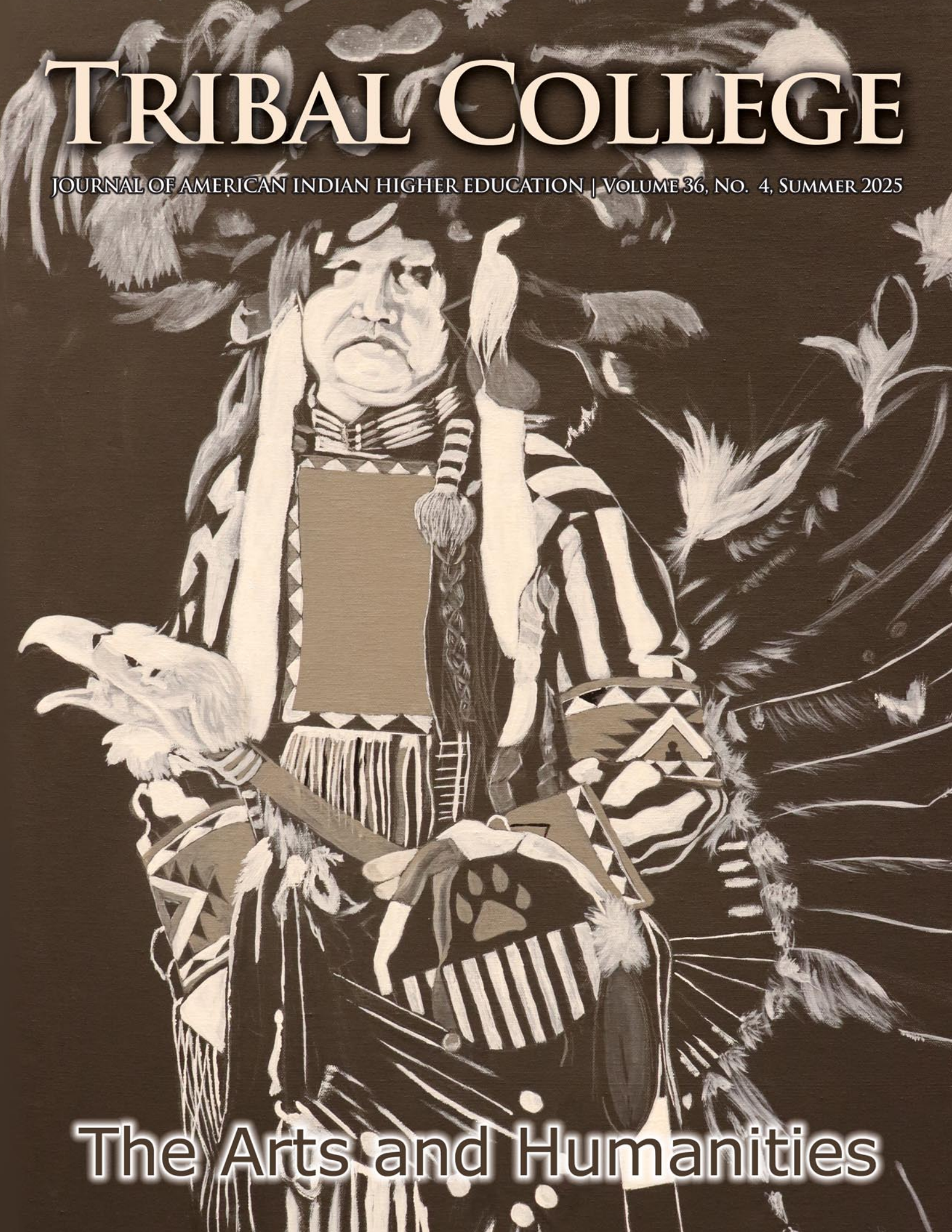


TRIBAL COLLEGE



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The Arts and Humanities

▲ MEDIA REVIEWS

S-Yéwyáw Awaken

Directed by Liz Marshall

Bullfrog Films & Elders Films Inc. (2023)

91 minutes

Review by Norma Marshall



Liz Marshall's documentary film, *S-Yéwyáw Awaken*, focuses on First Nations children who were forcibly removed from their homes to attend the residential schools in Canada. The film opens with a gathering of Native people with the group leader asking each person to imagine "broken bricks . . . that will never fit together again . . . to imagine the bricks falling to the ground . . . to walk away is to decolonize . . . to listen and to feel is to Indigenize." The leader explains that the shattering of systems creates space for the natural way of knowing to rise. Native people seek the Creator for strength, healing, and encouragement. We sit together in a sacred way, and you are welcome with open arms.

Throughout the film, one can see orange shirts with the slogan "Every Child Matters." Native people commemorated Orange Shirt Day on September 30, 2024, to remember the children of the residential schools and to recognize Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The documentary shows the determination to bring about healing from the past and to bring healing to today's generation. In many Native American tribes, historical trauma leads to purpose and traditional healing and wellness. Of special importance is traditional training and leadership through the elders and into prosperity through the wealth of healthy children.

In the film, a young man asks an elder and chief about the gifting of the drum. The elder explains that the drums and regalia had been abolished by the government's Indian agents. He encourages the youth to learn how to carry the drum and to revive the things lost for many years through the very spirit that was taken away along with the children of the residential schools.

First Nations people look to reconnect to the land and the energy of the land. For example, canoeing connects the canoe family to the land and ancestors. A young man asks an elder and grandmother for teaching to awaken the canoe and how the youth can be caregivers of the canoe paddles and the people. The elder and grandmother speak of the totem and the Creator—the great mystery—that helps them to be humble and true to ancient faith. She mentions the Red Road to the encampment of our fathers across the "River of Hope."

Residential schools in Canada are synonymous with the boarding schools in the U.S. The federal government in the U.S. looked for ways to terminate, exterminate, desecrate, and assimilate. The U.S. federal government used the concept "kill the Indian, save the man" as the solution to the "Indian problem." But we have always been here. We hold aboriginal title, and we hold this land in common.

Later in the film, a young woman meets with another chief to develop a program called "Coming Home for the Children" that seeks to connect them to the land. The chief explains his experience fasting while in a cave under a waterfall. The purpose was to release pieces of oneself from childhood that we do not need to carry anymore, and to forgive atrocities that happened to the children, as the heaviness will stick with the person. First Nations people lived through Canada's child welfare removal system and now call back all that was taken from them, including songs and the children themselves. It takes a lifetime to heal from the trauma.

One segment in the documentary shows an elder and grandmother who advises a young man to ground himself before

becoming a teacher, clarifying that he is a tool and that he should work to make himself a better tool. Another person highlighted in the documentary recalls the abuse of young boys that continued even after they left the residential school. During a court hearing, attorneys offered him an out-of-court settlement of \$1 million. He tore up the check.

Today, Native people still encounter atrocities against their young people. The national attention given to the repatriation of the remains of the children who died at the residential schools has been positive and promising. We cannot remain silent any longer. We must educate the young children and the youth to be aware and to not allow history to repeat itself. *S-Yéwyáw Awaken* illuminates that healing and cleansing begins when we return to our humble beginnings.

Norma Marshall (Muscogee) is a senior faculty member at the College of the Muscogee Nation.

From Diné'tah to Denendeh: Restoring Relations Through Stories

By Renae Watchman

University of Arizona Press (2022)

222 pages

Review by Shaina A. Nez



The book *From Diné'tah to Denendeh: Restoring Relations Through Stories* explores Indigenous community narratives and film, focusing on Shiprock, New Mexico, and Denendeh in Canada's Northwest Territories. The author provides valuable insights into Navajo storytelling through conversations with community members. The book is recommended for those interested in Indigenous stories and cinematic expressions.

The book's strength lies in its focus on the perspectives of Navajo community members, adding depth to the discussion of storytelling. However, it lacks diverse voices among Navajo creative writers who are actively preserving and innovating within this tradition. Including a broader range of perspectives could enrich the dialogue around Navajo storytelling and its evolution in relation to the future.

Structurally, the book might benefit from elements of creative nonfiction to enhance the reader's engagement and understanding of the complexities of Navajo narratives. The author's positionality may have opened avenues for deeper exploration of the themes of storytelling, particularly through the works of contemporary Navajo nonfiction authors. Additionally, revisiting the contributions of early Navajo writers with an emphasis on personal storytelling could provide a more nuanced historical context.

In the chapter "Diné Diegesis: 5th World," Watchman initiates a focused conversation with selected Navajo creatives. However, the exploration of how Navajo storytelling can transcend the Glittering World feels somewhat limited. While Indigenous justice-related terminology is employed, the lack of Navajo-specific terms may weaken the connection to the cultural roots of these concepts. The author's introduction of the term "hane'tonomy" represents an interesting blending of Navajo and English but may benefit from additional insights from a wider range of Navajo voices which could fully address the complexities of autonomy in storytelling and filmmaking.

A broader inclusion of perspectives from Navajo writers and filmmakers could also illuminate the connections between settler

colonialism and contemporary narratives. Engaging with a diverse array of knowledge holders would allow for a more dynamic discourse on how terminology and concepts can evolve, centering prose and film in the process. Finally, while Watchman's personal stories contribute meaningfully to the narrative, a deeper integration of personal storytelling from other Navajo creatives could further enrich the discussion.

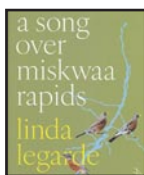
In conclusion, *From Dinétah to Denendeh* serves as a thoughtful foundation for exploring Navajo storytelling but calls for further research and engagement with a wider spectrum of Navajo voices. As the landscape of Navajo creativity continues to evolve, there is significant potential for new forms of identity and expression that not only challenge traditional narratives but also engage in meaningful dialogues with other Indigenous communities navigating similar transformations.

Shaina A. Nez, PhD, is Táchií'nii born for Áshijhi and serves Diné College as a senior lecturer in creative writing and English.

A Song Over Miskwaa Rapids

By Linda LeGarde Grover
University of Minnesota Press (2023)
149 pages

Review by Elaine Fleming



A Song Over Miskwaa Rapids is based on the lives and stories of the people of the imaginary Mozhay Point Band of Chippewa. It is a story of Ojibwe teachings, fractionated allotment lands, economic development, and a “gruesome secret.”

Ojibwe author, Linda LeGarde Grover writes that in Ojibwe teachings, the birds were given the gift of memory and song by the Creator. They are to pass down these memories from generation to generation, so each morning they sing the stories of the lands and people of Mozhay Point. Unfortunately, humans are no longer able to understand the language of the birds.

The birds aren't the only ones who remember the stories of this space—so do the *Mindimooyenyag-iban*, the old women who have passed on. These are the elder female spirits who carry their lawn chairs out of the bush and trees, day and night, because they have a particular responsibility towards the families and their allotment lands. This responsibility concerns the acquisition of the LaForce allotment lands where Zho Wash, Joseph Washington, was buried in the sugarbush of Sweet Grass. It concerns economic development and the future building of a paved road from the border town of Mesabe to the Miskwaa River State Park. This economic development project revolves around tourism. Tourists and reservation citizens will have easier and quicker passage, not just to the state park but also to the tribal office buildings, casino, motel, and golf course.

But this is only the beginning of a story that is based on many stories of the past, present, and the future. These stories lead to a “gruesome secret” that has been kept for many years.

Grover's writing style combines stories of people from the past, present, and future. In the Ojibwe worldview, the ones who have gone home, passed on, are still here, still watching us, hoping for the best for our future. It is an interesting and surprising story that deserves to be read.

I was raised listening to legends of our land, and I originate from a reservation which is heavily forested and 50% surface water. I, along with other Indigenous Americans, can relate to

The Song Over Miskwaa Rapids, its Indigenous teachings, allotment lands, economic development, as well as its secrets. Like the birds that wake and sing the memories of our lands and lives, this novel plays over and over in my mind.

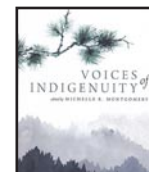
I definitely recommend reading it.

Elaine Fleming (Ojibwe) is faculty at Leech Lake Tribal College.

Voices of Indigenuity

Edited by Michelle R. Montgomery
University Press of Colorado (2023)
283 pages

Review by Gregory A. Cajete



Michelle R. Montgomery has produced a much-needed volume of essays of *Voices of Indigenuity* based on a speakers' series reflecting the diverse ways Indigenous science practitioners are addressing the many and ever-evolving issues Indigenous people are dealing with regarding environmental justice and climate change.

She has accomplished this by building an online platform for networking of science professionals, community members, and tribal leaders who are engaging in creative problem solving in addressing the impact of climate changes on tribal lands and resources. Indeed, it is a portrait of “Indigenuity.”

Through the stories of their work, the various authors in this edited volume have attempted to capture the multiple and diverse ways Indigenous science professionals and community members are not only addressing issues of climate change but are forging an expression of Native science through their work in Western science. While these stories are specific to Indigenous issues and concerns, they have a more universal message related to environmental justice, and they capture a deeper voice and sentiment of the spirit of Native science that cannot be easily captured in a single story.

There are few other books that have been able to capture this multifaceted theme in this way. In this regard, it is a unique edited volume, and Dr. Montgomery has produced a highly effective work by employing multiple perspectives and examples of Indigenuity. This work reflects the continuation of Indigenous peoples applying their knowledge, research, and activities in distinctly creative ways to solve problems that affect Indigenous people, lands, and resources.

True to the tradition of Indigenous storytelling, *Voices of Indigenuity* weaves together inspiring stories of Indigenous resilience, resourcefulness, and relationship into a tapestry of Indigenous creativity. Therefore, I strongly recommend this book. It is timely and even urgent in its demonstration of the insights which Indigenous professionals and community members are bringing forward through their own creativity and propensity to do mindful research in the face of climate change challenges. They also bring focus to our collective responsibility to become “good ancestors” and to creatively address the perennial question, what kind of ancestors do we want to be? ▲

Gregory A. Cajete, PhD (Tewa - Santa Clara Pueblo), is an emeritus professor in the College of Education at the University of New Mexico and the author of numerous books, including *Indigenous Community: Rekindling the Teachings of the Seventh Fire*.