Third Annual Traditional Powwow

IU kicks off Native American Heritage Month with largest powwow yet.

On October 26 and 27, Indiana University hosted its third annual traditional powwow at the Willkie Auditorium. Native Americans from across the United States and Canada joined spectators—Native and non-Native alike—in a weekend filled with dancing, drumming, and socializing.

The event drew around 1,000 attendees over the course of two days. The highly acclaimed host drum groups attracted veterans of the powwow circuit, many of whom traveled long distances to participate in what is fast becoming one of the Midwest’s preeminent powwows.

Hailing from Pine Ridge, South Dakota, Brave Heart served as the Northern host drum. The Grammy Award winning Cozad drum, a Kiowa group from Hominy,

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Oklahoma filled the role of Southern...
host drum. And Chaske Hotain, a group founded in Sioux Valley, Manitoba and now based in Dayton, Ohio, was the event's invited drum.

A prominent head staff led by emcee Terry Fiddler (Lakota) and arena director Darrell Goodwill (Dakota/Lakota) helped keep each day's activities on schedule. Fiddler entertained the crowd with jokes and stories between dances and also helped explain the significance of the various styles of dance and song showcased over the weekend.

For a powwow only in its third year of existence, and one hosted by a university far from what most would call Indian Country, this combination of drums and staff was nothing short of exceptional. Even Fiddler, winner of multiple dance competitions at major powwows, and Goodwill, eight-time world champion grass dancer, commented on this rare assemblage of talent.

In addition to bringing in the highest caliber staff, the event's organizers hoped to highlight the powwow's capacity to educate. Catering to a predominantly non-Native audience, IU’s powwow offered an opportunity for non-Native students and community members to learn more about contemporary Indian culture as well as Native history. Equally important, it offered many of Bloomington’s Native students and community members a chance to mingle with old friends and meet other Native Hoosiers.

As part of this educational mission, this year’s Head Man Dancer was University of Kansas student Isaiah Stewart (Oglala Lakota) from Lawrence, Kansas. Charlie Cuny (Oglala Lakota) from Kyle, South Dakota and a student at Haskell Indian Nations University attended as Head Woman Dancer. As college students and powwow dancers, Stewart and Cuny symbolized the continuing popularity of the powwow as a vehicle for Native expression now and in the future.

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In the week before the event, Indian Country Today, a major
Clyde Ellis, Distinguished Scholar and Professor of History at Elon University, Visits IU Campus

Clyde Ellis, Distinguished Scholar and Professor of History at Elon University, visited campus October 24-27 to share his work on the history of the powwow and to participate in IU’s third annual traditional powwow. Ellis has written extensively on the powwow and powwow culture, co-editing the volume *Powwow* (University of Nebraska Press) in 2006.

Ellis’s October 24 talk at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, titled “This is a Good Way: Get Up and Dance,” investigated the powwow as a modern form of Native cultural expression. Ellis, whose works tend to focus on peoples and communities on the southern plains, explained that the powwow served as one way for Native nations to simultaneously embrace and negotiate rapid change while also maintaining and adapting various traditions at the turn of the twentieth century. In particular, the powwow became a way for Indian people to counter government repression of dancing. The powwow also represented a form of voluntary Native gathering that stood in stark contrast to federal boarding schools, places that for many young Native men and women were sites of captivity.

In his talk, Ellis used calendars produced by Silver Horn, a Kiowa ledger artist active between 1870 and 1920, to demonstrate that dancing continued despite the heavy-handed assimilation efforts famously deployed by the federal government during this period. Despite the best efforts of Indian agents, Native Americans never stopped dancing—they went underground, found new reasons for gathering, and adapted as necessary.

Ellis demonstrated that powwows themselves, like all forms of cultural expression, changed over time. In the 1930s, the powwow atmosphere became increasingly solemn as these gatherings became places where men without veteran status could join warrior societies. Through the middle part of the twentieth century, powwows grew in size and focused greater attention on contest dancing. More elaborate forms of dance, namely fancy dancing, enhanced powwows’ performative component. This period also saw the opening of these events to the public, a move that contributed to the further growth of powwow gatherings.

Despite this ongoing evolution of powwow culture, Ellis noted that powwows have consistently maintained some component designed to honor and acknowledge military service. In the 1940s and 1950s, powwows were commonly organized to honor the massive number of Native veterans who served in World War II and the Korean War as well as

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Ellis (continued from p. 3)
Native news publication, promoted the IU powwow in an article that celebrated the event’s “top-notch performers.” This national attention coupled with the event’s highest turnouts since its inception bode well for the future of the Indiana University powwow.

The event’s organizers and sponsors—a group that included the First Nations Educational and Cultural Center, the Native American Graduate Student Association, the IU Student Association, and many others—ultimately hope to make IU’s powwow the largest in the Big 10.

the War Mothers who aided these war efforts on the home front. Native military service has remained high into the present and thus contemporary powwows continue this tradition of acknowledging service.

Ellis’s interest in powwow culture extends far beyond his formal work. A powwow dancer himself, Ellis attended and participated in IU’s powwow. A longtime attendee of powwow gatherings, Ellis commended the event’s organizers for bringing together such a quality group of well-known drums, dancers, and staff. His presence certainly enhanced the prestige of the event and boosted the energy in an exciting and successful powwow weekend.

Dancers spend untold hours creating their regalia. The above photos showcase some of the intricate beadwork adorned by participants in the 2013 IU Powwow. Photos courtesy of Paula Stapley and IU FNECC.
“The Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA) aims to develop an approach to scholarship, institution building, and activism animated by the spirit of the decolonial, antiracist, and other global liberationist movements that enabled the creation of Ethnic Studies, and which continues to inform its political and intellectual projects. We seek to move away from current critical deadlocks, to counteract institutional marginalization, to revisit the political ideas that precipitated ethnic studies’ founding moment within the US academy, and to create new conversations.”

-CESA’s mission (from https://criticalethnicstudies.org/content/about)

This fall, I had the opportunity to attend the biannual meeting of the Critical Ethnic Studies Association (CESA). Titled “Decolonizing Future Intellectual Legacies and Activist Practices,” the conference took place from September 19-21 at the University of Illinois-Chicago and was hosted by UIC’s Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy.

I went both to support the strong contingent of friends and colleagues who traveled north from IU to present their work and because of the substantial presence of Native scholars and topics on the program. Like at the NAISA meeting earlier this summer, indigenous scholars traveled from as far as Australia and New Zealand to share their scholarship at CESA. Native scholars also sat on the CESA conference organization committee as well as on the association’s working committee.

As anticipated, the panels and roundtables devoted exclusively to Native American and indigenous studies proved to be intellectually invigorating and thought provoking.

More interesting, in terms of future reflection, were those scholars working in other areas—queer and critical race theory, diaspora studies, and a variety of ethnic studies—who made efforts to incorporate insights from NAIS into their own work. It was encouraging to see such a broad base of scholars grappling with insights drawn from Native studies, especially critiques and considerations of settler colonialism.

Watching this cross-disciplinary work also reaffirmed the importance of Native American and Indigenous Studies’ distinct set of inquiries. The value of these inquiries, and their clear influence on the direction of such a large and diverse body of cutting-edge scholarship left me feeling hopeful about the growth of Native American and Indigenous Studies at IU and elsewhere.

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**Upcoming Events & Conferences**

- **2014 Native American and Indigenous Studies Association Conference.** University of Texas at Austin, Texas, May 29-31, 2014. For more information, visit [www.naisa.org](http://www.naisa.org).
- **2014 Ethnohistory Conference.** Indianapolis, IN, October 8-12. [http://www.ethnohistory.org/](http://www.ethnohistory.org/)
- **Indiana University’s Fourth Traditional Powwow.** Indiana Memorial Union, November 1-2, 2014. [www.indiana.edu/~fnecc/](http://www.indiana.edu/~fnecc/)
- **Visit Indiana University’s** Native American and Indigenous Studies program on [facebook](https://www.facebook.com) for updates on upcoming talks, workshops, events, and more!