Our First Issue!

Fall 2016 Newsletter

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Kris Manjapra............................ 2
Parker Breza and Benya Kraus .... 3
Matt Hooley.............................. 4
Who We Are ............................. 5
Where We Are ......................... 6
Now is the Time

Letter from the Interim Director
Kris Manjapra

We stand in the Post-Election of 2016. And we clearly see the manifestations of aggressive nationalism, patriarchy and sexism, popular disavowals of history and truth, the collusion of military and corporate interests, and majoritarian attacks against racialized “others”. Black, Muslim, Latino/a, Native, and Asian peoples, in particular, have been made to serve as the chief objects of abuse and degradation within a political discourse compulsively fixated on the social ego of aggrieved whiteness. These many groups (Black, Muslim, Latinx, Native, Asian, among others) have long known the systemic and differentiated discounting of their bodies, their labor, their cultures, and their legacies within a racialized economy of value.

But, only now (or now, again) we see the unapologetic willingness of political and business elites to vindicate and celebrate the pile-up of human collateral damage in the name of security, law and order, and illusionary prosperity.

This is a new now-time.

In the coming period of regressive politics at the level of high administration, what is the role of the university, and of new interdisciplinary academic formations such as the Consortium of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora within the university?

The RCD at Tufts spans a powerful and vital space constituting five programs: American Studies, Africana Studies, Latino Studies, Asian American Studies, and Colonialism Studies. The consortium of these programs in the RCD has three main goals: it supports new curricular developments, new campus programs, and new research agendas.

The faculty members who teach in the RCD see the core need to patiently and carefully trace the relations and conjugations between communities, locations, histories, and resistance struggles of the modern world, which also characterize US society in the modern world.

The RCD anchors intersectional and relational ways of knowing – of seeing social processes critically, historically, and comparatively. This dovetails with the call for social justice and social action. We believe that the intersectional and relational study of race, colonialism, gender, sexuality, and diaspora permits especially salient ways of comprehending the world today and its historical legacies. Through these studies the RCD connects the classroom with society, since the two are woven together especially in this urgent time.

So, what kind of university aught we to be when the question is not minimally posed, but maximally conceived? And how does knowing this world more clearly require us to act differently in this world, especially in the midst of a politics of regression and resentment sponsored by a new governmental regime? These are questions we within the RCD, students, faculty and alums, continue to pose together.

Now is the time for which our work and studies have been preparing us.

Kris Manjapra
Associate Professor of History
Interim Director, Consortium of Studies in Race, Colonialism, and Diaspora
Tufts First Indigenous People’s Day

Parker Breza and Benya Kraus

On October 10, 2016, Tufts University celebrated its first Indigenous Peoples’ Day, following more than a year of student activism. Just over a year ago, Tufts University still celebrated “Columbus Day” after a resolution calling for Tufts University to recognize Indigenous Peoples’ Day in place of “Columbus Day” was voted down before the faculty meeting in spring of 2015. Building off of the work by alumni Andrew Nuñez and Genesis Garcia, we built a coalition of hundreds of students, faculty, and Native community members calling for the same change. After passing two TCU Senate resolutions collecting more than 1,000 signatures from students, parents, alumni, and faculty, and working with local Indigenous activists from United American Indians of New England, we prepared for a faculty vote. After months of sharing Native and student voices articulating their reasons for supporting the change the resolution passed nearly by acclimation—a testament to what we believe to be the power of building strong community coalitions between students and faculty.

To celebrate, we organized a celebration on the academic quad, inviting different local Indigenous groups to share their dance, music, prayer, and food with us that evening. Tables were filled with Sassafras tea, fry bread, corn cakes, and Three Sisters Rice as hundreds of students gathered on the quad to listen and watch La Piñata, a Boston-based youth group, share with us a traditional Mayan religious dance, and The Nettukkusqk Singers, a group of inter tribal women singers from across the New England area, sing and dance.

Indigenous Peoples’ Day, especially here at Tufts, is rooted in a long tradition of Indigenous resistance, and it is vital to us that this continues to be the case. This year, we had tables for students to sign petitions in support of Indigenous Peoples Day Boston and for the water protectors at Standing Rock fighting for #NoDAPL. As we look towards the future of student faculty initiatives supporting Indigenous students, we are excited to be working towards the creation of an Indigenous studies minor within the RCD, and to continue to expand the amount of Native students, faculty, and classes here at Tufts. We hope you’ll join us!

With love and solidarity,
Parker & Benya
A Reflection
Matt Hooley

One of the challenges of this year’s RCD Workshop was to link the study of colonialism with practices of decolonization. This was a challenge raised by students (thousands of whom petitioned for Tufts to change its celebration of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day), faculty (over sixty of whom wrote a letter in support of this change), and staff. And it is a challenge occasioned by the material conditions of the work of the RCD, and Tufts in general: we are a campus situated on unceded Wampanoag land during the ongoing colonization of the Americas.

What is the role of study in the midst of these historical and political exigencies? Can Native American and Indigenous Studies open our campus to meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities in southern New England? Will centering Native knowledge in our study of race, colonialism, and diaspora spur us to envision and pursue futures that might seem impossible in this, colonial present?

The Workshop was convened on October 14th: the Friday following the first Indigenous Peoples Day celebrated at Tufts. With the support of the Diversity Fund, the Toupin-Bolwell Fund, the Center for Humanities At Tufts, and others, the Workshop hosted scholars, artists, and activists from across the country. Four panels were organized around essential issues in Native American and Indigenous Studies: the politics of research, the meaning of ‘Indigeneity’, the dynamics of collaboration, and the decolonial power of Indigenous art.

These conversations highlighted the need to think about Indigeneity and decolonial struggle beyond narrowly-conceived national, ideological, and disciplinary rubrics. Histories of land and language loss, disrupted social systems, and state violence implicate and impact each of us, albeit in profoundly different ways. Presentations by Amal Eqeiq, Iyko Day, Doug Kiel, Farina King, Malinda Lowery, and Linda Coombs showed how violence and resistance must be traced across disparate and local political geographies. Alyssa Mt. Pleasant, Circe Sturm, Adrienne Keene, and Lóren Spears demonstrated how the multivalence of settler colonialism demands agile and innovative responses: from the theoretical to the institutional to the digital. Jessie Little Doe Baird and Will Wilson insisted that this work is also transhistorical and guided by the conviction that the politics of the present requires kinships across history, toward decolonial futures.

This year’s workshop demonstrated that the energy and interest in this work is already here. The workshop was fully-attended, for more than nine hours, by faculty, staff, students, and community members from across New England. It opened new collaborations between Tufts, other universities, and the tribal communities whose land we occupy. And it was an occasion to celebrate relationships that have been ongoing for decades. Settler colonialism makes it hard to see that we are already bound in struggle. One thing that links the study of colonialism and material practices of decolonization is what made this year’s RCD workshop possible in the first place: a willingness to gather and think beyond the narrow terms of who and where we are that colonialism sets out for us.

Matt Hooley,
Lecturer in American Studies
Lead organizer of the Native American and Indigenous Studies conference
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