

Introduction

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The essays in this volume discuss selected examples of significant confluences in Indigenous North American religious traditions and foodways. Methodologically diverse, this collection provides rich individual case studies informed by relevant historical, ethnographic, and comparative data. Many of the essays demonstrate how narrative and active elements of selected Native American religious traditions have provided templates for interactive relationships with particular animals and plants, rooted in detailed information about their local environments. In return, these animals and plants have provided them with sustenance. The remaining essays provide analysis of additional contemporary and historical Indigenous foodways, contributing to the ongoing scholarly discourse regarding issues of tradition and cultural change.¹

Together, these essays make an important contribution to the expanding scholarly discourse on Indigenous, North American, global, and religious foodways. There are existing publications about Indigenous foodways, and about religious foodways. However, this is the first scholarly edited volume exclusively devoted to the interplay between Indigenous North American religious traditions and foodways.

There is no question that Indigenous foodways in North America have been impacted by colonial, in many cases European-derived, methods of developing and harvesting food resources. Though such efforts to force change began earlier, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the widespread introduction of imported agricultural techniques, crops,

and gender protocols disrupted Indigenous models of the same.² Federal policies and treaties aimed at “civilizing” Indigenous peoples strived to change nearly everything about them, including the food they ate and how they acquired it. For example, Article XIV of the 1791 Treaty of Holston between the United States and the Cherokee Nation stated:

That the Cherokee nation may be led to a greater degree of civilization, and to become herdsmen and cultivators, instead of remaining in a state of hunters, the United States will from time to time furnish gratuitously the said nation with useful implements of husbandry.³

Simultaneously, a group of federal policies began a methodical, systemic attack on Indigenous land rights, families, education, and cultural systems in the United States. Regardless of the impetus for their institution, several of these policies bred predatory, corrupt treaty-making and lending practices, annuity models, and land allotment practices. Results included family units being torn apart, and entire nations being forcibly removed from traditional homelands.⁴ As Neil Prendergast has summarized in *The Routledge History of American Foodways*, “even well after the nation’s founding, the project of agriculture was also the project of empire.”⁵ Furthermore, this “barrage of federal policies aimed at dissolving American Indian culture, including foodways” has resulted in the majority of “twentieth-century civil rights efforts on the part of American Indians” being focused on “undoing this agriculturally inspired policy.”⁶

Despite these challenges, at the time of this book’s publication, cultural revitalization projects are underway in a number of contemporary North American Indigenous communities. Although such projects take many forms at present, those that focus on reviving or promoting community-wide engagement in foodways are the subject of the essays in this volume. Elizabeth Hoover and Devon A. Mihesuah explained the significance of this pairing as they defined the key subject of their co-edited volume *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States: Restoring Cultural Knowledge, Protecting Environments, and Regaining Health*. Due to the “focus on cultural relevancy and specific relationships to food systems, cultural restoration is imperative for Indigenous food sovereignty, ‘generally more so than to non-indigenous food sovereignty.’”⁷

Furthermore, Indigenous food sovereignty,

is not focused only on *rights to* land, food, and the ability to control a production system, but also *responsibilities to* and culturally, ecologically, and spiritually appropriate *relationships with* elements of those systems. This concept entails emphasizing reciprocal relationships with aspects of the landscape and the entities on it, “rather than asserting rights over particular resources as a means of controlling production and access.”⁸

Hoover and Mihesuah cited the “four principles of Indigenous food sovereignty,” formulated by scholar Dawn Morrison and the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty. The first principle is as follows: “the recognition that the right to food is *sacred*, and food sovereignty is achieved by upholding sacred responsibilities to nurture relationships with the land, plants and animals that provide food.”⁹

Detailed explications of this statement occur in virtually every chapter of this present collection. Many Native American communities have traditions of living in symbiotic relationships with the plant and animal beings that surround them. The essays in this volume drive home the persistent reality, the manifest presence of animals and plants as meaningful partners in these cultural resource equations. Thus, the concept of humans interacting in person-to-person relationships with non-human living beings is important to consider carefully.

A useful conceptual term in this context is “other-than-human persons,” coined by the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell in his article “Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View,” first published in 1960.¹⁰ Michael McNally employs Hallowell’s term in his essay for this collection, and several other authors also assert that in the cultures they discuss, animals and plants are understood to be other-than-human persons. In other words, people relate to these beings not as “its,” but as “persons.”

In fact, humans around the globe relate to non-human beings in the universe in myriad ways. Humans ask non-human beings for assistance, or to make specific events occur. Humans beg for forgiveness from, make promises to, and bargains with, forsake, reunite with, and doubt non-human beings. Some humans search for such beings throughout their lives, while others are born into traditions to which they belong for their entire lives. Some humans believe in a singular entity such as “God,” while others believe in a multitude of gods and/or goddesses, or in the constant active presence of a spirit, entity, energy, or aspect of a

universal element. In many cases, humans interact with these ancestors, animals and plants, celestial bodies, or one of various other manifestations as people—just not human people.

Among Native American nations, certain communities have been living in traditional homelands for centuries. In other cases these environmental relationships have developed after communities have settled in new territories, either by force or by choice. Often such relationships have been expressed in terms of kinship, and have encouraged attention to the health of plant and animal beings by means of daily practices as well as through performance of particular ritual actions. In reciprocal fashion those plant and animal beings have aided human health by providing food, medicine, and the raw materials for a variety of goods from which humans have constructed their built environments. Narrative traditions in such cultures often have detailed these relationships, featuring the animals and plants of particular landscapes as proactive characters.

People in many communities worldwide have long recognized the importance of ethically and morally sustainable practices with regard to animals and plants. Yet somewhere along the way there also have been disconnects; at times the message has gotten lost in translation between cultures. As a result, historically, Indigenous notions of relationships with other beings in the universe no doubt have contributed mightily to a generalized core motif in both classic popular and academic stereotypes, that of Indigenous peoples being “anti-scientific.” This vague designation has provided a convenient counterpoint to postulated nonindigenous, “scientific,” “educated,” “rational” ideas and approaches in scholarship and other human endeavors. As a result, Indigenous explanatory frameworks often have been parsed variously as Disneyesque fantasy; the beliefs of the “savage,” “heathen,” or uneducated; or quaint, children’s-book fare.

But of course the connections between Indigenous cultural narratives, ritual activities and particular food “persons” in these individual communities are *not* elements of a romanticized Disneyesque fantasy. They are in fact constituent parts of diverse cultural systems of relationships. They deserve to be taken seriously.

The essays in this volume emphasize how Indigenous community members assert authority in terms of interpreting their cultural practices and narratives, as well as their histories, and present circumstances. In this regard, the issue of “tradition” is complex. As they determine how best to chart a path forward into the future, often Indigenous communities are revitalizing associated beliefs, practices, and items, including foods, that are designated

as being “traditional,” “precontact,” or “precolonial.” It is certainly a valid question to consider the extent to which the cultural elements are in fact authentically any of these things, or if one can even know. And what does one make of cultural exchange? Does emphasis on such elements preclude recognition of the adoption or adaptation of elements from other cultures?

Archaeologists scour middens for bits of organic data, and check teeth in skeletal remains for evidence of what a particular community’s ancestors ate. But can scholars, and for that matter members of the communities themselves, know for sure how their ancestors related to the sources of their foodstuffs, animal and vegetable? By the same token, assigning the designation “traditional” is a relative matter. One must consider what data is deemed appropriate to make such assertions, who is characterizing the information, and which a priori cultural assumptions are informing their views. Often what observers, visitors, and latecomers to a particular area documented when they arrived is designated a cultural fault line, an artificial Rubicon one must never cross in academic discourse. In the absence of physical or written historical evidence, are such data as oral history and cultural narratives of any utility at all?

Anyone with more than a passing interest in scholarship about Indigenous peoples knows that examples abound of discursive approaches in which authors either assail, pity, or champion Indigenous communities for refusing to adapt, while simultaneously bemoaning the loss of something authentic and pure due to what is characterized as an inevitable cultural slippage in the face of the steamroller of contact. All of these viewpoints assert authority over someone else’s history.

James Clifford addressed these issues of history, evidence, and tradition in his book *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*. At the turn of the twenty-first century, many Indigenous communities have weathered the storm of very real challenges to their existence. They have defied the standard narrative of a “tragic” and “inevitable” fate, by,

adapting and recombining the remnants of an interrupted way of life. They reach back selectively to deeply rooted, adaptive traditions: creating new pathways in a complex postmodernity. Cultural endurance is a process of becoming.¹¹

This statement encapsulates the fundamental concept in Clifford’s book, and is reflected in the book’s title. Later in the book, to support this idea, Clifford invoked Stuart Hall’s notion

that a discursive linking of pasts and futures is integral to the positioning of collective subjects. Thus, to imagine a coherent future, people must selectively mobilize past resources—historical practices that take diverse forms and are expressed in unfamiliar idioms.¹²

Drawing from the work of Raymond Williams, Clifford argued that this multiplicity of cultural practices and expressions stops prevalent historical narratives in their tracks. For example, the long-standard narrative about the general “waning significance” of religion in society cannot account for the “many forms of religious practice today.” Thus, “the global reach of Pentacostalism” simply does not compute. In the same way, when Indigenous communities look to their pasts to inform their futures, “[w]hen ‘ancient’ traditions are understood to be effectively ‘modern,’ the whole direction of Western historical development wavers.”¹³ In both cases, a standard narrative edifice is shaken, and begins to teeter under the weight of its own contradictions. Furthermore, when analysis shifts from Europe to

the variegated and contradictory zones of colonial and postcolonial contact and struggle, Williams’s sense of the “historical” is further complicated—thrown into dialogical relations of translation.¹⁴

At this point Clifford reminded readers of his own past assertion “that ‘history’ belongs, significantly, to others. Its discourses and temporal shapes are idiomatic and varied.” He concluded, as follows:

A concept of “historical practice” can help expand our range of attention, allowing us to take seriously the claims of oral transmission, genealogy, and ritual processes. These embodied, practical ways of representing the past have not been considered fully, realistically, historical by modern ideologies that privilege literacy and chronology. Historical practice can act as a translation tool for rethinking “tradition,” a central process of indigenous survival and renewal.¹⁵

The chapters of this volume, as distinct as they are in terms of subject matter and method, share this commitment to treat as authentic the

cultural products of Indigenous communities, and to accord them the same veracity as archaeological evidence and written evidence arranged in a linear chronology.



Conceptions of Indigenous peoples as being anti-scientific and anti-intellectual, resistant to change, and even childlike are rooted in centuries-old stereotypes. Scholarly, theological, and popular culture representations have contributed to the continued acceptance of characterizations with these underlying ideas buttressing them, while simultaneously romanticizing chosen characteristics as potent, symbolic elements of what it means to be “American.”¹⁶

Corn also has morphed into a potent symbolic component of what it means to be “American.” In a swift effort to illustrate the connection between tropes about Indigenous peoples and the symbol of corn, I now briefly survey early selected non-indigenous perspectives on corn and Indigenous botanical and cultivation knowledge. Along with scholarly critiques of them, I add review and critique of a 1953 magazine advertisement for corn and a 1959 account of animism written by Christian missionaries. I offer these observations to readers not to support a universal explanation, but simply as “food for thought.”

Corn has held symbolic capital for many nonindigenous people in the United States throughout the nation’s history. In this regard, historian Katherine Vester’s finely detailed study of food and American identities, *A Taste of Power: Food and American Identities* offers an important summary. In a cogent discussion of the symbolism of corn in United States colonial history, Vester demonstrated how Indigenous foods, in particular corn, were depicted as powerful symbols for colonists as they strove to survive and then distinguish themselves from their European counterparts, in particular Britain. In the face of “widely circulating theories” that warned of regression “into a state of savagery . . . Anglo-Americans strived to demonstrate that they were not corrupted by living in an untamed landscape and in proximity to Indigenous peoples.”¹⁷ For such was the certain fate of “even the most civilized people . . . if exposed to insalubrious conditions of nature, climate, and food.”¹⁸

Settlers of both Jamestown and Plymouth initially refused to eat corn. Fearing “for their humanity,” those at “Jamestown would not eat corn even when faced with the prospect of starving.” At Plymouth they

“started cultivating corn only after all their European crops failed.” Corn was cultivated and consumed in Europe at that time, but “mostly in rural areas and by the poor.” Cornmeal was considered “too coarse for fine dining, and fit only for feeding animals.”¹⁹

However, the tide turned for humble corn. In January 1766, Benjamin Franklin actually defended cornmeal in a letter sent to a London newspaper. Franklin, using “the pseudonym ‘Homespun,’” verbally cloaked himself in corn husks when he responded to a published letter alleging that “Americans were dependent on English imports of tea, as their breakfast of cornmeal was indigestible without it.” Sprinkling “the Native American names of Indian corn dishes,” into his prose like seeds into the ground, Franklin wrote “‘that Indian corn, take it for all in all, is one of the most agreeable and wholesome grains in the world.’”²⁰ In doing so, according to Vester,

Franklin invokes the colonies’ cultural difference from the mother country, perhaps menacingly, with the allusion to its “savage” heritage the way protesters would soon masquerade as Native Americans to dump English tea into the Boston harbor.²¹

It is possible that those protesters were masquerading as “Mohawks” in an effort to “honor” Indigenous people, similar to the claims of sports teams such as the Washington Football Team (which for too long was known as the “R-word”). However, it does seem more likely that they were doing so in order to avoid recognition and retribution, much like why Franklin was masquerading as “Homespun.” Continuing its rehabilitation into a symbol of nascent national pride, corn made its way into “Yankee Doodle Dandy” renditions. It even was celebrated in Joel Barlow’s 1793 post-Revolution “famous mock-epic ‘The Hasty Pudding’ . . . as a quintessential American food to describe the values the nation hoped to uphold.”²²

In terms of nonindigenous views of Indigenous botanical knowledge, the first account I offer is of the Jesuit Joseph-François Lafitau’s 1716 “discovery” of ginseng. Christopher M. Parsons noted that, “in his *Mémoire*, Joseph-François Lafitau maintained the complex and ambivalent relationship with indigenous knowledge.” He did so by “alternating between crediting himself with the intellectual heavy lifting and revealing his dependence on local networks of knowledgeable women.”²³ According to Parsons, Lafitau

suggested that the Haudenosaunee were largely unaware of the significance of their own botanical knowledge, and he denied that they were capable of joining a scientific discussion in their own right . . . Indigenous knowledge was incomplete and could only be understood through a comparative analysis that highlighted continuities and downplayed local particularities, yet it remained a valuable shadow of an original knowledge shared by all humanity.²⁴

Two centuries later, the inferiority of Indigenous botanical knowledge in relation to “scientific” knowledge was a point of emphasis prevalent in boarding schools for Native American children. Jennifer Bess provided one example of this bias in an article about attitudes concerning corn cultivation at the Chilocco Indian Industrial School in Oklahoma in the early twentieth century. Bess cited a 1906 letter written by the superintendent of the school, Samuel M. McCowan, describing a World’s Fair exhibit in which corn from students’ home communities in New Mexico, Arizona, and elsewhere was displayed among other “‘native foods.’” As Bess characterized his commentary, “[i]n a statement typically dismissive of indigenous species and indigenous understanding of selective breeding, McCowan’s verdict was that the corn ‘was miserably poor.’” Of the exhibit he concluded, “[t]he chief values seemed to be to illustrate the degenerate results of neglect and in-breeding.’” The Chilocco corn, on the other hand, was vastly superior. The School’s “improvements and . . . engineering” had “produced kernels ‘thick-skinned and filled to bursting with food elements.’”²⁵

Bess argued that McCowan’s

ignorance of the maintenance of strains grown carefully by Hidatsa such as Buffalo Bird Woman (Wilson [1917] 1987), as well as Tewa, Pima, and Hopi farmers, for example, marginalizes not only a long history of empirically grown science, but spiritual and religious traditions connected to specific varieties.²⁶

To further support the point, Bess quoted from a 1910 publication in which one of the boarding school teachers, J. W. Van Zant, spoke of an “‘age in which farming has become a science.’”²⁷ Finally, Bess pointed out that such disregard for Indigenous knowledge became part of the rhetoric of empire in the United States, even enshrined in reports to Congress:

Even in the case of corn, ignorance, dissatisfaction, and marginalization of traditional environmental knowledge, including breeding practices, predate the foundation of the USDA and its quest for seeds as the Commissioner of Patents reported to Congress in 1838 that “there can be no doubt that the crop of Indian corn may be improved at least one-third, without any extra labor.” (Conover 1924, 28).²⁸

Though hardly comprehensive, these examples do demonstrate that there were negative evaluations of Indigenous botanical and cultivation knowledge which persisted from the early eighteenth century through the early twentieth. These accounts are consistent in the sense that all held steadfast to the dichotomy incontrovertibly subverting Indigenous knowledge to “science.” This dichotomy is of course itself rooted in earlier images, in which Indigenous peoples themselves were portrayed as part of the landscape along with the flora and fauna.²⁹ The contrast, or dyad, became so ingrained in United States popular culture that through much of the twentieth century it featured prominently in food advertising campaigns.

There are many examples to choose from to illustrate the point, but in keeping with the theme of the symbolic significance of corn, here I offer for consideration a print advertisement for Green Giant brand “Niblets” corn that appeared on the back cover of the November 23, 1953 issue of *Life* magazine.³⁰ At the midpoint of the twentieth century *Life* magazine was a cultural juggernaut. It is difficult to characterize the scope of its significance as a media outlet. *Life* reported on cultural trends and set them as well. Photojournalistic essays combined succinct reporting, first with high-quality black-and-white, and then later, color photography. The format was wildly popular. For all of these reasons I think an advertisement for Green Giant brand “Niblets” corn on the back cover of the 1953 Thanksgiving issue of *Life* magazine provides an instructive popular cultural snapshot to illustrate my point.

This advertisement features a cartoonish drawing of a man with copper-colored skin, dressed in what appear to be buckskin clothes and moccasins, with a single giant feather attached to his headband. Crouched down on his haunches and hands, he stares with a stupefied grin on his face at a cornstalk inches from his prominent nose. To the right of the figure is a can filled with corn kernels, identified by a plain white label with the words “Niblets up to now” printed on it in plain black type. Underneath it in large print is the phrase “Indian discovered corn,” followed by additional text in much smaller type.³¹

However, rather than read the fine print, the eye is drawn to a second can, seemingly suspended upside-down above the first, also filled with corn kernels. Writing is clearly visible on it, as well as an upside-down caption. This spurs the reader to turn the entire page upside down.

When one does so, suddenly the cartoon on the page reveals a second image conjoined upside-down with the first: the face of a man in glasses and a tie, staring down a can of corn and literally licking his lips in anticipation. Quick review: an image of a man in glasses and a tie staring longingly at a can of corn is combined with an image of a man in buckskin and feathers interacting moronically with a corn plant. This, in a nutshell, or a corn kernel, is the “anti-scientific”/“scientific” dichotomy.

This second can also has a white label, but this one, instead of having a label with plain black type, is colorfully illustrated with the eponymous Green Giant holding a large ripe ear of corn. Also colorfully imprinted on the label are the phrases, “Niblets brand / Fresh corn off the cob / NEW fresh-flavor process”; and the words “New Process Niblets” are printed next to the can. Finally, the caption underneath this second can reads “Science discovers New Niblets.” Thus, the captions underneath both cans form a couplet: “Indian discovered corn” / “Science discovers New Niblets.”³²

To make sure the point of all of this was not lost on the readers, the fine print under both captions explains further. Under the first can the text reads,

Indian discovered corn . . . but it remained for the Green Giant folks to make it a delicacy. They pioneered in seed breeding, flavor farming, and vacuum packaging to bring you corn-on-the-cob without the cob. Or, as it's better known, Niblets Brand whole kernel corn . . . finest corn up to now.³³

And under the second can:

Science discovers New Niblets . . . Now Green giant scientists have found a way to give America's most popular corn new natural color and flavor. They've developed a new “fresh-flavor” process that quick-cooks new Niblets in 7 minutes (instead of 35). See the difference . . . taste the difference at your dinner table tonight.³⁴

A few observations: The singular term “Indian” seems to be a telling, though grammatically incorrect contrasting concept for “Science,” rather

than a typographical error or a crude attempt at stereotypical humor. In 1953, “seed breeding, flavor farming, and vacuum packaging,” were wonderful new innovations, and the ability to bestow “new natural color and flavor” on the corn due to the “‘fresh-flavor’ process” seemed almost magical. And what’s more, it was faster to prepare! Almost too good to be true. But wait, the fact that it was touted as the “finest corn up to now” teased of further innovations just around the corner. Who knew corn could be so exciting?

The proposition that Indigenous people discovered corn, but it took the friendly folks down at Green Giant to turn it into a “delicacy,” resolves the historical ambivalence about it discussed above. Corn had been modified successfully, just as many of the boarding school proponents had hoped to do with Native American children. By the 1950s corn certainly had come a long way, elevated from a food only fit for animals, to being worthy of Anglo consumption, to being considered American food.

The 1953 advertisement’s basic message of “Indians *discovered* corn / Science made it better” continued to reflect the deeply engrained notion of the inferiority of Indigenous knowledge that had been codified centuries earlier. But it also gave it new life. Here in the advertisement for Green Giant brand “Niblets” corn, chosen for the back cover of the Thanksgiving holiday issue of the most popular magazine in the United States, the dichotomy is plainly and crudely rendered.³⁵

Here too in the advertisement one can find an allusion to another critical element of the perceived anti-scientific Indigenous approach: the concept of other-than-human persons, discussed above. That man clad in buckskin might be interpreted as prostrating himself in front of the corn plant, that is, praying to it. Parsed as “animism,” some theologians and scholars have deployed this concept to contrast Indigenous religions negatively with other religions, including Christianity.

My thoughts about this subject stem in part from reviewing a 1959 missionary publication titled *Introducing Animism*. The authors of the text were Rev. Eugene A. Nida and William A. Smalley; at the time they were the secretary and an associate secretary for translations of the American Bible Society. Text on the front and back inside covers announced that the book would provide a global survey of the phenomenon:

The word “animism” is not easily defined. The authors . . . explain that it has two separate and valid meanings. One is the definition of anthropologists, who designate it as the belief in spirits.

More popularly, the word has a broader meaning as the name for all kinds of primitive religions.³⁶

In a section titled, “Weaknesses in Animistic Beliefs,” the missionary authors provided a list of reasons for the “inherent weakness in the primitive religions.”³⁷ This statement is worth quoting at some length:

In the first place, there is no fundamental moral basis in animism . . . a religious belief that is scientifically preposterous may still enjoy a long and comfortable life, for worshipers seem quite capable of suspending the scientific part of their minds while worshipping. However, they cannot suspend judgment on what is morally contemptible while at the same time being challenged by a deep religious sentiment that is basically good and just. As in the case of the religions of ancient Greece and Rome, the vulnerable point was the traditional mythology, filled with the absurd moral antics of the gods. By the process of allegorizing, an attempt was made to adjust such myths to the science of the day, but they could not be refurbished to meet the moral challenge posed by the Christians.³⁸

This remarkably forthright passage encapsulates a theological argument against animism. According to the authors, animistic beliefs, like “the religions of ancient Greece and Rome,” lack a “fundamental moral basis,” due to their “traditional mythology.” Akin to “the absurd moral antics of the gods,” these beliefs could not “meet the moral challenge posed by the Christians.” This was beyond not aligning with the prevailing “science of the day.”

The authors concluded that for converts, “becoming a Christian has meant a step from basic mistrust of an irresponsible spirit world to growing confidence in an eternal God.”³⁹ So in this case the contrast is belief in “an eternal God” versus belief in spirits. These statements reflect negative interpretations of both “other-than-human persons” and Indigenous knowledge versus “the science of the day.” One might modify the “Niblets” dyad accordingly: “Indians discovered Animism / Christianity discovers Morality.”

Over the sixty or so years since the 1953 magazine advertisement and the 1959 missionary handbook, such ideas and attitudes about Indigenous knowledge and “scientific credibility” still have found traction in scholarship. Vestiges of this “anti-scientific” assessment have continued

to surface in the scholarly discourse regarding Indigenous foodways. As Suzanne Crawford O'Brien and Kimberly Wogahn assert in their essay for this collection: "anthropological scholarship has largely misrepresented Native land management practices, first denying their existence, and where admitting they exist, placing these cultivation practices on the 'backward, less-developed side of the imaginary evolutionary scale.'"⁴⁰

However, a shift is occurring. In his article about Lafitau, Parsons identified a group of contemporary scholars whose

work has reconceptualized the nature of scientific activity in a multicultural, epistemologically diverse Atlantic world, answering the call to use "recent methodologies in history, anthropology, and archaeology" to adequately capture traces of the knowledge of indigenous actors who remain underrepresented in histories of the rise of Western science.⁴¹

Certainly many of the essays in this collection are illustrations of such approaches in Native American communities. Parsons concluded with a statement that I think encapsulates important features of the current state of the discourse:

Environmental and Native American histories can demonstrate the local ramifications of the creation of global science in early America and the Atlantic world. These are particularly important lessons to bear in mind in an era when ecologists and Native Americans are again being asked to collaborate in a bid to better know and protect American environments.⁴²

In an article on contemporary tribal watershed management, Amanda Cronin and David M. Ostergan discussed the important point of the gradual acceptance of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or "TEK":

TEK is slowly gaining Western recognition as a valid and integral component of ecosystem management. Even as some writers caution against direct applicability of management based on TEK, Dennis Martinez of the National Park Service views integration of TEK as vital to a global reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.⁴³

The authors then quoted Martinez: “Native cultures, although badly fragmented by the impacts of industrial societies, still hold onto significant ecological wisdom based on long ecological experience in particular places. To ignore that millennia-long local experience and knowledge is to risk doing poor science.”⁴⁴

James R. Veveto and Kevin Welch presented one good contemporary illustration of this point in a book chapter detailing revitalization efforts underway among members of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in western North Carolina. The authors described the contemporary strategy of what they referred to as the “‘memory banking’ of farmers’ cultural and agroecological knowledge about traditional cultivars to complement the more traditional scientific *ex situ* conservation strategy of collecting and storing folk crop varieties in seed bank facilities.”⁴⁵ Likewise, several of the essays in this volume illustrate how this notion of “memory banking” traditional knowledge and employing it in conjunction with “traditional scientific” knowledge is being put into practice in many Indigenous North American communities.



In a chapter of *The Routledge History of American Foodways*, Angela Jill Cooley asserted that “food historians need to take up the challenge to write more region-based histories of food—starting with the American Indian story.”⁴⁶ She cited Rayna Green’s chapter in *The Larder: Food Studies Methods from the American South*: “Green laments the lack of research on native food practices in the south.” Cooley cited Green’s discussion of how “the 1960s emphasis toward giving proper recognition to the cultural endeavors of historically marginalized populations . . . virtually ignored indigenous communities.” Cooley concluded, “future scholarly attention to American Indian foodways will broaden our understanding of regionalism” in terms of food studies.⁴⁷ Such attention also will contribute to the growing body of scholarship on religion and food.⁴⁸

In many cases the experiences of Native Americans reflect those of people worldwide in that they raise concerns about international issues that impact everyone on the planet. Issues such as access to affordable, healthy food and clean water are global concerns. More attention to the study of religions and food will add valuable additional specific perspectives and data to the discourse. This collection was conceived as part of that effort.

Andrea McComb Sanchez begins chapter 1 in this volume, “Balance and a Bean: Revitalizing *Himdag* through Traditional Farming and Sacred Knowledge,” by citing the Tohono O’odham Community Action (TOCA) magazine, *Native Foodways*, which was published from 2013 to 2015. In the first paragraph, McComb Sanchez states a core concept of this volume: “food itself is about more than just eating,” then provides a succinct list illustrating many of the ways this notion is manifested in cultures.⁴⁹

McComb Sanchez also provides an introduction to the concepts of foodways and TEK, before devoting the bulk of the chapter to a nuanced explanation of the importance of the tepary bean to Tohono O’odham diets, land, language, songs, ceremonies, and sacred narratives. Significant cultural narratives and key historical developments are presented as well, including the causes of the decline in bean production from 1930 to 2001. McComb Sanchez documents how the resurgence of tepary bean farming is dependent on climate factors such as monsoon rains and resulting floods. However, she also explains why ceremonies centered on the saguaro cactus that are meant to call the rains are critically important as well: “like all beings in the traditional Tohono O’odham universe, the tepary bean, *bawī*, who could not exist without the rain brought forth by the saguaro wine ceremony, has its own songs and its own stories.”⁵⁰ McComb Sanchez explains how the establishment of two farms in 2002 for relearning traditional farming techniques will not only create a healthy food source but also restore their traditional lifeway: “*Bawī* is not just a food, it is an integral part of the ecosystem, of the people, and is an essential component to the *O’odham Himdag*.”⁵¹

In chapter 2, “Of Coyotes and Culverts: Salmon and the People of the Mid-Columbia,” Suzanne Crawford O’Brien brings the oral traditions of the Indigenous peoples of the middle Columbia River into conversation with contemporary conservation efforts to provide a clearer sense of the importance of salmon in the spiritual life of Indigenous peoples in this bioregion. Beginning with the creation story featuring Coyote, Crawford O’Brien moves through four acts, linking each section of her chapter to a section of the Coyote cycle: “Salmon are presented here, and in other origin stories, as beings who voluntarily sacrifice their lives so that human beings may live.” Her work culminates in “Act Four: Coyote Frees the Salmon,” in which she illustrates how, “just as Coyote uses his ingenuity to rescue the salmon, so Columbia River tribes are using their creativity and intellectual acumen to solve contemporary salmon problems.”⁵²

The section features a useful summary of significant legal decisions concerning salmon in the region and discusses the work of cooperative organizations such as the Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission (CRIFC) and the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC). These and other examples, such as the Wáashat first foods ceremonies and grassroots organizations such as *Xwayamamí ishích*, highlight what Crawford O'Brien terms "the interplay of sacred traditions and ecological knowledge."⁵³

In chapter 3, "Where Food Grows on the Water: *Manoomin*/Wild Rice and Anishinaabe Peoplehood," Michael D. McNally explores this principal traditional staple food of Minnesota's Anishinaabe, or Ojibwe community. *Manoomin* is also regarded as a medicine, ceremonial food for ritual participants—human, spiritual, and the like—and a food for the feasts following the ceremonies. McNally writes of *manoomin*, "It is, at the end of the day, more than a food source. It has culture; it has history; it has story; . . . the wild rice plant is no 'it' at all, but a subject, a moral person." He further writes, "[f]or Anishinaabe people, *manoomin* . . . is an other-than-human person, and as a person holds a place in the moral circle of concern."⁵⁴

The harvest of *manoomin* remains one of the most important Anishinaabe traditional practices, both for a sense of peoplehood and subsistence on their traditional lands, and for the Anishinaabe economy, even as that tribal economy has become integrated into the broader economy. While McNally points out that this plant is not simply a resource for the Anishinaabe, it is an other-than-human person in a moral universe, for nonindigenous researchers, the rice was something very different. Here I want to reference my discussion above of the 1953 Green Giant Niblet corn advertisement. As McNally reports in a footnote to his chapter, it wasn't just food conglomerates that were interested in co-opting Indigenous foodways at this time: "In the 1950s, University of Minnesota researchers decided it was time to liberate the rice from the indigenous people. So they set out to domesticate wild rice."⁵⁵

McNally explains how ecological and genomic research challenges to the *manoomin* plant have generated important spiritual activism among Minnesota's Ojibwe community. He explores that spirited activism "in an effort to come to terms with the limits and possibilities of natural and cultural resource discourses," and provides a critique that moves the discourse on Indigenous foodways forward in an important way.⁵⁶

In the first paragraph of chapter 4, “Harvesting Wild Rice,” Lawrence W. Gross states that “harvesting wild rice is not just a means for procuring food. It is an act that unites the Anishinaabe people with their environment and provides a sense of wholeness of being.” Gross terms his chapter “something of a prose poem”; in it he self-consciously retains the rhythmic cadence of oral delivery in his prose, and as with the subject matter, it is meant to evoke the experiential aspect of this foodway.⁵⁷

The account proceeds much like Gross describes the visual image of polers “gliding through a sea of grass”—with “a certain grace and rhythm.” But readers should be alert not to miss the careful attention to detail in Gross’s account, mirroring the careful attention to detail of Anishinaabe people like him who are involved in the process of harvesting the wild rice. Specific locations and weather patterns are described precisely. When Gross writes of the Anishinaabeg “teaching that the sound of the wind in the trees is the voice of our ancestors talking to us,” he juxtaposes this with a meticulous description of regional wind patterns and cloud formations. Similarly “Anishinaabe teachings about kinesiology,” and information about rice beards are juxtaposed with brief narratives drawn from the oral tradition, one in joke form.⁵⁸

Gross also pauses to acknowledge his teachers, the specific sources of the cultural knowledge he presents. This chapter provides a wonderful counterpoint to McNally’s chapter on the same topic. While each can stand alone, together they inform each other to produce an original and powerful multivocal reflection on this foodway.

Chapter 5, David S. Walsh’s “They Call Us ‘Caribou Eaters’: Negotiating Tłı̄chǫ Dene Relationships with Caribou,” is a study of the complex relationship between climate change and theories of Indigenous relationships with caribou. The Tłı̄chǫ-Dene traditionally have hunted caribou on their ancestral homeland in present-day Northwest Territories, Canada, and they believe the caribou gift themselves to the hunters. The hunters reciprocate through sharing the meat, feeding the ancestors, and returning the remains to the land so the caribou may be reborn, forming a complex intersection of food and lived traditions. Walsh discusses how climate change has led to a dramatic decline in caribou populations which, in turn, has led to calls by the government of Canada’s Northwest Territories for less hunting.

Walsh explains how the Dene have responded according to their traditions by calling instead for more respectful hunting practices to demonstrate to the caribou that they are still needed. As Walsh notes, Tłı̄chǫ “elders’ discussions revealed a different interpretation of the current state of the

Bathurst herd than that of the Canadian government and biologists: one predicated on the agency of caribou.”⁵⁹ However, the sides are working together: “the intent of joint Tłı̨ch̓q and territorial government caribou management plans ‘is to help Tłı̨ch̓q relearn their traditional ways, their nàowo, and respect and relationship with ekwò [tundra caribou]. If these traditions are renewed, ekwò will come back.’”⁶⁰

In chapter 6, “Bringing a Berry Back from the Land of the Dead: Coast Salish Huckleberry Cultivation and Food Sovereignty,” Suzanne Crawford O’Brien and Kimberly Wogahn explain, “In order to better understand the significance of huckleberries within Coast Salish traditional cultures, it is necessary to remember that plants are not merely resources, but relatives and ancestors. The Tulalip are not simply picking berries. They are maintaining millennia-old *relationships with plant people*.”⁶¹ The authors address contemporary efforts to reintroduce Coast Salish children to their mountain culture through wild huckleberry gathering and huckleberry cultivation in community gardens.

In addition, the authors provide a novel and timely critique of the local and slow food movement. They assert that the movement focuses on individualism and utopic connection to the land and ignores how structural and historical biases prevented Indigenous peoples from carrying out their own food practices. Crawford O’Brien and Wogahn contrast this assessment with that of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, which they argue focuses on communalism and a different understanding of what might be called a “return to the earth” that is informed by Indigenous peoples’ histories of being denied access to the land and its resources.

In chapter 7, “The Black Drink throughout Cherokee History,” R. Alfred Vick traces the history of the Black Drink among members of the Cherokee Nation, both in traditional homelands of the present-day southeastern United States and in Oklahoma. Traditionally utilized in ritual contexts, the Black Drink was derived from the leaves and small twigs of yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria* Ait.), a native North American holly species. Additionally, archeological evidence traces use of the Black Drink as far as current-day Illinois, at the Cahokia site, fully 500 kilometers from its source, evidence of the yaupon holly’s cultural significance as a trade item.

Vick’s chapter differs from others in the collection in that it focuses on historical accounts of this resource among Indigenous nations instead of discussing contemporary usage. It also differs from the other chapters in that the subject is the only “drink” in the volume, and in fact is an emetic. But his essay is an important contribution to the discourse because

it illustrates that not all foodways that once were significant have been revived by Indigenous nations.

Yaupon is currently experiencing a popular culture regional resurgence in certain areas of the country as an enjoyable, restorative beverage. As Vick explains, historically, it was said to lack any medicinal properties other than as a diuretic. This past assessment also speaks to the heart of the “anti-scientific” stereotype I sketched out above. However, as Vick notes, “contemporary research . . . has shown that yaupon holly foliage possesses a high antioxidant capacity,” as well as “anti-inflammatory properties shown to have potential to inhibit colorectal cancer and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD).”⁶²

As this book was going to press, purely by coincidence I discovered an example of yaupon’s current popular culture appeal, and the use of old stereotypes to market it. In the aisles of a chain store that features food, drink, and household items from around the globe, I found it staring at me at eye level on a shelf: Yaupon Brothers’ American Tea Company Fire Roasted Warrior’s Yaupon Tea. The label was a parchment-like color and was decorated with some generic geometric design images (that someone thought looked “Indigenous”) and the accompanying drawing like the label text was monochromatic, in black ink. Depicted were two individuals with what looked to be hides covering their waists down to their knees. They were crouched over a kettle perched on an open fire, mixing and stirring something into the kettle. On the back a portion of the text read,

Florida’s native Timucua people roasted Yaupon leaves over an open fire before going into battle . . . In tribute to the ancestral tribes of Florida, we’ve brought this powerful blend to you. Sweet and smoky with an intensity that will awaken your inner warrior. Make it part of your daily ritual.

Around the bottom of the round container it read: “Naturally Caffeinated-Wild & Organic-Grown in Florida-Antioxidant Super-Food.”⁶³

Once more I want to return to the image of the Green Giant Niblet advertisement in *Life* magazine discussed above. It’s been nearly seventy years since that ad appeared, but the Yaupon Brothers’ Warrior’s Yaupon Tea, with its stereotypical views of Indigenous religions as well as Indigenous foodways, would fit right alongside it. While much has changed since the 1950s, the example of yaupon proves that old stereotypes, both written and illustrated, remain difficult to exorcise from cultural usage.