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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Native Acts: Indian Performance, 1603–1832. Edited by Joshua David Bellin and Laura L. Mielke.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7kw038pd>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2013-06-01

DOI

10.17953

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Native Acts: Indian Performance, 1603–1832. Edited by Joshua David Bellin and Laura L. Mielke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. 344 pages. \$35.00 paper.

At least since Philip Deloria's *Playing Indian*, Native American studies has embraced performativity as a powerful lens for understanding identity, culture, and power. *Native Acts* makes an important contribution to these ongoing dialogues, one that advances historical understandings and expands analytic tool kits.

Native Acts features an exceptional introductory essay, ten original contributions, and an engaging afterword by Philip Deloria. Importantly, the contributions exhibit diversity in content, regional focus, and historical period, providing a comprehensive engagement with the subject. At the same time, they attend to the significance of gender, religion, and ethnicity. And happily, the volume displays consistent quality, rigor, and value from start to finish.

In the introductory chapter, Laura L. Mielke does readers a great service by rendering a sophisticated assessment of the literature in clear terms. Using the familiar story of Pocahontas' intervention on behalf of John Smith, she unpacks a number of the key concepts, core contributions, and fundamental challenges of the collection. Of special value is her presentation of performance. She provides a helpful definition, a sharp account of the literature, and clear summary of the volume. It establishes the context for reading the volume by placing the contributions and their contribution in dialogue with broader currents in American Indian studies, American studies, and performance studies.

Opening the volume with Pocahontas points to the often unrecognized significance of Indian performance. Such enactments, as the collected essays in the volume remind us, have always been the cornerstone of white-Indian relations, the foundation of formulations of national narratives in Europe and then in the United States, not to mention across Indian country, and a crucial pivot point in the middle ground. Indeed, the mythic act of the young Pocahontas is an origin myth in the United States. At the same time, as the contributions to *Native Acts* rightly assert, stories about Indian performance, often competing ones, not only give such enactments life, but they also illuminate the intersection of interpretation and power.

Studying the history of Indian performance presents scholars with unique challenges, as Mielke notes in the introduction. This is especially true for this collection, which takes up a historical period in which indigenous peoples, their actions, and their perspectives were almost invariably recorded and represented by European actors, whose preoccupations, politics, and positions left a large imprint on their accounts. This challenge incites a series of critical readings that not only unpack the creation and projection of textual persona by authors, but sensitively tease out the construction and circulation of Indianness by

indigenous people. These multiple readings provide nuanced accounts of acts, ideas, and events that broaden our understandings of the cultural and political meanings of being and being understood to be Indian.

Although the interface of Indianness and performance often conjure images of whites masquerading as American Indians, whether in association with youth groups, party culture, sport mascots, or hobbyism, *Native Acts* rightly shifts the frame to emphasize performances by American Indians. The contributions collectively outline the situated agency of indigenous actors. This has the benefit of illuminating the complexities and contradictions of cultural play, political power, and tribal identity during this period. Attending to these (sometimes uncomfortable) features, moreover, remind readers that history is not a one-way street or preordained tragedy, but rather a process set in motion and redirected by human actions made under conditions not of their own choosing. It suggests that the middle ground is something more than just a meeting place or trading post: the middle ground is a stage on which Natives act.

The case studies concern themselves with issues ranging from conversion and common law to symbols of sovereignty and staging power, and take up three key themes: expectations, authenticity, and authority. First, they interrogate white preconceptions about and preoccupations around Indianness, detailing the ways in which indigenous actors play with, off, and to these cultural frames to formulate political projects and communicate social messages. Second, they probe issues of continuing significance: Who is a real Indian? How can/should one convey this to audiences? What symbols and acts allow one to be recognized as such? Third, they direct attention to the use of performance to lay claim to social and political power and to legitimate such claims. In foregrounding these issues, *Native Acts* not only provides a series of first-rate case studies of the past, or even a collective assessment; the volume speaks to current concerns in a very powerful fashion.

Native Acts deserves a wide readership. Undoubtedly, scholars interested in the history of Native nations will welcome the collected case studies, which should appeal to historians of the United States, especially those specializing in colonial America and the early republic. At the same time, the conceptual framework should be actively engaged by those more concerned with other historical periods and contemporary sociopolitical and cultural issues. While highly recommended for academic collections and research libraries, *Native Acts* will find more select use in college classrooms. In particular, it would be well suited for graduate seminars and upper level undergraduates in American Indian studies and allied areas of inquiry.

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