

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic.
Edited by Ernest Stromberg.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/29v0r1nx>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 31(1)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Stuckey, Mary E.

Publication Date

2007

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

of how to keep the traditions and culture alive in the young and in those who are removed, either physically or spiritually from the community is critical if American Indian governments are to prosper.

However, although *American Indian Constitutional Reform* discusses the process of reform at length, it does not address whether or not culture change is best addressed by focusing on changing the constitution. The idea that culture change and the resultant alienation of many from tribal government could be addressed by other means is not explored. Other approaches used by some American Indian communities to enhance societal integration and satisfaction with tribal government, including the integration of elders with youth programs or community involvement in the lives of those living outside the community are not studied. Rather, the basic presumption of the book, that community dialogue should be in reference to tribal constitutions, remains the focus of attention.

Of course, other modes of addressing culture change are not the focus of this book. Rather, *American Indian Constitutional Reform* brings together scholarly research and grassroots observation of constitutional change in a highly readable text. It sets a good precedent in the involvement of different people who bring different perspectives of the reform process. It serves as a model for work in Indian Country and is a valuable contribution to the body of research in the field of American Indian Constitutional Reform.

Eileen Luna-Firebaugh
University of Arizona

American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic. Edited by Ernest Stromberg. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006. 286 pages. \$55.00 cloth; \$24.95 paper.

It is always a challenge to review edited books, because they tend to be either too loosely organized or too repetitive; they can also present a hazard for reviews when the quality of the various chapters varies so widely that generalizations become impossible. These dangers make reviewing this work all the more pleasurable. The chapters are clearly organized around a central theme. There is enough consistency among ideas in the various chapters to render the collective cohesive but not so much as to make it redundant, and the contributions are uniformly well written and smart. In short, this book is going to be an essential part of the library of all those interested in American Indian rhetoric, indigenous intellectual history, and Native *belles lettres*.

The rhetoric of and about American Indians is receiving increasing attention in rhetorical studies and public address, and this volume will provide a much needed foundation for future work in an area that remains characterized by fragmented studies of specific cases and with little shared theory or canon. This book really has two objectives: it provides something of an intellectual history focusing on American Indian rhetoric, and it situates American Indian rhetoric within a broader tradition of American intellectual history.

To accomplish the first task, the authors deal with historical and contemporary American Indians. These chapters focus on issues such as the autobiographical form as it pertains to indigenous authors, as in the fine chapter on Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins by Malea D. Powell; with boarding school narratives as a specific genre as Ernest Stromberg provides insight on Francis La Flesche and Zitkala-Sa; and with the always important question of audience—to whom and for whom do American Indian authors write? Holly L. Baumgartner and Karen A. Redfield tackle this question in very different but equally effective ways. In all of these chapters, the authors provide astute readings of the texts under consideration, wield theory effectively, and provide strong evidence for a robust indigenous rhetorical tradition.

Equally important is the task of situating American Indian rhetors within the American rhetorical tradition. This volume underlines the importance of indigenous speakers to that tradition by examining the rhetoric of American Indians in the context of non-Indian institutions and documents. Matthew Dennis, for instance, provides an insightful analysis of hybrid rhetoric in his study of Red Jacket; Patricia Bizzell gives us a fine study of William Apess's transcultural public speech through the lens of the jeremiad; Janna Knittel studies Leonard Peltier's prison writings; and both Angela Pulley Hudson and Peter d'Errico treat important issues of how American Indians' experiences illuminate the Constitution of the United States. In all of these cases, the emphasis is on the relationship between the continent's indigenous peoples and the dominant culture, and, in each case, it is very clear that the latter has much to learn from the former.

Contributors to this volume also place indigenous writing within the critical tradition, as Robin Derosa offers the trickster as a model for criticism, Anthony G. Murray addresses issues of authenticity in the telling of history, and Ellen L. Arnold treats Leslie Marmon Silko's work as an exploration of oral and written literary traditions as refracted through her emphasis on the visual. These chapters provide theory, models, and examples of criticism of indigenous authors from indigenous perspectives and as such are useful to both the aims of the book.

The volume ends with a delightfully funny short story by Richard Clark Eckert about Wennebojo (the Anishinaabe trickster) and his search for a "real Indian." The story is no less important for the doubt it casts on the foregoing analyses, reminding readers that identity is best understood in its performance rather than in theory.

In accomplishing the aims of generating more insight into indigenous intellectual history and highlighting indigenous contributions to American history, this volume demonstrates once again that American Indians were not—and are not—merely the passive victims of non-Indian colonialism. Without diminishing the devastating impact of non-Indians on indigenous societies, work such as this makes it clear that American Indians were and are actors in history, not merely acted upon by history.

According to the editor, ethnic studies are troubled by the tension between establishing some sort of unity with the dominant culture while also maintaining an insistence on difference. This volume is concerned with that

tension. It is focused on efforts to examine both the potential and limits of rhetoric that attempts to challenge and adapt to the limits imposed by the dominant culture. It thus focuses on “pan-Indian” rather than tribally specific rhetoric, which points attention to the crucial importance of audience to these rhetors. Yet audience seems to remain a bit undertheorized in many of the chapters.

In addition, I wish that the authors made more consistent use of theories and ideas that have considerable currency among rhetoricians in communication (as opposed to those who inhabit English departments). There are places where Darsey’s prophetic tradition, for instance, would be useful or where Burke’s perspective by incongruity could inform the analyses. There is a reliance on Krupat, Vizenor, and Gunn Allen that recurs in many chapters, and reference is often made to the usual historical figures with considerable frequency—Zitkala-Sa, for instance, appears often. The authors assume that readers are aware of these canonical texts and people, and this book is probably not for those who aren’t.

But these are quibbles. All of these essays make good use of the theories they do wield. They stick close to the texts under consideration while placing those texts firmly in their appropriate political/social contexts and provide considerable insight into the exigencies faced by indigenous rhetors in the United States. This collection does what it ought to do: it provides very few answers and opens up a wide array of topics and issues for further research. It is going to be a very important book in the area of indigenous studies and especially for American Indian rhetorical studies.

Mary E. Stuckey
Georgia State University

Bernie Whitebear: An Urban Indian’s Quest for Justice. By Lawney L. Reyes. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006. 160 pages. \$35.00 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

Made from twelve million cubic yards of concrete, Grand Coulee Dam is the largest concrete structure in the United States and the third largest hydroelectric facility in the world. Sharing the Columbia River with ten other dams on the US side of the border separating Washington State from British Columbia, Grand Coulee is the first dam located downstream where the river enters the United States from Canada. Lake Roosevelt, the reservoir created by the dam and memorializing the well-known Indian hater, stretches over 150 miles north to the international boundary line. When the United States began construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in 1933, white people welcomed the project as a marvel of modern technological resourcefulness. For numerous indigenous peoples along the Columbia River—from Kettle Falls, Washington (north of Spokane) to north of Revelstoke, British Columbia, high in the Monashee Mountains—however, the dam did not signal flattering ingenuity but rather provoked further disruption and displacement, distress, disrespect,