

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Torn from Our Midst: Voices of Grief, Healing and Action from the Missing Indigenous Women Conference, 2008. Edited by A. Brenda Anderson, Wendee Kubik, and Mary Rucklos Hampton.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/46k3894t>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 36(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Terrance, Laura L.

Publication Date

2012-09-01

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/>

participants are so necessary. Today, many American libraries, archives, and museums remain bastions of this mentality when they claim ownership to, hold, and impose access regulations upon traditional cultural expressions. The final chapter covers the incorporation of illustration in Native writing, focusing on the subthemes of resistance and survival in woodcuts created by David Cusick (Tuscarora) in the 1820s, and the ledger art of Haw-Gone/Silver Horn (Kiowa).

Removable Type's index employs logical subject headings—authors, titles, historic events, historical figures, organizations—that enhance the usability of the work. The thirty-eight illustrations are well-reproduced, captioned, and referenced within the text. *Removable Type* should be required reading in courses that cover the development of Native writing in the United States; it might also serve as recommended reading in most any class on Native literature, as well as American bibliography. Faculty in doctoral programs are encouraged to direct their doctoral students to *Removable Type* as a successful example of creating a well-supported, analytical text that builds on theory with stories, examples, and balanced rhetoric. With citations to over 120 published primary works, and nearly 180 published secondary works, the bibliography alone represents a required reading list for the study of Native literatures. It deserves a place alongside other scholarly contributions in this area, such as Robert Warrior's *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, Jace Weaver's *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, and the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literatures*.

Loriene Roy

University of Texas, Austin

Torn from Our Midst: Voices of Grief, Healing and Action from the Missing Indigenous Women Conference, 2008. Edited by A. Brenda Anderson, Wendee Kubik, and Mary Rucklos Hampton. Regina: University of Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, 2010. 288 pages. \$24.95 paper.

Writing this review as the United States Violence Against Women Act comes up for renewal amid severe Congressional opposition to its expansion of tribal jurisdiction over non-Native offenders, I feel compelled to mention this opposition's continued debasement of the well-being and, in fact, its virtual denial of the existence of the indigenous women. A colonial juridical structure that values the abstraction of jurisdiction more than it values the safety and lives of indigenous women heightens their vulnerability to the violence they face, and sometimes fall victim to, in that it perpetuates the process that portrays

them as natural targets of violence and terror. *Torn from Our Midst: Voices of Grief, Healing and Action from the Missing Indigenous Women Conference, 2008* attempts to push back against this structure of violence through its insistence on confronting the question of how the lives of indigenous women across nation-state borders and continents appear and vanish within a continuing framework of colonialism. Refusing to disappear indigenous women, this collection of essays and artwork attempts, with some success, to provide the reader a framework by which to understand the context of the violence and the perspective of indigenous peoples; it further discusses the family, friends, and indigenous women who persevere, offering inspiration to assist in the work toward social justice for those who have disappeared and are disremembered.

In the first section, "Family Stories," the authors/speakers clearly strive to avoid the voyeuristic tendencies in conversations about violence. In other words, the storytellers refuse to participate in the consumption of Aboriginal women as tragic stories by not sharing the details of death, instead focusing on the loss incurred as a result of the death and/or disappearance of these women. By experiencing the stories of their "takings" through their families and learning about them through loved ones, the reader gains a decent sense of who each was, what she valued, and what she gave, focusing on the profound consequence her loss has had for her family and her community. Their survivors are left to confront the apathy that greets the violent loss of their loved ones. The rich constructions of person/womanhood and community in this collection are intended to push back against notions of Aboriginal women as inherently violable and, consequently, the colonial ideologies that structure society in ways that allow for and create the violence experienced by these women and their families, both physically, ideologically, and emotionally.

Using violence as an organizing principle of this collection foregrounds the issue of how to talk about violence. Each essay carefully maneuvers around the difficulty in exposing and discussing violence inflicted upon indigenous populations. Mostly avoiding tropes of victimhood and helplessness or descriptions of a people in need of rescue, these discussions concentrate instead on the importance of exposing all the layers of violence involved in the epidemic of missing indigenous women, the complicity and inaction that perpetuates such violence. Importantly, however, most essays are careful to recuperate the subjectivity of the women from that violence by addressing issues of representation in societal discourse and media relative to indigenous peoples while also sharing the history, creativity and aspirations of those women specifically discussed. Beyond exposing the violent end to their lives, these essays also judiciously discuss the violence in their lives, taking up issues of sex work and drug addiction without condemnation or expressing a need to justify such

circumstances. Instead, in addressing these situations the best essays focus on the relationships among discourse, societal structures, geography, and colonial history that sometimes overdetermine a life. Lastly, these essays attend to the significance of historic and geographic specificity to the causes of violence, demonstrating the need for appropriate solutions in different places while underscoring the continuities of indigenous violence. The writers understand that the means of addressing violence in Canada, for instance, necessarily differ from addressing violence in Mexico because of its particular physical and political geography, but violence erupts in and connects these different places through the similar effects of colonialism.

Interestingly, a point of differentiation between the essays also occurs precisely at the site of colonialism as the differing positionalities of the authors emerge. In each essay's attempts to formulate solutions to rampant violence against indigenous women, the writers' varied academic disciplines and areas of expertise become apparent. These varied positions tend to correlate with how directly the author engages colonialism as the structure primarily responsible for the violent atmosphere within which indigenous women exist. While some see potential answers in indigenous populations gaining recognition and rights from their respective colonial states, others present a more revolutionary and/or tribal concept to resolve structural and physical violence. While all essays take up colonialism and capitalism as contributing factors to indigenous women's vulnerability, some speak most directly about the erosion of traditional practices and tribal structures during an ongoing colonial context and/or the colonial discourse that has overwritten the identities of indigenous women. Others, however, confront the violence by framing it primarily within capitalism and its legacies as a defining structure of a state with a manifestly colonial history. These disparate approaches, intentional or not, aptly demonstrate the reasoning behind the tensions that can arise between decolonizing discourses and those more focused on government reform.

The collection's inclusion of various works of art and performance art created specifically to confront this issue attempts to provide a space for imagining solutions and alternate ways of being. For example, an essay that recounts the conference's "healing walk" performance notes how the banners tied to trees along the route prompt inquiry from passersby as to their meaning, effectively achieving a kind of outreach (129). Likewise, this performance is modeled after the practice of Mexican mothers who seek justice and confront inaction by marking telephone poles to claim a voice. While in light of the artists' stated objectives the art itself appears successful, the book's framing of this art tends to romanticize notions of artistic expression. At a minimum, this risks and perhaps at times reifies indigenous populations as affective peoples exuding cultural expression, when compared to western forms of knowledge and

science as represented by the academic essays themselves—forms of knowledge that persistently overwrite and subordinate indigenous forms of knowledge production and history.

The collection of essays concludes with a direct engagement with questions of what comes next, what needs to be done, and what are the means to accomplish meaningful change. Pointing out that exposing the violence and its structures is only a beginning, and incorporating an elder's counsel to one of the editors that "it is not useful to appropriate the pain of others" (6), the final essays encourage readers to engage in transformative activism by whatever means available to them, be it through creative processes, academic engagement, or some form of political activism. By and large, the essays successfully expose the violence and its accompanying supporting structures, as well as those structures that obstruct efforts to end the violence and seek justice—however justice may be realized. Less successful is the effort to address the specific actions and contexts necessary for decolonization, leading, ultimately, to questions regarding what constitutes successful decolonization, and who makes that determination.

Laura L. Terrance

University of California, San Diego

Tribal Constitutionalism: States, Tribes, and the Governance of Membership. By Kirsty Gover. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 320 pages. \$100.00 cloth.

Membership and territory are foundational ways that political groups distinguish themselves from other groups. For indigenous communities worldwide, these criteria are problematic, particularly membership. In the United States, the federal government legally defines Indian status, and individual tribes define tribal membership. While one would assume that all tribal members are "Indian," the two categories are imperfectly aligned. Generally, tribal members hold federal Indian status, but several federal programs and departments use unique definitions to regulate Indian status for their own purposes. As a result, according to certain federal programs it is possible for a person to be a tribal member but not legally an Indian; similarly, it is possible for a person to qualify as an Indian legally and not be a tribal member.

This discrepancy between tribal and federal definitions leads to significant negative consequences. Not only is administration of judicial, medical, and educational services inconsistent, but overly specialized areas of law and policy add to the overall confusion of the public. Until recently, a strong empirical