

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap. By Terry Huffman.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ws2w88x>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 36(3)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Poitra, Christine

Publication Date

2012-06-01

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/>

the mythological origins, which are fascinating, if vague. Archaeological and ethnographic evidence shows that Nuu-chah-nulth people were adept at hunting not just large whales, but also dolphins and tuna. Their amazing ability to integrate technology, mythological beliefs, and traditional environmental knowledge into a cultural practice that nourished so many is truly an achievement to celebrate and honor.

Coté beautifully describes the joy of Nuu-chah-nulth whaling, which she contrasts with the sadness brought on by contemporary opposition from individuals and groups who could not (or would not) “pass over” to see the whale through the eyes of the Makah. Perhaps the author might have included more information on the political processes of contemporary Makah decision-making, but all in all, this is a fine read and a welcome addition to the literature describing tradition and cultural identity on the Northwest Coast.

Chris B. Wooley
Anchorage, Alaska

Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap. By Terry Huffman. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010. 278 pages. \$65.00 cloth.

The achievement gap among American Indian students can be seen in higher dropout rates, lower performance on state assessments, lower SAT scores, decreased college readiness, and dismal college attendance and completion rates. This achievement gap is not new: low achievement of K-12 and post-secondary American Indian students has been well documented by the US Department of Education, nonprofit organizations, research centers, school districts, and Native nations. Decades of careful research inquiries have produced vast numbers of ethnographies, statistics, organizational studies, and other mixed-method and qualitative work speaking to the poor educational outcomes prevalent among Native students. In the last few years, the achievement gap has come back to the forefront of public discourse, with increased visibility of national educational reform organizations as well as increased media attention to issues of educational equity and the opportunities provided to low-income and minority students, with the result that academic work on these issues is highly sought after. Terry Huffman’s book *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education: Taking a New Look at Academic Success and the Achievement Gap*, then, is both timely and relevant.

A professor in the School of Education at George Fox University, the author has maintained a prominent voice in the area of American Indian education

and achievement for the better part of two decades, with a significant portion of his career dedicated to delving into reservation teachers' practices, Native college persistence, and Native educational experiences. Huffman's last book, *American Indian Higher Educational Experience*, employed mixed research methods to explore the cultural identity of college students in relation to college persistence and experiences. Notably, Huffman's work usually includes diverse research methodologies to understand and convey educational phenomena, and as he attempts to merge a practitioner's understanding of Native achievement to broader scholarly discussions of the education experiences and outcomes of minority students, his latest work follows the same pattern.

A major objective is to unpack several widely recognized sociological theories, including cultural discontinuity, structural inequality, interactionist, and transculturation. In order to do so, the author includes a dialogue about the contentious relationships surrounding the individual and the teacher, the individual and the school, and the school and the community. Intended to provide readers who have little prior knowledge with a solid introduction, the overarching purpose of the work is to impart to the reader a clear understanding of four major, sometimes competing theories in the context of American Indian studies.

Chapter 1 provides a wide overview of the role and criticisms of scholarly theory in American Indian studies and themes in American Indian education, and also outlines the four large parts of the book, which correspond with the four theories under examination. Each section includes a literature review that first describes the theory, carefully outlines its premises, illustrates its assumptions, gives its origin, and then finally discusses its implications. The work diligently displays the celebrated components of a given theory together with its inherent contentions and counterarguments, and the discussion appears balanced. Throughout his presentation, Huffman is careful to maintain objectivity in his critique, rather than impose his own ideological slant.

Huffman pairs each condensed overview with a complementary qualitative research article. For example, chapter 2 (on cultural discontinuity theory) includes "Teachers' Cultural Knowledge and Understanding of American Indian Students and their Families." These short complementary articles, written by a variety of authors, enhance the book's overall quality and depth by showing how tangible qualitative research is carried out under each theoretical lens. An article may also model how to apply a theoretical lens to better describe an observed phenomenon. The pragmatic elements of the text steer the reader to think critically and to make larger connections between the themes in American Indian education and the four theoretical frameworks. Highly detailed and at the same time easy to read and process, few current texts successfully package theory with research articles in this way. Moreover,

the book's organization means that the reader need not consult supplementary books or research to understand the content.

Huffman's book takes a common-sense approach and contributes to the discipline by clearly elaborating on sociological thought and adding modes of expression to discuss American Indian educational achievement. It will interest graduate students, professors, academics, policy researchers, and some advanced undergraduates, though perhaps it is best suited for a mid-level graduate course or upper-division undergraduate course in American Indian studies, ethnic studies, education, or sociology. *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education* is an excellent instructional tool on how to conceptualize and define certain aspects of scholarly discourse, so it would also contribute to qualitative methods or education theory courses. Additionally, it can serve as a useful orientation guide for developing a research question, a theoretical framework for a research project, thesis, or dissertation, or reference for a comprehensive literature review. Finally, *Theoretical Perspectives on American Indian Education* easily stands alone as a rich starting point for research on the American Indian educational achievement gap.

Christie Poitra

Michigan State University College of Education

War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army. By Mark Van De Logt. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. 368 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

Fortunately, Mark Van De Logt's *War Parties in Blue: Pawnee Scouts in the US Army* is not another glorification of Frank J. North, the white American commander of most Pawnee scout units. In the late nineteenth century North's younger brother Luther, who also served as an officer of the Pawnee scouts, embarked on a campaign to immortalize Frank (who died prematurely in 1884) as a fearless frontiersman and Indian fighter whose command of Pawnee scouts played a vital role in the opening of the West. Luther North found a willing disciple in George Bird Grinnell, a noted naturalist, ethnographer, and writer who, after meeting Frank North and several Pawnees in 1870 and participating in an 1872 Pawnee buffalo hunt, developed an enduring interest in Plains Indian histories, cultures, and warfare.

Grinnell adhered to nineteenth-century ideologies that proclaimed white American intellectual and cultural superiority over Indians. His portrayal of the North brothers in *Pawnee Hero Stories* (1889) and *Two Great Scouts and Their Pawnee Battalion: The Experiences of Frank J. North and Luther H. North* (1928) relies on selective information provided mostly by Luther, as well as