

NATIVE STUDIES VERSUS THE ACADEMIC ESTABLISHMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Native Studies as an inter-disciplinary university field is very young with an uncertain future.¹ It has had a troubled history and could disappear as a discipline. As academics we have a role to play to insure that it grows, diversifies, and matures. To the Native people themselves we have very complex relationships that involve the encouragement of their participation in academic matters; fostering pride in their racial and cultural heritage; advising Natives and governments on our views of policies and programs; and doing research and teaching in subjects of interest to Native people. This paper is on the other direction of relationships, between us as specialists in Native Studies and our professional disciplines, our academic institutions, and our students.

The central problem of Native Studies is that disciplines and academic institutions developed out of a European charter culture and, where culture is a subject outside of the physical and biological sciences, are designed to enhance and teach the European ethnic heritage. Thus universities in Canada are ethnic institutions and the ethnicity they assume, reflect, and teach is an ethnicity of a European heritage. This is the establishment that Native Studies must redirect if it is to survive in the hostile halls of academe. It has already been challenging the old conservative monopoly of its parental discipline of anthropology for over a decade now. It must now seriously challenge the conventional curricula of departments of history, literature, fine arts, sociology, and so forth. Canada still

has only several sociologists with long term professional commitments to research and teaching in Native Studies, although we have seen dozens more jump briefly into the field for one or two research projects.

NATIVE STUDENTS AND NATIVE STUDIES

In my text on Native Studies I mentioned how crucial Native students were to the development of the discipline of Native Studies. York University is a case study in which there are too few Native students to take the classes to provide a strong push for the full development of Native Studies outside of anthropology. Anthropology has been in a state of declining enrolments now for about seven years and without those students or Native students we now had to abandon two classes. Native Studies in the university as a whole involves only four full courses at the undergraduate level. We do have some new bright spots at the graduate level, a seminar and field course on Indian leadership in Canada in the Faculty of Environmental Studies, a half-year course on Indian rights in the law school, and one or two students working on M.A. degrees in Native Studies within the Inter-disciplinary Studies Program.

Native Studies constitutes some 0.13% of the 1980-81 undergraduate curriculum at York University, four courses out of about 3,000 total undergraduate courses. Arthur Ray teaches "The Cultural-Historical Geography of Canadian Indians". Russ Chace has a history course on "Amerindian Mexico and Guatemala". This year we hired Joan Vastokas and Helmut Fuchs as visiting professors to teach "Native Arts of the Americas". And finally, I teach our general Native Studies course, "Indians of Canada".

Jordan Paper puts some Indian religion and philosophy into his humanities courses. Evelyn Kallen adds Native materials to her race and ethnic relations courses. Conrad Heidenreich uses some Native examples in his cultural geography courses. And Ed Dosman does some analysis of Native problems in his political science courses. If we added the proportion that Native Studies comes in as an element in courses such as these we might be able to add the equivalent of about three more courses, for a total of seven out of 3,000 or 0.23% for the total undergraduate content of Native Studies in a university with 23,000 students. In the three departments of

history at York (Arts, Atkinson and Glendon) there are 196 area-oriented courses: Europe and Western cultures - 92.3%, Asia and Africa - 7.1%, and Native Indian - 0.5%.

Our curriculum is conservative, prestige and class-oriented, ethnocentric, and European-oriented. It is mostly European-heritage professors teaching European-heritage students about the elite elements of their own heritage. It is essentially European studies.

York's students are quite provincial. Our foreign area studies programs on Africa, Latin America, and East Asia are so unsuccessful in terms of majors that they have more professors than student majors. For example, we list 22 professors in East Asian studies and typically have only three or four majors in the field. African studies is the same situation. The inter-disciplinary programs that are oriented by an European heritage have many majors: urban studies - 73, law and society - 29, and Canadian studies - 18. The students and the self-interested decisions they make about the courses they want to take are an essential part of this European studies academic establishment. Canadians are having a hard time making the transition to North American. Our history department is so conservative that the only two first year level courses offered are both about Europe. Then you can go on to advanced studies and have full-year courses on such esoteric topics as Tudor and Stuart England, but they do not have a single course on Canadian Indian history.

Within my own department the particularly European-oriented professors managed for several years to get their courses defined as "core courses", which are of higher academic status and are thus required by anthropology majors, while Native Studies courses were defined as peripheral. Our history of anthropology theory course ignores or mocks the American theorists who worked with Native materials, in the early development of evolutionary historical and diffusionist ideas, such as Morgan, Boas, Kroeber, Sapir and White. Instead we teach Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Malinowski, and Radcliffe-Brown, all Europeans. Our department is so European-oriented that we do not even teach regular physical anthropology and we do not have an archaeology program, perhaps the only large university in North America to lack such a field of basic research and teaching. In anthropology at York we have had the following numbers of course year enrolments in Native Studies,

showing a peak in 1973 and then a steady decline through the decade:

TABLE I: ENROLMENTS IN NATIVE STUDIES AT YORK UNIVERSITY, 1970-1980.

1970 -	7.5
1 -	137.0
2 -	117.0
3 -	167.0
4 -	156.0
5 -	110.0
6 -	63.0
7 -	58.5
8 -	42.0
9 -	18.0
1980 -	22.0

HISTORY AS NATIVE STUDIES

While exploring the weaknesses in university curricula on North American Indian Studies, I was surprised by the ethnocentrism of the discipline of ethnocentric inadequacies of American textbooks over a decade ago. Bowker (1972) described how the proportion of material on Indian and Black events in recent U.S. history textbooks averaged only about 11 each at the high school level and that the immoral actions of Whites tend to be ignored. McDiarmid and Pratt (1971) showed that social science textbooks in Ontario teach prejudice with unfavorable evaluations of Indians.

The field of history pretends to range the world in time and space but is still largely unscientific story telling and heroic narratives of historians about their own ethnic traditions. There is little exploration of genuinely different cultural traditions than that of the historian. And there is rarely ever any cross-cultural analysis, so the attributions of causes are left to conjectures about the local tradition being studied. This self-satisfying recreation would not be a serious problem except that the readers and students end up narrow-minded as well, thinking that cultural processes operate in the story telling way that historians write.

While there is a place for ethnic pride in academia and ethnic history is a part of that, we also live in an increasingly interdependent world culture that has to be careful about the prejudices of excessive ethnic nationalism. It is now necessary, to challenge historians, to ask them to broaden their research and teaching to cover the world.

To explore the patterns of ethnic orientation in major universities I had a count made of the number of undergraduate courses with area orientations.² My sample included only large universities on the grounds that they would have the greatest range of courses and the largest proportion of courses outside of the European cultural tradition. I wanted to test for patterns by nation, region, and local non-European populations. I thus used a matched sample of fourteen large universities on the two sides of the international border in seven regions across North America. The results of this survey are shown in Table II and Table III.

Some 80% of the areal content of history courses is on Europe and the European heritage in the Americas, the heritage of the charter cultures, the majority of the professors and their students. Asia and Oceania is the most important "foreign" or non-European area with 17.3%, Africa is next with only 2.4%. and the Native American Indians, Metis, and Eskimos have less than 1% of the areal curricula with courses offered at only a few of the fourteen universities. The U.S. universities in general and the more prominent universities, such as Harvard, Minnesota, Washington and McGill, have a much higher proportion of non-European heritage courses than the Canadian schools or the less prominent schools. The University of Saskatchewan with only 6% is markedly narrow in its curriculum even for Canada. This latter condition is correlated with several surveys and statistical measures that show that the population of Saskatchewan tends to be particularly ethnocentric and has the highest levels of anti-Indian racism of any province in Canada (Price 1979: Chapter 9).

There seems to be no correlation between the prominence of Asian minority population in a region and the number of Asian courses. Some correlation seems to be present between the amount of local Blacks and the number of African courses. Thus, for example, Halifax has one of the old and large Black communities in Canada and we do find that its Dalhousie University has the

TABLE II: AREA ORIENTED HISTORY COURSES OUTSIDE OF THE EUROPEAN HERITAGE AT SELECTED U.S. AND CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES

	Asia and Oceania	Africa	Native American	Total
Dalhousie	9%	5%	0	14%
Maine	14%	0	0	14%
McGill	23%	4%	0	27%
Harvard	37%	4%	0	41%
York	13%	3%	1%	17%
SUNY-Albany	20%	1%	0	21%
Manitoba	16%	2%	5%	23%
Wisconsin	14%	2%	3%	19%
Saskatchewan	5%	0	1%	6%
Minnesota	25%	6%	0%	31%
Alberta	17%	0	1%	18%
Montana	11%	2%	0	13%
UBC	13%	0	0	13%
Washington	25%	4%	0	29%
Averages	17.3%	2.4%	0.8%	20.4%
Canadian Average	13.7%	2.0%	1.1%	16.8%
U.S. Average	20.9%	2.7%	0.4%	24.0%

TABLE III: UNIVERSITIES BY ORDER OF NON-EUROPEAN HERITAGE HISTORY COURSES

Harvard	41%	Manitoba	23%	Dalhousie	14%
Minnesota	31%	SUNY-Albany	21%	Maine	14%
Washington	29%	Wisconsin	19%	U.B.C.	13%
McGill	27%	Alberta	18%	Montana	13%
		York	17%	Saskatchewan	6%

highest proportion of African courses in the Canadian sample. There is an even stronger correlation between the proportion of native courses and the proportion of native people in the population. The correlation is even higher if we take into account the level of current Indian activism. That is, the universities with even a single course,

Ontario, Manitoba, Wisconsin, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, are the places in this strip of states and provinces where current Indian political activism is the strongest. While Montana, Washington, and British Columbia do have large Indian populations, the Indians there have done little to force their local universities to recognize their existence.

The historians' reasons for not doing Indian research are that anthropologists already have a monopoly in the field, the written sources that historians work with are poor in the field, and their students want to learn about their own heritage. If Indian history courses were proportioned on national ethnic population grounds, the three courses at Wisconsin would fill the American quota of our sample, because the 0.4% course average is the same as the Indian proportion of the national population. Canada's Native proportion is six times greater, 2.5%, so on these grounds alone the 1.1% should be more than doubled. The important challenges of historians are to broaden their views of the world, to study and teach outside of their own heritage, to be more sensitive to the histories of minorities in their midst, and to use more cross-cultural analyses.

NATIVE STUDIES AS NATIVE STUDIES

Students in the early 1970's were initially attracted to Native Studies at York primarily because they perceived the conditions of the Native people as a significant social welfare problem in Canada. They saw "the Indian problem" as their problem, as part of the collective national guilt, in a time of strong nationalism. They had some mild interests in the exotic or primitive or alternative life styles of the subject, but they were not very interested in Native Studies as a social science or as a professional discipline. And their specifically Canadian nationalism and parochialism was quite strong in that they were much more interested in the Canadian Indians than the U.S. or Latin American Indians.

Today, from the perception of York students the so-called Indian problem is not the kind of issue that students can perceive themselves doing much about any more. Now there are a lot of strong Indian associations and Indian politicians who can negotiate directly with governments. The strong sense of a cause, with protest against the political establishment, has gone out of the subject for

most students. The few students I have now are mostly women and their interests are quite broad, many now preferring to do their research on aspects of fine arts and the traditionally female service professions of education and nursing. It is difficult to get female students interested in such important but traditionally male subjects as economic development or government policy formation. If Native Studies is going to develop a representative balance from all the academic disciplines we will need to encourage our students to fill out the empty or weak subfields, rather than just following their first inclinations, their traditional sex role patterning, or the popular fashions of research.

I think we have to accept the idea that Native Studies in North America is inherently a critical discipline, one that challenges the European heritage culture. We have to recognize that the majority society, the charter culture, has a vested interest in the European heritage disciplines. Those professors have great difficulty even recognizing other perspectives, that Tudor and Stuart England is an extremely obscure and irrelevant subject in North America. They need to be told that and to be pressured to find a place for at least elements of Native Studies in every discipline in the curriculum: dance, music, religion, philosophy, sociology, and so forth. They need to understand that the exclusion of Native Studies in these circumstances is a form of institutional racism, and that the students need to be encouraged to expand their intellectual horizons beyond their European heritage.

NOTES

1. Parts of this paper were prepared for the Native Studies Session, Conference of the Ontario Association of Sociology and Anthropology, Guelph University, 1980.
2. Methods courses and graduate courses were not included in the calculations. Bill Novack, a graduate student specializing in Native American History at York, did the data collection for me.

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