

Prof. Bethany Hughes, UM Native American Studies Program
Introduction to Native American Studies in preparation for Inuit exhibitions
Docent CE, November 19, 2018

Hi Everyone, I took sketchy notes of Prof Hughes talk and subsequently expanded my notes into (relatively) full sentences, looked stuff up, and added links. Prof Hughes mentioned many interesting and complicated topics so I tried to find good references for these in order to include accurate and more complete information in the body of the text below, as well as footnotes so you can read more, if you wish. Any mistakes are, of course, mine.
---Pam Reister

Preliminaries

Dr. Hughes begins in her native tongue, Choctaw, then introduces herself in English including giving her academic and personal background. Family is of Choctaw Nation, now of Oklahoma. But, Choctaw language belongs to the Muskogean language family group, Hopewell and Mississippian cultures, who, in the past, lived throughout the east of the Mississippi River valley and its tributaries.

Ann Arbor on lands of Council of Three Fires, a long-standing Anishinaabe alliance of the Ojibwe, Ottawa, and Potawatomi. The land we are on is simultaneously home to multiple people, languages and it pre-dates the USA.

Further, we are in Michigan which is divided by a number of treaties. An important treaty for UM history is the Foot of the Rapids (Fort Meigs), Treaty with the Wyandots, etc., 1817.¹ This treaty indicated that Native American children may be able receive an education at UM. No Native American students were enrolled for 130 years, however. In 1971 a lawsuit started a series of events that led to the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program of 1976.

Other campus issues around Native American affairs include the presence of the Order of Angell (created in 1902 by a group of seniors in coordination with University president James Burrill Angell) a senior honor society also known as Michigamua. The organization officially renamed itself the Order of Angell in 2007, in an effort to move beyond its controversial past including its being a secret society for some of its history, and the fact that in its former identity, "Michigamua" (a name derived from a fictional Anishinaabe tribe), the organization had been criticized for its past practices of "playing Indian" by wearing imitations of Native American regalia in public rituals. Former members include Gerald Ford and Denard Robinson.² The university could curtail their organization because they had a room in the Union but had not paid

¹ Here is text of the treaty:

[https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/ResearchResources/Native_American_Material/Treaty_Rights/Text_of_Michigan_Related_Treaties/Pages/Foot-of-the-Rapids-\(Fort-Meigs\),-1817.aspx](https://www.cmich.edu/library/clarke/ResearchResources/Native_American_Material/Treaty_Rights/Text_of_Michigan_Related_Treaties/Pages/Foot-of-the-Rapids-(Fort-Meigs),-1817.aspx)

Here is a University Record story about an official UM plaque, and the history behind it, placed in 2002 between the Chemistry and Natural History buildings http://www.ur.umich.edu/0102/Nov18_02/16.shtml

Here is a student response to a plaque placed as part of UM's bicentennial celebrations:

<https://mystudentvoices.com/rethinking-the-native-american-land-gift-to-the-university-of-michigan-64e0a972e2b8>

² Michigan Daily article: <https://www.michigandaily.com/article/order-angell-secret-societies>

rent.³ In case you are interested, the 2018 class, whose raison d'être includes "...continue the mission to bridge campus divides, promote pride for the University, and unite our campus in all its breadth of diversity," is published here <https://www.michigandaily.com/section/campus-life/order-angell-releases-2017-roster>

The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) is a U.S. federal law that mandates the transfer of human remains and associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony to lineal descendants who have requested them and who have the legal right to them. Prof Hughes notes that faculty in Native American Studies have worked on this issue but there is an institutional history of not giving artifacts back. The University has a site dedicated to this process including progress on repatriation from 1997 to the present.⁴

At UM, the Native American Studies program is housed within the American Culture Department, it is not a department in itself. Undergrads can get a minor in Native American Studies. American Culture faculty did a lot of hiring at the beginning of 2000's but three key faculty were recently hired away by Harvard. Now, they are in a period of development. The program has strengths in history and literary studies, as well as some in Public Health. There is a small number of Native students at UM. Last year about 83 (page 5 of the Central Student Government Demographic Report has a graph of UM student demographics for 2017/18⁵). Dartmouth and Stanford have been targeting Native American students and have more in their student population. The Native American Students are an active population. They do an annual Powwow.⁶

That was a quick summary of where we are, here at UM.

Intro to Inuit

Professor Hughes suggests that we consult the packet she created and navigate to the website from University of British Columbia (<https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>) for introduction to terminology and language. She notes that because this is a Canadian site, terminology will be slightly different than that used in the US.

The Canadian Territory of Nunavut, or "Our Land" in Inuktitut, encompasses over 2 million km² and has a population of 35,944 residents (2016 census), approximately 85 percent of whom are Inuit. (see www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/nunavut)

Professor Hughes proposes that we think about the arctic people as sharing a circumpolar geography. People inhabiting the area include the Laps, aka Sami people, who live and work in an area that stretches over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Russian

³ Wikipedia has an article about this society: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Order_of_Angell

⁴ <https://nagpra.umich.edu/0>

⁵ <https://umcsg.files.wordpress.com/2018/04/csg-demographic-report-2017-2018-1.pdf>

⁶ <https://powwow.umich.edu/about/>

Kola Peninsula; the Aleuts, the indigenous people of the Aleutian Islands (both the Aleut and the Aleutian islands are divided between the US state of Alaska and the Russian administrative division of Kamchatka Krai); and the Yupik of western, southwestern, and southcentral Alaska and the Russian Far East. All are indigenous people. The term “Indigenous” was created to do a certain kind of work as recognized by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The United Nations describes Indigenous People as

...descendants - according to a common definition - of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means.

(As Prof Hughes notes, the UN would not create a definition for indigenous; Indigenous is not a term describing race.)

According to the UN the most fruitful approach is to identify, rather than define indigenous peoples. This is based on the fundamental criterion of self-identification as underlined in a number of human rights documents.^{7 & 8}

Terminology

Inuit means “people,” “home,” “us.” In many native languages, the name they call themselves means people or us. Prof Hughes proposes that specificity is best practice. “If we say Inuit, we do the job of caring for our neighbors.”

Indian is a word still in circulation. Although it is not offensive in federal law, for example, in the Bureau of Indian affairs, most of the time, if coming from others than Native Americans, it is unwelcome and off putting. Indian is misnomer because Native Americans are not from India. It is a culturally constructed, made-up term from movies, paintings, literature, etc. The word circulates along with “cowboys and Indians,” Michigamua Indians, etc. For more see Philip Deloria’s book, *Playing Indian*. It is a term we have to work with.

“Indian” went out of favor with the Red Power movement and as the **American Indian Movement**, founded in July 1968 in Minneapolis, gained recognition. AIM was initially formed to address Native American affirmation, treaty issues, spirituality, and leadership while simultaneously addressing incidents of police harassment and racism against Natives forced to move away from reservations and tribal culture by the Indian Termination Policies.⁹

Subsequently, some Native Americans elected to distance themselves from being identified first as American (as in American Indian) and moved to calling themselves **Native American**. Who

⁷ <https://indigenous.fiu.edu/news/2015/who-are-indigenous-people/>

⁸ UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People:
https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf

⁹ AIM website: <https://www.aimovement.org/>

uses American Indian or Native American is largely generational. The term “Native American” is most safe now. Not totally precise but generally accepted. Even better than Native American is **the best practice of using the actual nation a person belongs to**, as in our neighborhood, Odawa, for example.

Within Canadian Inuit people there are subdivisions. The following may not be exactly what Prof Hughes was referencing but it illustrates divisions by geography.

Historically, the Canadian Inuit were divided into eight main groups: Labrador Inuit, Ungava or New Quebec Inuit, Baffin Island, Igloodik, Caribou, Netsilik, Copper and Western Arctic Inuit. https://firstpeoplesofcanada.com/fp_groups/fp_inuit1.html

In Canada, “Indian” is slightly different. “Indian status” is the legal status of a person who is registered as an Indian under the Indian Act.¹⁰ Prof Hughes mentioned that the classification “Indian status” was misogynist because it was based on marriage and if a woman married a non-Indian she would lose her status. This appears to be changing as there is proposed legislation from 2017 to extend this status “to descendants of women who were removed from band lists or not considered Indian due to marriage to a non-Indian man going back to 1869.”¹¹

Professor Hughes mentioned that this probably won’t impact the Inuit because they are not “Indians” by Canadian definitions.

the term “Aboriginal” refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.... “First Nation” is a term used to describe Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit.... Inuit refers to specific groups of people generally living in the far north who are not considered “Indians” under Canadian law.¹²

Authenticity of Inuit Art

The question of authenticity in art--in Inuit art and globally--is a big deal. How do you know if anything is authentic. In US, law, indigenous art has to be made by a Native American.

In the first article in the packet created by Prof Hughes, Heather Igloliorte, an Inuit curator, names six principles that guide Inuit ways of being and social relations for Arctic residents (including people, animals and nonhuman entities). Artists working with these principles may be considered authentic in her eyes.

Igloliorte calls this the concept of *Inuit Qauimajatuqangit* (or IQ), concepts lived out in Inuit practice.

1. *Pilimmasarniq*: Acquisition of knowledge, the way in which Inuit artists train and develop, usually observing elder family or co-op members, i.e. how you learn and who you learn from.

¹⁰ <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032463/1100100032464>

¹¹ <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1467214955663/1467214979755>

¹² <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/terminology/>

2. *Angiqatgiinniq*, consensus-building and collective decision-making with a focus on benefiting the community. Example: artists choose designs based on drawings from named local artists, but collaborate in the production.
3. *Pinasuqatigiinniq*, working together for common good
- 4 *Pijitsirarniq*: Serving, which is crucial to how success is measured in Inuit communities. How much you serve and how well, is highest level of leadership in community.
5. *Qanurtuuqatigiinniq*, being resourceful and inventive in problem solving.
6. *Avatimik kamatsianiq*, environmental stewardship, being respectful of limited resources, the practice of living well in community with community being people, animals, plants, land, water, etc. Need to take all of these into consideration. The land is their family.

Prof Hughes uses the language of the people she is discussing whenever possible, even if she does not know it or pronounce it well, to keep her content more authentic.

Art Inflected with Political Process

A common thread running through indigenous art is that it is inflected with political process, and political/historical trauma. Alcohol and drug use on the reservation, poverty, access to jobs.... these are issues that appear in contemporary Native American Art. The art may address how to deal and live with the repeated and ongoing relationship to colonialism, racism, oppression, how people who have survived these live with it. [For example, James Luna created “Artifact Piece,” consisting of himself lying on a platform surrounded by objects from his contemporary life.¹³]

Forward thinking indigenous art addresses what kind of future is being made. The creators consider how one can be a good ancestor. The network or web of familial connections, extends backward and into the future. How to honor your own ancestors within this web of kinship while also being real and not frozen in the past.

History of Inuit art is connected with the Hudson bay company. In the past, Inuit sold fur to the company but when the economy tanked they turned to something else. For them, if tourists want art, they will do it to survive. This art making process is a way of being authentic by serving the community.

Prof Hughes provides links to the video and musical art of Tanya Taqquk and Tanya Linklater. Some of the videos on Linklater’s website include episodes of learning from elders.

Questions from Docents re: Naming

When is it appropriate to use tribe or nation?

Professor Hughes notes that this is a complicated issue as some political entities are officially tribes, while others are bands, clans, nations, confederacies. There is a move to call themselves Nations. This strategy emphasizes that Native Americans are speaking sovereign nation to sovereign nation when they deal with the US government and expect to be treated as

¹³ <http://artofthemooc.org/wiki/the-artifact-piece/> And, here is a remembrance of Luna: <https://hyperallergic.com/433437/james-luna-performance-artist-memorial/>

sovereign. Tribe is more racialized and is not very formal, it may not be a government structure. Uneasiness around tribe comes from this political situation.¹⁴

[An interesting discussion of the history of the use of tribe, band, nation, etc., can be found here: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Difference-Between-a-Tribe-and-a-Band-1673365>]

Prof Hughes referenced a few court cases that were decided depending on where the person was, in Indian Country or not.

Prof Hughes nation is confederated. In about 1800, three groups confederated into one, Choctaw. In 1830s they shifted to having one chief. Now there is an elected chief.

When touring we should choose a name for the people we are discussing, based on the goal of our talk. Think about whether we have a political goal and select appropriate term.

Notes on textual and oral language cultures

Prof Hughes mentioned the importance of oral tradition. In an oral tradition you are relying on relationships of trust, time, space, land, when you convey an important event or story. Somethings you tell everyone, somethings you guard. Writing things down is not context specific but the oral tradition is tied to indigenous practices, community, relationship. Professor Hughes notes that oral history is not always admitted legally but that she believes oral transmission of knowledge is reliable.

Often cultures that are traditionally oral, have recorded histories. For example, wampum belts are historical documents. Although not alphabetic, the content is a document. Bound on strings, wampum beads were used to create intricate patterns on belts used as a guide to narrate history, traditions and laws.¹⁵

Histories are also kept on skins and other materials. For example, *winter counts* are a record of history. Usually drawn on buffalo skin or deer hide, Lakota winter counts are composed of pictographs organized in spiral or horizontal rows. Each pictograph represents a year in history of a Lakota community. The pictographs were organized in chronological order so that the winter count provided an outline of events for the community's Keeper or oral historian.¹⁶

Will Rogers, a Cherokee citizen born in the Cherokee Nation, used political criticism in his performance which Prof Hughes says is a totally Cherokee thing to do. Rogers' earthy anecdotes and folksy style allowed him to poke fun at controversial topics in a way that was appreciated by a national audience, without offending his audience.

¹⁴ Discussions about the concept of sovereignty: <http://www.ncai.org/about-tribes> and <http://blog.nativepartnership.org/what-is-tribal-sovereignty/>

¹⁵ <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/wampum/>

¹⁶ <http://aktalakota.stjo.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=8993>

A docent asked a question about how to discuss Issues of oppression, violence, inequity, in Native American culture with young children. Professor Hughes suggested using cartoons because kids understand what it is to draw a person to look like a cartoon but since cartoons are not realistic representations, the stories are not as viscerally upsetting.

Prof Hughes suggested the following thought question for older students. Imagine a friend comes in and starts working on your laptop saying “You weren’t working on it so I thought I could use it.” Later they suggest “maybe we could both use it or co-manage it.” When does the laptop stop being yours? Is there a timeframe? Prof Hughes compared this to the situation with the Mashpee Wampanoag people who lost land because of their legal status at different points in time.¹⁷

A docent asked a question about how the knowledge she produces outside of her home is accepted within it. Prof Hughes’ tribe was excited that she got a PhD. Her nation is big on education and business but they care less about the specific details of what she is doing. She explains that what you do as academic includes writing a book in English and publishing within certain publishing houses. Her community doesn’t really need learning about what she is writing about but she may have resources that they could use. She mentioned that a teacher friend of hers went back to a reservation and taught a few classes.

A docent asked a question about whether native American art is considered folk art. Prof Hughes said that it is finally being recognized as fine art. She mentioned that a NY museum elevated a collection by moving it from one gallery to another. Here is an interesting announcement of an exhibition of Native American art at the Met

[\[https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/art-of-native-america-diker-collection \]](https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2018/art-of-native-america-diker-collection)

Notice, if you scroll down that they include this reference to the indigenous people who lived on the land where the museum is situated:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is situated in Lenapehoking, the homeland of Lenape peoples, and respectfully acknowledges their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to the area.

The page also mentions the Mets’ “ongoing dialogues with source communities,” and includes a short video introducing the exhibition by Ned Blackhawk (Western Shoshone), Professor of History and American Studies, Yale University.

¹⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/01/07/archives/new-jersey-pages-indians-lose-in-court-in-fight-to-gain-land-jury.html>