

# UCLA

## American Indian Culture and Research Journal

### Title

Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing. By Michelle M. Jacob.

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4qz253fm>

### Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 38(3)

### ISSN

0161-6463

### Author

Bushnell, Jeanette

### Publication Date

2014-06-01

### 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/>

into the constitution.” In their various roles as delegates, scribes, consultants, drafters, conveners, and teachers, the authors have created a document that is both prop and script in this process.

Vizenor’s narratives about citizenship by lineal descent and representation for off-reservation citizens are examples of this purpose. Chapter 4, a set of essays Doerfler composed for *Anishanaabeg Today*, is another. Intended to prepare citizens for the constitutional referendum, the essays address topics from tribal sovereignty to individual rights to government accountability. Dispassionately and informatively, they explain how White Earth’s government would operate if the nation went forward with change.

Some might complain about the book’s limited mention of the White Earth Nation’s membership in the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (MCT). Opinion leaders within the other member tribes have questioned the legality of White Earth’s exit from the MCT and wondered how White Earth’s dissociation affects the Tribe as a whole. But viewing the book as a narrative about constitutional enactment at *White Earth*, this is less a flaw than a strategic omission, as it does not affect local implementation of a new governing structure.

Vizenor calls ratification of the new White Earth Constitution “a great and memorable moment in the history of the White Earth Nation and the United States of America” (61). Certainly, Vizenor, Doerfler, and Wilkins have created a book that is part of both the greatness and the memory. And especially in teaching about the process of living into a constitution, they prove Wilkins’ point that the world has much to learn from Native nations’ constitution-making efforts. He suggests that it is on “the smaller scale, the indigenous scale” where one can “learn vital details about the rule of custom and law, the pursuit of freedom and liberty, the meaning and exercise of sovereignty,” and best observe “the development of formal and informal constitutions to improve self-governance” (6–7).

*Miriam Jorgensen*

The University of Arizona and Harvard University

### **Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing.**

By Michelle M. Jacob. Tucson: University of Arizona Press. 152 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

In *Yakama Rising*, Michelle Jacob uses emerging conversations by today’s indigenous scholars to describe, explain, and honor Yakama experiences and perspectives. She situates her shared Yakama stories within projects of healing, education, and living at places and in ways that Yakama peoples have done

for many generations. Jacob's case studies reflect what Jo-ann Archibald in *Indigenous Storywork* calls personal life-experience stories that are part of a healing process for the disease of decolonization.

A good source of information about Yakama decolonizing activities from the 1970s to today, Jacob's book includes both Yakama and other indigenous analyses. Where her life experiences and understandings of academic literature overlap with my own, I perceive a thoughtful discussion of her situated partial knowledges. Her case studies clearly illustrate much of the scholarly conversations within the settler society's academy that are about indigenous philosophy, education, and decolonization resistances. Using many examples of activities drawn from her elicited narratives, she meticulously walks her readers through a Yakama praxis that is reminiscent of Gerald Vizenor's post-Indian warrior in *Manifest Manners*.

Jacob's telling of her own stories and the stories of those who are well known to her is a strength, aligning with what I understand to be the process of indigenous science, where "science" is used to mean the way human people come to an understanding of knowledge. In these stories she shares a deep understanding of the recalled experiences and events. We clearly perceive the knowledges within these stories and, like our elder indigenous scholars and teachers, she often repeats some of their concepts important to Yakama cultural revitalization: gifting, reciprocity, honor, respect, relationships, peace, discipline, intergenerational connection, place, humility, pride, accountability. When she moves into the more recently claimed role of settler society academician, her writing loses some of its authority and fullness of understanding. We see appropriate quotes and citations with short discussions that tie the published source to her story, but these sequences do not have the smoothness of those who tell a story that has become theirs to tell. (My thanks to Lee Maracle for explaining this distinction to me.)

My perception is that Michelle Jacob is a gifted indigenous scholar who, while also being very well read in current settler society academic literatures, moves mostly within indigenous pedagogies and philosophies as she shares her stories. For readers situated within indigenous communities, Jacob is gifting us with her stories that hold within them models for enacting our own community-building activities. Her research, like that of many other indigenous scholars, includes the now familiar methods and methodological concepts written in Linda Smith's oft-cited work, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2001), alongside more "usual" social science practices.

Jacob reports on the lack of wellness experienced by Yakama people, particularly by the youth in the 1970s when Wapato Indian Club formed—violence, substance abuse, depression, erosion of Yakama identity, lack of Yakama knowledge, and poor self-esteem—and defines this state of being to be what Duran

and Duran have identified in *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* as “soul wound,” a sequel to colonization. Moving within the logic of that naming, she then cites three case studies of Yakama culture revitalization projects to show how healing of the soul wound is enacted. Her case studies focus on dance (Wapato Indian Club), language (Northwest Indian Language Institute), and food (Xwayamami Ishich). She gifts us with stories of how Yakama individuals and the Yakama community claim healing roles to effect individual, communal, and intergenerationally connected healing. Similar to other research done on the generational transference of trauma, such as with Nazi holocaust survivors, she cites an intergenerational effect of historic (and continuing) colonial trauma among Yakama people. Her project diverges from former studies by taking the academically political risk of “using indigenous communities’ own ideas as central to an analysis” (13).

It is a challenge to write about indigenous concepts within the knowledge systems of the settler society’s house of stories because of the necessary compromise between being positioned within this system enough to be understood, while still explaining the indigenous content that comes from a different knowledge system, knowledge genealogy, and basic understanding of reality in a credible way. We always seem to end up with a syncopated narrative. The author situates her work as being critical indigenous scholarship with the ultimate goal of cultural revitalization, but cautions that “our traditions and languages will not be fully restored until global transformation abolishes the multiple forms of oppression that perpetuate the physical and cultural genocide of indigenous peoples” (14). Jacob names her work as decolonizing, but I would also name it more broadly as anti-oppressive because the stories have so much in common with those of other resisting groups who must interface with the contemporary settler society. I would greatly enjoy a further conversation about her concept of “global transformation.”

Jacob’s discussion of language revitalization offers a clear and effective roadmap for collaborative work between grassroots community workers and educational institutions. Along with her other case studies, this example foregrounds the importance of specific Yakama individuals taking action based on desires of community members and not relying on the vagaries of governments and government funding. I was hoping to see a stronger explanation of how language is the shared communication that supports the means for perception and comprehension of a particular understanding of reality. She shared one short example of the multiple words for “salmon,” but it was not a compelling discussion of the foundational relationship between language and culture.

Her discussion of indigenous feminisms and gender leaves me pensive in the way that an elder sees one’s words being reproduced by youth. As a longtime activist with Janet and Don McCloud during the years when Women of All Red

Nations (WARN) was developing with the American Indian Movement (AIM), as a settler-society scholar with a PhD in women's studies, and as a university and community teacher of indigenous feminisms and masculinities, I perceive that our emerging scholars are challenged to translate rhetorical tellings of the settler society's house of stories into our elders' actions, which are founded in an understanding the world as potential energies in a continuing rebalancing harmony. Jacob shows in her shared stories how Yakama elders practice gender balance, or strive to do so, against the overarching misogyny of the settler society.

Jacob's book shares different insights with subsequent readings. Once the entire story is known, the reader can better appreciate how Jacob adroitly weaves together historical accounts, narratives, and theoretical analyses. However, I felt moved off-balance by her use of "tradition." For example, when she discusses the Wapato Indian Club's performance of a Christian prayer, she explains how the use of sign language is a means of bridging cultural communication gaps but does not fully explain how the positions of Yakama traditions and Christian traditions specifically differ such that they create a gap, other than to say that Christianity has "widespread appeal across the reservation" (32). The appeal of Catholicism and its position vis-à-vis historical understandings on my reservation have been discussed at great length, and I would have liked to see Jacob give this issue more attention, especially given that her ultimate goal as a critical indigenous scholar is the full restoration of Yakama traditions and languages. Which traditions is she talking about? Where do our cultural and societal abilities to change and adapt fit into her logic of tradition? If traditions can somehow incorporate Christianity, how do they negotiate different economic systems, government styles, and changing technologies? By tradition, is she calling upon a certain philosophy and value system?

This well-written book is easy to comprehend with a single reading, but additional readings expose its deceptive complexity and nuanced knowledges from both indigenous and settler society systems. I would recommend it to community builders, resistance workers, and scholars in the field.

*Jeanette Bushnell*

University of Washington