



### 12TH AMERICAN INDIAN WORKSHOP

#### Meeting the Indians in Rome

It was a special day at the Dipartimento Studi Americani, Università di Roma "La Sapienza," when the Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday addressed an enthusiastic group of anthropologists, ethnographers, and scholars dealing with different aspects of Native American history, culture, or literature. They had arrived from twelve countries to discuss "European Ethnographers, Scholars and Travellers Meeting the American Indians: From the Enlightenment to the New Deal."

Of course, Momaday's opening words went beyond that theme. In an almost visionary way he made his listeners aware that we are all products of our history, that our cultural identity is determined by our past and the people and events that gave meaning to our lives. He used the story of Ishi, the last "wild man" found in California in 1911, who survived the confrontation of his stone age culture with twentieth-century civilization for five years. Momaday used the fact that Ishi died in the Museum of Anthropology as an analogy for the human race. If we don't learn to preserve the earth and change our course, we might be part of a big human tragedy—and a new race might walk through "the museum of the remembered earth."<sup>1</sup>

The following three days (30 May to 1 June 1991) were spent listening to twenty-eight papers, looking at many interesting slides, and joining in very lively discussions.

Dealing with the histories of early European contact with Native Americans meant stirring the question of culture clash again and again. Most Europeans had dealt with the Native inhabitants of the New World as savages inferior to an advanced White civilization. The descriptions and evaluations were always done from a position of superiority relying for a scale on a given set of values. Misconcep-

tions and stereotypes were thus enforced. In spite of all progress the problem is still a relevant one. The participation of two more "living" Native Americans in the conference helped to balance the picture. The Cree artist Alfred Young Man (University of Lethbridge) made us aware how necessary it is to be more sensitive and respectful of the feelings of Native Americans today, who refuse being categorized as anthropological subjects of the past only. Delores J. Huff, a Cherokee from Chico (California State University) indicated that a cultural transference is never one-way, and that Native-Anglo relations are two-sided, too. In her paper she used the example of the unusual marriage between the Taos man Tony Luhan and Mabel Dodge, a white socialite, as a process of mutual learning and understanding. Huff regretted that Native ideas, concepts, and intellectual thoughts are rarely accepted by white Americans.

The main part of the workshop was devoted to the central theme, to widen the picture of early contacts between Europeans and Natives, to add new sources of ethnographic material, and to reevaluate these early meetings.

William C. Sturtevant (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC) documented the importance of Geneva-born Albert Gallatin, a friend of Alexander von Humboldt, who not only contributed to the research of Indian languages, but who did some pioneering classificatory work as well.

Leonardo Vigorelli (Museo "Caffi," Bergamo), who is about to publish G. C. Beltrami's Dakota dictionary and manuscript notes on his 1823 trip to the sources of the Mississippi, took a new look at early American criticism of Beltrami's writings as artifacts of the difference between the Italian and the American cultural environment of the day. Cesare Marino (Handbook of North American Indians, Washington, DC) stimulated a controversy about

the role of the Italian adventurer and pioneer photographer Carlo Gentile, who in 1871 had bought a five-year-old Yavapai boy for thirty silver dollars from his Pima captors, who became the ideal of an acculturated Native American—Carlos Montezuma.

Fedora Giordano (Università di Roma) presented the German scholar Aby Warburg, who got involved in ancient Hopi mythology and ritual and struggled between reason and magic for the rest of his life. Another aspect of Native exotism in the European mind was shown by Franco Meli (Università di Milano) in his analysis of Puccini's opera "The Girl of the Golden West." With an extraordinary orchestration Puccini created the bitter-sweet flavor of a Wild West atmosphere, probably stimulated by Buffalo Bill's show in Milano in 1908. Daniele Fiorentino (Università di Roma) discussed the importance of two books he had discovered in the collection of rare travel books at the Centro Studi Americani in Rome: François Marie Perrin du Lac's 1802 account of Napoleonic Louisiana and Paul Vissier's 1827 tract on the Osages, published in connection with the display of an Osage troupe in France.

In her paper on Poq and Qiperog, "two Eskimo travelers meeting the European in the early Age of Enlightenment," Verena Traeger (University of Vienna) pointed at the posthumous publication of Poq's song narratives with their reflections on European lifestyles as an interesting product of culture contact.

Wolfgang Hochbruck (Albert Ludwigs Universität, Freiburg) contrasted the more accidental contacts of Johann Gottfried Seume, an impressed Hessian soldier in the American Revolution, with Native Americans in the area of fortress of Halifax, Nova Scotia, with the image of Natives in his poem "Der Wilde" (1793), which seems to rely on popular concepts rather

than on his own observations. The paper presented by Beatrix Reichel (Albert Ludwigs Universität, Freiburg) was centered around the strong influence of the Moravian missionary John Heckewelder on the historical fiction of James F. Cooper.

A number of other papers were dealing with the ambivalent roles of missionaries among Native populations. Sylvia S. Kasprzycki (University of Vienna) analyzed the function of Catholic missionaries in the process of Menominee culture change in the 19th century. While criticizing their disrespect for traditional religion and their self-imposed role as guardians, she in other respects presents them as preservers and chroniclers of Native life. The positive aspect of the missionaries' work among the Lakota was emphasized by William K. Powers (Rutgers University). He concentrated on the contributions of the German Rev. Eugene Buechel and Franz Boas to the preservation of the Lakota language. Buechel's achievements were also illustrated by Maria N. Powers by giving examples of his photoethnographic work. Having lived on Lakota reservations for over fifty years, Buechel was trusted and allowed to record the intimacy of everyday life of Lakota families. Adriana Greci Greene (Rutgers University) gave a paper on the German missionary participation in the Ghost Dance of 1890. It was focused on Rev. John J. Jutz, Founder of the St. Francis Mission in 1886 and the Holy Rosary Mission in 1888, and his changed attitude and new role as priest after the Ghost Dance experience.

Another session was dealing with collectors and collections of Indian material. Sally McLendon (Hunter College, New York) presented interesting biographical data on the German Ferdinand Deppe, whose activities as collector of California Mission Indian material for the Royal collection in Berlin were hardly known and hard to trail. Mick Gidley (University of Exeter) reported on his continued research on Edward S. Curtis and his images of "the vanishing race." He portrayed Curtis as a typical representative of his time, as leader of a large anthropological enterprise, including a team of ethnologists, Indian assistants and informants, and photographic technicians, and the project as a profit-making venture. Another kind of collecting was introduced by Naila Clerici (Università di Genova), who presented the image of Native Americans on European collector cards of the 19th and 20th centuries, which were available to a large public.

In her paper "Narrative Perspective in Contemporary Native American Literature" Susan Pérez Castillo (Universidade de Porto) extended the theme of the conference. She analyzed structure and narrative voices in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*, Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, and Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft on Blue Water*.

The occasion of the Columbus quinqucentennial in 1992 is already stimulating activities on a broader scale. For Christian F. Feest (Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna) and his students the 1992 event will at least provide an excuse for a prestigious research project to survey "Austrian Contributions

to the Knowledge of Indigenous America." The goal is a computer-supported data base on all Austrian-Indian related material.

Christian Feest was also in charge of the business meeting on the last day of the conference. He gave a report on the state of *ERNAS* and urged everybody to support the journal by winning new subscribers and by providing interesting local news.

The 13th American Indian Workshop will be held in Sevilla in 1992 as part of the EAAS conference (see below), and Susan Pérez Castillo reported on her portion of the preparatory work for this meeting. Marie Mauzé extended an invitation to host the 14th American Indian Workshop in Paris in 1993, which was enthusiastically accepted by the participants.

A special thank you was expressed to our Italian hosts, especially to Daniele Fiorentino who had acted as both local and program chairperson for the meeting. All their visible and hidden activities made our workshop successful in terms of the good debate and the good friendship which it engendered.

**Helga Lumer**

#### **NOTE**

1. Those Workshop participants who ventured on their own to look at the Museo Luigi Pigorini in its dilapidated Fascist abode in the southern suburbs of Rome, may have shuddered at the thought of suffering Ishi's fate in Italy's national museum of anthropology, also part of a "big human tragedy." (Editor's note.)