

What is Native American and Indigenous Studies?

(And Why Isn't it Here at Brandeis?)

A Zine by Rachel Wang

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, a scholar of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, has defined the discipline of Native American Studies as “the **endogenous** study of First Nation cultures and history,” meaning it would be different from other disciplines in two big ways:

- ★ “It would emerge from within Native people's enclaves and geographies, languages and experiences”
- ★ “It would refute the exogenous seeking of truth through isolation (i.e., the “ivory tower”) that has been used in “history, anthropology, and related disciplines all captivated by the scientific method of objectivity”

Cook-Lynn thinks Native American Studies should center on **indigenusness** and **sovereignty**.

There are **114** colleges and universities in Massachusetts.

Only **5** have Native American Studies programs. Why?

There are probably a lot of reasons, but Cook-Lynn identifies a major one. She says that the academy is concerned with the “quintessential question of Western culture, ‘how does it fit in?’” But those who actually care about NAIS aren't interested in answering that question. Cook-Lynn says,

“The truth is that Native American Studies does not “fit,” nor can it, nor should it. Rather, its meaningfulness stems from the fact that it challenges almost everything that America has to offer in education and society.”

How Can We Bring NAIS To Brandeis? This is a HUGE question with lots of potential answers. Here are some of my ideas:

We can organize together. Send me an email at rashellwang@brandeis.edu if you'd like to be part of a student group that advocates for NAIS at Brandeis!

We can meet with Dean Hodgson to talk about why NAIS is important at Brandeis and we can propose a NAIS cluster hire. We can create a petition.

Brandeis has already demonstrated an interest in NAIS by hiring Lee Bloch, a 2-year postdoctoral fellow in NAIS. The university usually creates these short-term positions to gauge student interest in the emerging discipline. So if you're into it, take a class with Lee in the Spring (their last semester at Brandeis!) or stop by their office to chat. (Lee didn't ask me to plug them here--I just genuinely think they're great!)

Sources:

Cook-Lynn, Elizabeth. “Who Stole Native American Studies?” *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1997, pp. 9–28. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1409161.