook story of how historic Pueblo culture as we know it was a reactive product of Spanish and Anglo influences combined with strategies of secrecy and cultural preservation, but rather a story of how what we now call Pueblo culture is a complex, multi-faceted cultural construct of Native American Pueblo agency, including not only secrecy and resistance, but in some cases deliberate adoption of new cultural elements, such as Catholicism, as part of the Pueblo mosaic.

Similarly, with regard to another of our area foci, the Great Lakes region, our Visiting Scholar Michael Witgen [Red Cliff Ojibwe], in *An Infinity of Nations/ How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (2012), traces the encounters of the Anishinaabeg [Algonquians] with the French, and with Iroquoian and other Indian groups, re-visioning this history of the Great Lakes region as a specifically "Native New World" story, one in which, from the 16th through the 18th centuries, the Anishinaabeg systematically manipulated and controlled for themselves, and in their own interests, the new conditions generated in the North American interior in consequence of contact with the Europeanized Atlantic seaboard's "new world system." That is why, Witgen argues, we need a new "history of the Native New World that developed in the west alongside the Atlantic World that emerged on the east coast of North America" (112-13).

We begin to see in these new ethnohistories the appearance of newly devised tropes or mega-concepts intended to convey these innovative perspectives, tropes such as "Native New Worlds," "Middle Ground," or "Facing East," or conceptual polarities such as cultural custom and property rights; dispossession and development; sovereignty and identify. These are just some of the prominent pivotal expressions in this important new turn in Native American Studies driven by trying to *think ethnohistorically*.

***Facing East*** In trying to clarify our discourse about the Native American experience, much of this new attempt at "thinking Ethnohistorically" is focused on reconceiving the perspective, or the positionality, of our historical narrative (as Raymond DeMaillie puts it in his "Afterward" to *Transforming Ethnohistories: Narrative, Meaning, and Community*, edited by Sebastian Felix Braun [2013]). Even the post-contact history of the Eastern Seaboard area, so early dominated by European colonization efforts, has now been opened to a fresh reading centered on Indian perspectives and Indian voices in the influential book *Facing East from Indian country: A Native History of Early America* (2001) by our 2015 Institute Scholar, Daniel Richter. "Facing East"

inverts the usual perspective of the American master narrative of “Facing West” and looking to “tame the wilderness” and to “possess the virgin land.”

***Native New Worlds*** As noted, Visiting Scholar Michael Witgen has summarized the need to accommodate, intellectually, the new realities of these recent innovative approaches to American history, including “the story of the emergence and evolution of a Native New World,” demanding “a reconceptualization of the field.”<sup>4</sup> Witgen here uses a term -- Native New World -- that has of late been widely adopted by ethnohistorians to convey a sense that just as the colonizing Europeans described the Western hemisphere as a “New World,” so too did the indigenes of this hemisphere experience *their own* “Native New Worlds” in consequence of those encounters, both in the immediate vicinities of contact and in the deep interiors of both continents.

“Native New Worlds” is, of course, a deliberate variant on the Renaissance convention designating the Western hemisphere as a “New World” (e.g., Peter Martyr’s *De Orbe Novo* of 1530). James Merrell originally introduced the term in *The Indians’ New World* (1989) in the now familiar sense that European contact radically disrupted traditional Native American life, but subsequent scholars have now appropriated the term to convey instead the sense that the post-contact world of the North American interior remained, from the sixteenth through much of the nineteenth centuries, a world of autonomous Native polities, negotiating their own arrangements in response to the new realities to the East, rather than simply reflecting a colonized world of Indian victimization, subservience, and dependency upon the Europeans’ “Atlantic New World.”

***Middle Ground*** To take one further example of these new ethnohistorical tropes, in *The Middle Ground/ Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991), Richard White’s provocative metaphor of “middle ground” is used as an explanatory metaphor of Indian/European interactions in the Great Lakes region, hypothesizing a new existential space, neither wholly Indian nor wholly European. The term has provoked a whole controversial literature of its own, as reviewed in White’s own new “Preface” to the twentieth anniversary edition of *The Middle Ground* (2011). The question remains whether the conditions of what the French referred to as the *pay d’en haut*, or Upper Country, were unusually conducive to the construction of a middle ground, or whether this trope can be usefully applied in other

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<sup>4</sup> “The Native New World and Western North America,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 43 [2012]: 292-3.

regional contexts as well, such as the Pacific Northwest coast, or the Greater Southwest. The issues are explored in our first week by Visiting Scholars Michael McDonnell and Colin Calloway, both of whom have written extensively on them, and on the ethnohistory of the Great Lakes region itself.

The evolution and centrality of Native American Studies is a fruit of the growth of ethnohistory in the mid-twentieth century as a new scholarly endeavor. The renowned late anthropologist Bruce Trigger, in an overview of the then relatively new discipline, wrote that the emergence of ethnohistory in the 1950's (the scholarly journal *Ethnohistory* itself was founded in 1954) came about to fill a historic void in two respective disciplines: a perceived lack of focus on historical method in anthropological studies, and a lack of attention to the perspectives of indigenous peoples in historical studies.<sup>5</sup> Ethnohistory, he noted, thus came about as a combination of the methodologies of historians' traditional archival work and ethnographers' field work methods, plus work with new interdisciplinary source material, such as oral tradition, ethnomusicological material, pictographs, winter-count paintings on deerskin, or account records in the form of wampum belts.

Exactly twenty-five years after Trigger's 1982 review of the status of ethnohistorical studies, John Wunder (emeritus, History, University of Nebraska-Lincoln), wrote his own overview article introducing a special volume of *Ethnohistory* in 2007. Wunder picks up from where Trigger left off, surveying what by 2007 had how become a rapidly burgeoning field, concluding:

Native American history has come a long way since its first tentative steps in the 1960's. What is so amazing are the questions that are being asked.... Questions of agency, voice, sovereignty, nationhood, gender, marriage, status, class, intercultural connections, diplomatic mergers, race, and culture change abound.... Native American history is here to stay, and is irrevocably connected to ethnohistorical method.<sup>6</sup>

### **Cartographic Encounters in Early America**

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Trigger, "Ethnohistory: Problems and Perspectives," *Ethnohistory* 29.1 (Winter 1982): 1-19.

<sup>6</sup> John Wunder, "Native American History, Ethnohistory, and Context," *Ethnohistory* 54.4 (2007): 602.

A closer look at the mapping of the Europeans' "New World," and of the Native New World, as well, effectively ties together two of the main themes to be explored in our "Native Grounds" Institute, the previously described Native New Worlds concept, and new approaches to the cartography of North America.

The matter of mapping and mapmaking was, of course, a crucial component of all the European projects of exploration, settlement, and colonization. The sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries was, we know, a great age of map-making, generating many historically notable maps, ranging from John White's 1585 map of Virginia, through the map of Lewis and Clark's great trek across the continent, published in 1814. These various New World maps have always been published purely as European, or American, Canadian or Mexican-generated artifacts, but as John Rennie Short of University of Maryland, Baltimore County, has shown in *Cartographic Encounters* (2009) in the case of almost all of these documents, there is ample evidence and documentation of how much indigenous Native information was actually incorporated into the final product. In some cases, as Short demonstrates in his chapter on "Fremont and Tah-Kai-Buhl," the contribution is so fundamental that scholarly publication should treat the mapping in terms of literal joint authorship. In sum, Short argues, these maps of "discovery" are really artifacts of demonstrable information exchange and active collaboration between the Euro-Americans and indigenous informants -- or, as anthropologists now prefer to put it, interlocutors.

There is also the matter of indigenous-produced maps, and this is the subject of an earlier volume of the same title, *Cartographic Encounters: Perspectives on Native American Mapmaking and Map Use* (1998), edited by G. Malcolm Lewis, a volume containing essays on Indian-produced maps in Aztec Mexico, in New England, the Great Lakes and Canada, in the Southeast, and in Louisiana and the Mississippi Valley. In terms of our access to cartographic materials at the Library of Congress, it is fortuitous to note G. Malcolm Lewis' personal collection of cartographic materials is in process of being donated to the Library. Our Summer Scholars will have an orientation to the Maps and Geography Division of the Library, as well as to the related Kislak Collection of the Culture and History of the Americas (see <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/kislak>), conducted by the Library's Senior Geographer and Kislak Curator, John Hessler.



### **Access to the Library of Congress**

The Library of Congress, is the largest, most comprehensive library ever assembled, with nearly 120 million items on approximately 530 miles of bookshelves, the collections include some 18 million books, 2 million recordings, 12 million photographs, 4 million maps, and 53 million manuscripts. The Kluge Center of the Office of Scholarly Programs of the Library of Congress will host the Institute, and our Summer Scholars will be registered as Readers and will enjoy full Library privileges; each will be assigned a personal Study Shelf in the Main Reading Room, and we will facilitate individually arranged access to the various other Divisional Reading Rooms of the Library.

The resources of the Library of Congress afford access to archival resources at once so varied, so voluminous and in so many diverse formats that they afford the researcher of Native American Studies unprecedented opportunities to ask new questions and to test old and new hypotheses about the ethnohistorical past and the ethnographic present. As the editors of *Many Nations* have said, “The serious researcher who is in the beginning stages of lengthy research on American Indian topics, and who has ample time to devote to such a project, would do well to make the Library of Congress a base from which to explore” (*Many Nations/ A Library of Congress Resource guide for the Study of Indian and Alaska Native Peoples of the United States* [Library of Congress, 1996], xiii). But, the editors also warn, “Library of Congress resources are formidable . . . [and its] prodigious research collections and wealth of information on North American Indian people” are not located in any one collection or Division devoted to them – instead one must learn to navigate all the Library’s Divisions. Hence, our program includes a series of presentations by the Library’s Divisional reference librarians, and Summer Scholars will be able to schedule additional individual appointments with LOC professional staff during the course of the Institute, to facilitate their individual library research on topics in Native American history and culture.

Every teacher/scholar dreams of the opportunity to immerse herself in the full array of source material of a given field of study, to be able to access, without the mediation of limited database subscriptions or interlibrary loan arrangements or copying, the troves of primary source materials, whether manuscripts, original photographs, artifacts, or rare print items that are available in a collection such as the Library of Congress. While the LC Catalog, and a significant amount of the Library's holdings, has been digitized and is available online, this represents still

only the tiniest fraction of what can be accessed through research in person at the Library. As Senior Cartographic Librarian John Hessler has told us in preparation for this project, the Geography and Maps Division alone holds five and half million items, of which 300,000 appear in the on-line Catalog, and of which just 30,000 have been digitized, so that -- as every other Divisional Librarian has also stressed -- *there is no substitute for working on-site in the Library*.

We are confident that this opportunity for the twenty participating Summer Scholars from different humanities disciplines to participate in the seminars of our eight Visiting Faculty Scholars, and to undertake their own focused study on a self-defined research topic in the area of Native American studies, aided by systematic orientations by the Library of Congress Divisional reference librarians, will dramatically open up new areas of research, interdisciplinary study and curriculum development. The project should enhance research and curricular development in Native American Studies, as well as in such disciplines as American Studies, North American and Latin American history, anthropology, archaeology, sociology and cultural geography, art history, ethnomusicology, religious studies, and language and literature, thus significantly contributing to the emergent new paradigms transforming these disciplines.