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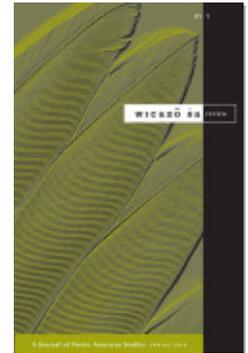
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## Editor's Commentary: Honoring the Legacy of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

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## Editor's Commentary

### Honoring the Legacy of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

*James Riding In*

When Melanie K. Yazzie and Nick Estes approached me several years ago with the suggestion for a special issue of *Wicazo Sa Review* in honor of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn's many accomplishments, I became ecstatic because these graduate students had recognized the significance of her intellectual contributions to our knowledge. Liz, as we call her, truly deserves such an acknowledgment of her accomplishments from the journal that she cofounded in 1985.<sup>1</sup> Although now in her mid-eighties and living in the Black Hills near Rapid City, South Dakota, she continues to fiercely oppose the crippling effects of colonialism and anti-Indianism on Indian life and sovereignty. What should we expect? After all, she is legendary for her fervor to develop American Indian studies as a stand-alone academic discipline, criticism of academia for its flawed research methodologies and analyses pertaining to the history of Indian–white relations, scathing critiques of imperialistic U.S. Indian laws and policies, and promotion of Indian nationalism as a strategy of Indian survival as distinct, self-governing political entities.

In this commentary, I will share a few of my memories about the role that Cook-Lynn played in the creation of the American Indian studies program at Arizona State University (ASU). I had the good fortune to meet her on February 8, 1993, at Scottsdale Community College on the Salt River Pima and Maricopa Indian Community in Arizona during a regional hearing of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs about amending the “toothless” American Indian Religious

Freedom Act of 1978. Dr. Beatrice Medicine,<sup>2</sup> a mutual friend, introduced us. Of course, I did not realize then that Cook-Lynn and her writings would have such a lasting influence on my views about what American Indian studies should be.<sup>3</sup>

Cook-Lynn's association with ASU started in the late 1990s. As Dr. Carol Chiago Lujan, I, and others began the work of developing an AIS program, we called on Cook-Lynn for her expertise and leadership in this area. She subsequently agreed to come to campus during several spring semesters in the capacity of a visiting professor. During meetings and one-on-one conversations, she spoke with eloquence and authority about the defensive, regulatory, and transformative roles of AIS while stressing that AIS must be grounded on the principles of sovereignty and indigenism.<sup>4</sup> With the support of the ASU administration and our allies, we have built a stand-alone program with its own paradigm, faculty, curriculum, methodologies, journal, conference, and undergraduate and graduate programs.<sup>5</sup> Our curriculum has grown to include a rich array of course offerings about matters such as U.S. Indian law, U.S. policy, human rights, governance, repatriation and sacred place issues, colonization/decolonization, human rights, health, historical trauma, activism, leadership, economic development, intellectualism, and language. Our eight full-time faculty members, all citizens of various Indian nations, earned doctorates in AIS, history, philosophy, education, sociology, and social work.<sup>6</sup>

Adhering to a Cook-Lynn tenet,<sup>7</sup> we faculty members view our research, teaching, and service as a "'sacred' responsibility to Indian nations undertaken for the sake of cultural survival."<sup>8</sup> Essentially then, the AIS model at ASU is tacitly grounded in the notion that being an AIS professor is substantially more than an eight-to-five job: it is a way of life that entails a willingness to make sacrifices for the common good.

We strive to equip our students with a useful set of skills for success in various employment settings with practical and intellectual knowledge of Indian issues. Some of our undergraduate alumni have entered graduate studies and law school while others have found employment in the public and private sectors. Of particular note, Stephen Roe Lewis, a 2005 graduate, is now completing his first term as the governor of the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona.<sup>9</sup> Graduates of our relatively new master's program are finding similar opportunities.

Over the years, ASU's administrative support for AIS and other Indian-focused programs has grown. On August 31, 2015, President Michael M. Crow sent an e-mail message to ASU departments under the subject heading "ASU Commitment to American Indian Tribes." It states:

Arizona State University is located in Indian Country;  
there are 22 tribal nations in Arizona. The Tempe campus sits

on the ancestral homelands of those American Indian tribes that have inhabited this place for centuries, including the Akimel O'odham (Pima) and Pee Posh (Maricopa) peoples.

In keeping with the design aspirations of the New American University, ASU seeks to embrace our place, connect with tribal communities, and enable the success of each American Indian student. We reaffirm the university's commitment to these goals and acknowledge that everyone, the entire ASU community, is responsible for their achievement.

ASU continues to develop an impressive cohort of scholars engaged in American Indian cultural, social, educational, legal, and economic issues. We have built world-class programs in American Indian Studies, American Indian Legal Studies, and Indigenous conceptions of justice. Our work, however, is not complete. We must further enhance our capacity to leverage place, transform society, conduct use-inspired research, enable student success, work across disciplines, integrate Indigenous knowledge and engage Indigenous issues globally. We are committed to providing access, retaining and graduating American Indian students in a climate that is welcoming and respectful of their languages and cultures. Foundational to these goals, we commit to creating an environment of success and possibility for American Indian students at ASU.

We are dedicated to supporting tribal nations in achieving futures of their own making. We will partner with tribal nations to: address the ravages of paternalism; improve educational achievement of American Indian children, youth, and adults; create innovative and appropriate use and development of natural resources; conceptualize and implement responses to physical and mental health challenges; and build and strengthen leadership capacities to address challenges for Native nations in the 21st Century and beyond. And we will enhance and foster an environment of success and unlimited possibilities for American Indians at ASU.

This work acknowledges our indisputable recognition of place and reinforces our mission as the New American University.<sup>10</sup>

Cook-Lynn's vision indeed inspired the building of what President Crow calls a "world-class program" in AIS. Other universities wanting to improve their AIS departments and programs would be wise to look at Cook-Lynn's scholarship about AIS and what has occurred at ASU.

In conclusion, Yazzie and Estes have done a remarkable job of “essentializing Elizabeth Cook-Lynn.” This collection of compelling essays, written by upcoming and established Indian scholars, demonstrates that her body of work is continuing to exert a powerful influence over academic thought and the development of scholarship. It is, therefore, a meaningful mark of respect to her legacy as a fearless intellectual warrior.

## A U T H O R   B I O G R A P H Y

**James Riding In**, a citizen of the Pawnee Nation, became the editor of *Wicazo Sa Review* in 2004 at the request of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn.

## N O T E S

- 1 The other founders were Roger Buffalohead, Beatrice Medicine, and William Willard.
- 2 Beatrice Medicine, a Standing Rock Sioux and noted anthropologist, entered the spirit world in 2005.
- 3 See James Riding In, “Presidential Address: American Indian Studies: Our Challenges,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2005): 65, 69–71. Also see Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), “Who Stole Native American Studies?,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 9–28, and *A Separate Country: Postcoloniality and American Indian Nations* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2012).
- 4 For a discussion of these functions, see Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars*, 114–53.
- 5 For an AIS paradigm inspired by the views of Cook-Lynn and other Indian scholars, see James Riding In, “Editor’s Commentary,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 26, no. 2 (2011): 6–8. Also see Cook-Lynn, “Who Stole Native American Studies?”
- 6 American Indian Studies, <https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu/people/>.
- 7 Cook-Lynn, *New Indians, Old Wars*, xiii.
- 8 American Indian Studies Paradigm,” American Indian Studies, <https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu/ais-paradigm>. The paradigm on the AIS website is a shortened version of the one published in my “Editor’s Commentary.”
- 9 “Executive Branch, Governor Stephen Roe Lewis,” Gila River Indian Community, [http://restoretest.mygilariver.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=91&Itemid=517](http://restoretest.mygilariver.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=91&Itemid=517).
- 10 Michael Crow to DL.WG.PRESIDENT.UMT, August 31, 2015, Office of the President, [https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu/sites/default/files/asu\\_commitment\\_to\\_american\\_indian\\_tribes.pdf](https://americanindian.clas.asu.edu/sites/default/files/asu_commitment_to_american_indian_tribes.pdf).