

WHO IS AN INDIAN?
Race, Blood, DNA, and the Politics of Indigeneity in the Americas

OVERVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

“But you don’t look Indian”; “I have a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood”; “My grandmother was a pure Carib”; “Are they real Caribs?”; “My DNA test results show that I am 38 percent Indian”; “The epicanthic folds on my eyelids and my shovel-shaped incisors tell you I am Taino”; “We have no Indians left, we are all *mestizo*”; “When we were small, our parents told us we were ‘Spanish’”; “He’s no Cherokee, he’s of the Wannabe Tribe.”

These and many other similar statements can be commonly heard across the Americas wherever indigenous identities have been discursively rendered into visible, physical categories, where indigenous identities have been reduced to bodily characteristics that can be mapped and indexed, certified and regulated. This project is about the ways that bio-politics shape indigenous identities across the Americas—whether in terms of racial phenotypes, blood quanta, or, of very late, DNA analysis—and the opportunities for fashioning indigenous identity beyond bio-political constraints. We are collectively concerned about the very real outcomes of biologized indigenous identities, where ultimately “the Indian” is defined out of existence, and we also wish to point to some of the paradoxes that create the opposite effect (vast numbers defined into an “Indian” category thanks to DNA testing) but at the expense of cultural integrity.

Context of Analysis

Racial identity shifts have underscored the mutually reinforcing processes of indigenous demographic and political resurgence in many parts of the Americas. The question of who is a “real Indian” seems to have much more force today, either as a means of validating or disqualifying claimants to indigenous identity, in a context where significant numbers of people in various parts

of the Americas are self-identifying as indigenous. According to 2000 US Census data, self-identified American Indians are becoming the US' fastest-growing minority, growing by more than 400 percent since 1960 (Shoemaker 1999:4; Nagel 1996:114). In Canada, more than twice as many people self-identify as aboriginal than those who are registered as "Status Indians." Brazil has seen its indigenous population grow by more than 300 percent in 50 years (Warren 1996:11-12). In Central America states have officially recognized indigenous communities in a break with previous narratives of amalgamation (Hooker 2005; Stocker 2005; Tilley 2002). The Caribbean has witnessed the resurgence of people claiming the identities of indigenous nations that were long thought to have been extinct, and some are using DNA testing services to prove their ancestry (Guitar et al. 2006; Martinez Cruzado 2002).

Issues of membership and self-identification are increasingly entangled in the operations of states and indigenous leaderships as they try to manage or contest the influx of "new claimants" to indigenous identities. While indigenous identity was never free of bodily associations, there appears to be a current revitalization, indeed an industrialization, of previous modes for fixing indigenous identity in physical substances (blood, genes, phenotype). With DNA testing creating new maps of indigenous identity we are witnessing the heightening of anxiety with each new opportunity for expanded indigenous self-identification, especially as the map is increasingly becoming the territory. The question of who has a legitimate right to proclaim an indigenous identity is one of the most divisive issues now afflicting Native North America (Churchill 2004:60). Lawrence argues that the "white need for certainty about the parameters of Indian 'difference'" is the root of casting Natives as racially Other (2004:4). Similarly, Sissons argues, "indigenous racial impurity has been regarded as...threatening to the natural order and a cause for colonial and post-colonial concern" (2005:38). Others note that long-established norms of racialization are now under fire, and that many lives stand to be affected in material ways from both the maintenance and resistance to these norms, in ways that can affect the whole society (Garrouette 2003).

Focus and Objectives

The proposed project brings together both leading and promising scholars to compare and theorize contemporary policies, ideologies, and technologies for regulating, certifying, and administering indigenous identifications, and the alternatives for indigeneity beyond biologized determinants. The project has three main aims, presented here in ascending order of importance. The first involves the participants' recognition of the need to move beyond the telling of local stories of calculations of indigenous identity, toward a more comprehensive analytical methodology embracing the Americas, thereby promising fertile ground for conceptualizations of what are often striking similarities coupled with theoretically fruitful analysis of differences. Thus one aim is to produce a transnational way of talking about race and indigeneity in the Americas. The second aim is the theoretical development of a unified, Americas-wide, problematic which can be termed the bio-politics of indigeneity, focused on race (phenotype), blood, and DNA. The third aim involves theorizing the current practices and future possibilities of indigeneity beyond the restrictions of bodily markers, and even beyond Indianness.

We collectively seek to reconnoiter histories and concepts of race and blood, and the impact of the new genetics, in a comparative transnational perspective in order to create a terrain for common understanding and collective theorizing, on the way to perceiving indigenities beyond bio-politics. Our primary focus is on the bio-politics of indigeneity and their inversions, reformulations of hegemonic ideas of race and blood, transgressions against these ideas, and alternate conceptualizations of indigeneity.

WHAT THE PROJECT PROMISES TO ACHIEVE

This project will advance the theoretical study of indigeneity by bringing issues of power and citizenship into a meeting with “embodied” ways of knowing and narrating indigenous identity. A further contribution to knowledge will come from our exploring the question of whether indigeneity is simply a question of identity. We will also consider how in the absence of a strong basis in visible racial difference, some indigenes go about articulating alternative routes to indigeneity. We proceed to discuss a more diffuse indigeneity as an evolving epistemology and ontology that cannot easily be tied to particular places or specific bodies. We also intend to evaluate how indigenous philosophies of identity and community might allow us to reframe the questions we ask about “Indianness” and “indigeneity,” even as we debate the contents and applicability of these terms.

The contributors develop a comprehensive framework for understanding and explaining racial approaches to indigenous identity at the intersections of colonialism, state governance, and indigenous political resurgence, by way of a cross-cultural and comparative analysis of indigenous cases from across the Americas. The second aim of the project is to explore the theoretical and conceptual bases for conceiving a unified problematic—the bio-politics of indigeneity—which has at least three manifestations: “race” at the broadest level but also involving culturally specific valuations of particular phenotypical traits in accordance with local norms of racialization; blood quantum measurements and the calculus of identity; and, DNA testing. The third goal of the collection is to examine the social possibilities and cultural contours for an indigeneity that exceeds or transcends the criteria of bodily markers, and for disciplinary reformulations.

The first topical objective is concerned with finding common empirical, theoretical and conceptual ground for a comprehensive understanding of race and indigenous identity in the Americas. Our objectives here include:

- analyzing diverse histories and conceptualizations of “purity” and “mixed-blood” indigenous identities in different parts of the Americas, and the reasons for those differences; and,
- to reveal the extent to which concepts of the “real Indian” are of universal concern across the Americas, and whether such concepts are equivalent in their meanings and social deployments.

The second topical objective is to examine the bio-politics of indigenous identification, where

bodies are seized upon as conduits for a number of projects. Our focus here is on:

- attempts by indigenous communities to build internal unity and external exclusivity;
- governmental attempts to reduce the numbers of institutionally recognized “Indians”;
- or, a means of achieving status as indigenous;
- indigenous notions of blood and their possible differences in meaning from Western notions of blood;
- the roles (competing, contrasting, mutually reinforcing) between science, kinship, law, and custom in determining membership in indigenous communities; and,
- the extent to which acts of quantification and certification help make visible previously “invisible indigenes” or are instead conceptual weapons in an armory designed to displace and deny indigenous presences.

The third topical objective will engage us in discerning the potential for re-centering indigeneity on culture and process, rather than biological fixity. We will consider how millions of indigenous persons who are described by others as “half-castes,” “mixed-bloods,” “non-traditional,” and “Westernized”—usually the majority of self-identified indigenous persons—are regulated by regimes of what Jeffrey Sissons called “oppressive authenticity” and sometimes find new ways of fostering an indigeneity that is not necessarily tied to “Indian-ness.” We are thus interested in exploring the potential for alternative indigeneities.

Questions & aims

The central questions to be addressed throughout the project include the following, in no particular order:

- ◆ Is the “real Indian” a construct of universal concern across the Americas?
- ◆ Do racial characterizations of indigenous identity, especially in terms of phenotypical appearance, prevail in places where “indigenous” has not been defined under the law?
- ◆ Are there diverse conceptualizations, both dominant and indigenous, of “race” and how do these confront one another in practice?
- ◆ Is the concern with mapping identities a by-product of the resurgence of indigenous identity politics?
- ◆ What are the issues of power and citizenship that are tied up with ways of narrating indigenous identity in terms of the body?
- ◆ What are the historical contexts and political economic frameworks that work to secure, reproduce or transform these modes of identifying the indigenous?
- ◆ What options are there for new ways of being/becoming indigenous under current regimes of certification, classification and surveillance?
- ◆ In the absence of a strong basis in visible racial difference, how do some indigenes go about articulating their own identities?
- ◆ Is indigeneity only or even primarily a question of identity?
- ◆ Is the emphasis on the *gene* in the indigene an inescapable feature for representing indigeneity in Western society? Is it inescapably Western?

- ◆ While blood, DNA, and race are biologized forms of identifying indigenes, do other discourses and representational possibilities lurk within such constructs?
- ◆ Are there any paradoxes that emerge from attempted exclusion via DNA testing/race/blood quantum?
- ◆ Is it wise for anthropology to wash its hands of the messy business of judging Indianness by allowing communities to make the decision-making?
- ◆ If indigeneity escapes the confines of the biological body, does this mean that we need to drastically undo conceptions of “new Indians,” “born again Indians,” “hobby Indians,” and “wannabe Indians”?
- ◆ Does the “post-traditional condition” effectively mean that “anything goes” where self-identification and recognition are concerned?

TOWARDS THE COMPLETED VOLUME

The move toward an edited volume occurs in three stages. First, individual contributors will produce their papers, to be circulated by the organizer. Second, at the workshop, contributors will: (a) present a synthesis of their contribution, explaining the importance of the issues they selected and the way they framed them; (b) they will address how their work addresses the larger themes of the workshop; and, (c) they will discuss and propose the key questions and issues that we should all be addressing. Third, contributors will present revised drafts of their papers to better match common themes and issues to be addressed in the published version of each paper.

Within a three-month period after the workshop (by November of 2007), contributors will present new drafts, revised to match the key themes and questions to be outlined in the concluding summary of the workshop (produced by the organizer) and in follow-up discussions between the organizer/editor and individual contributors.

The intended aim is to produce a coherent framework, allowing for theoretical diversity, as a means of structuring an edited volume to be published by the University of Toronto Press.

LIST OF PAPERS (in order of presentation at the seminar)

1. **Introduction: Sighting and Certifying Indigeneity in the Americas and the Prospects for Moving Beyond Race**
Maximilian C. Forte
2. **“How Much Indian are You?” A Cross-border Perspective**
Philip C. Bellfy
3. **Is “Indianness” Even Necessary? The Nationhood Struggles of Federally Unrecognized Algonquins in Eastern Ontario**
Bonita Lawrence
4. **“Inuitness” and Territoriality in Canada**
Donna Patrick
5. **Beothuk and/or Mi'gmaq?**
Dennis A. Bartels and Alice L. Bartels
6. **DNA.coms: Genetics and (Native American) Race On-line**
Kimberly Tallbear
7. **Law, Nationality, Blood and the Cherokee Resurgence**
Julia M. Coates
8. **Locating Identity: The Role of Place in Chorotega Identity in Costa Rica**
Karen Stocker
9. **Indian Enough? The Consequences and Contradictions of Selecting Indigenous Students in South America**
María Elena García
10. **Encountering Indigeneity: International Funding of Indigenous Organizations in Peru**
José Antonio Lucero
11. **A Heritage Beyond Race: Positioning Carib Indigeneity in Contemporary Trinidad and Tobago**
Maximilian C. Forte
12. **Taíno Reflections: African Legacy in American Indigenous**
José Barreiro
13. **The Canary in the Coal Mine: What Sociology Can Learn from American Indians**
Eva Marie Garroutte

14. Does Identity Make an Indian? The Retreat of Anthropology

Jonathan W. Warren