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Notes on Native Studies in the U.S. and Canada

By John A. Price
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In order to examine the relative importance of American Indian research in anthropology over time, I did a content analysis of the *American Anthropologist*, a journal that has remained general in scope for nearly 100 years. The proportion of articles there with a predominant American Indian content taken by decades was within several percentage points of 62% from the start in 1888 through the 1930s, slid to 52% in the 1940s, to 31% in the 1950s, 18% in the 1960s, 15% in the 1970, and finally to only 14% so far in the 1980s. Still, of the 403 PhD dissertations in anthropology in 1982-83 in the U.S. and Canada, 27% (109 of the 403) are concerned with Native peoples of the Western Hemisphere: 15% (61) in archaeology, 11% (43) in social anthropology, and 1% (5) in physical anthropology. Thus, relative to other specializations in anthropology, Native studies went through a long decline in the pages of the *American Anthropologist*, but figures on dissertations show that Native studies is still an important specialization in anthropology.

The past:present ratio of Native American articles in the *Anthropologist* ran at about 5:1 in the early years, 4:1 in the 1940s, 2:1 in the 1950s, and 1:1 in recent decades. The recent 'one part past to one part present' ratio is completely in line with the curriculum balance in modern Native studies programs.

Not all of those people doing dissertations in Native studies, however, end up teaching a course in the field. In Canada about 175 or 41% of the 424 full-time anthropology teaching faculty at Canadian universities have had some research experience related to North American Natives (Canada had 525 full-time anthropologists in 1983 if we include those in museums and research institutes). However, only about 20% regularly teach a course on Natives somewhere in the Americas and half of those are in archaeology.

To explore the patterns of ethnic orientation in the History departments of major universities, I counted undergraduate courses with area orientations in a matched sample of seven U.S. and seven Canadian universities. Some 80% of the areal content of their history courses is on Europe and the European heritage in the Americas, the heritage of the charter cultures of the majority of the professors and their students. Asia and Oceania is the most important non-European area with 17.3%, Africa is next with only 2.4%, and the Native Americans have less than 1% of the area curricula, with courses offered at only a few of the fourteen universities. The U.S. universities, in general, and prominent North American universities, such as Harvard, Minnesota, Washington, and McGill, had a higher proportion of non-European heritage

courses than the Canadian schools or the less prominent schools.

If we look at academic communications in the broad sense that includes university courses, books, graduate theses, journals, films, and videotapes we find certain common patterns that show up in cross-media comparisons: 1) Native peoples and cultures have a small part of the totality, although they do well for their population size in the print media; 2) the proportion is roughly similar from one media form to another; 3) the traditional dominance of anthropology in communications about Natives has been declining in all media forms; 4) there was an expansion in all media between 1965 and 1980, but that has now leveled off and may be starting to decline; 5) the Native proportion in academic media within a geographical region is positively correlated with the importance of that region's Native population; and 6) biases have come into the academic media.

The major academic biases are in 1) a nationalistic ignorance of Americans and Canadians about each other's work; 2) a primary research interest in the prehistory, aboriginal life, history, and traditional aspects of Native cultures; and 3) an emphasis on the attractive and romantic in traditional life and the problem-ridden character of modern life. The extremes, rather than the mundane and normal nature of the lives of most Indians, tend to be played up in the media.

I found strong nationalism in a survey of a sample of several hundred graduate theses done at U.S. (274) and Canadian (429) universities in the past decade in Native studies. Thus 95% of the American theses and 97% of the Canadian theses were done on Natives within their own country. The topics tend to be so narrow that it is rare for students to do comparative studies either within a country or between the U.S. and Canada. It is rare, outside of archaeology, for a student to do both a master's and a doctor's degree in Native studies, so few students seem to be building careers in Native studies.

A similar survey of 768 books and monographs published in the last decade in Canada showed 1) an even greater nationalistic narrow-mindedness with only 1.5% on non-Canadian subjects and 2) a western shift so that now about one half of the non-federal books and monographs (and 53% of the theses) in Native studies are produced in the four western provinces.

In a survey of several hundred audio-visual media items (films, videotapes, and film strips) available in Canada, I found a rough correlation between a society's current population and its audio-visual coverage, with the exception of an over-representation of the Inuit (34%) and an under-representation (2%) of the Metis. This coverage:population correlation was also found in courses offered, books, and graduate theses so it is clear that there is a general cross-media process at work here. Even the exceptions to the correlations are the same, so the Inuit are over-represented and the Metis are under-represented in all three media, although there is a new 1980s boom in books on the Metis.

The proportions in Native studies of university positions (0.2% of the Canadian total), area-oriented history courses (0.4% in the U.S. sample and 1.1% in the Canadian sample), and university film library films (2.1% in one sample) and videotapes (2.5% in one sample) are all small and all reflect the ethnic biases of professors and students. That is, media interest is a reflection of ethnic heritage. It seems that a small core of Native people and their friends are consuming most of the Native-oriented books ("books-in-print" are 1.0% in the U.S. and 1.8% in Canada), movie videotapes (0.1% in a Toronto survey), and university courses to make the Native studies media scene operate at the level it does.

*For more details on the several studies synthesized here see the author's articles in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*.*