

ANTH 303 -- INDIGENOUS CULTURES TODAY – READING GUIDE

Dr. Maximilian C. Forte

INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE FOR CONTEMPORARY INDIGENEITY

Hughes, Lotte. 2003. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Indigenous Peoples*. London: New Internationalist & Verso Books. (Ch. 1, Overview, 10-28)

1. Why is it politically important for so many indigenous representatives to insist on *self-identification* as a primary means of establishing whether or not a person is indigenous? Do you suspect there can be any serious problems with this, and if so, what might they be?
2. Hughes does a decent job of condensing a wide range of key documents by institutions that engaged the question of “who are the indigenous peoples”? What are the elements that are *common* to all of the attempted definitions?
3. Keeping cultural institutions intact; possessing a different language; remoteness and isolation; residing in a territory they have occupied since pre-colonial times; subsistence economies—these are elements one can find in the diverse representations of who should be defined as indigenous. What do you suspect are the main political problems that such defining elements raise, especially if self-identification is valued at the same time as these defining traits?
4. What does it mean to say that “indigenous” is an “essentialist” category? Does it need to be?
5. How would you characterize the role of the United Nations in aiding, or impeding, something we might call “indigenous resurgence”?

Field, Les. 1994. “Who are the Indians?” *Latin American Research Review*, 29 (3): 227–238.

Note: when reading this article, don’t feel constrained to keep careful track of which group of authors says what about whichever peoples they are discussing—instead, try to stay focused on the main themes, on the “cultural survival school” and the “resistance school”, how they differ, and the points that are raised about tradition and its relationships to identity.

1. What does it mean to focus on the “processual” nature of indigenous identities?
 2. What are the distinguishing features of the “cultural survival school” in how indigenous cultures are represented?
 3. What are the distinguishing features of the “resistance school” in how indigenous cultures are represented?
 4. What are the likely anthropological sources from which the “cultural survival school” emerged?
 5. “...being Indian may have little or no connection to precontact sociocultural forms” (Reader page 34)—what do you think of this statement and what are its implications for the politics of indigenous representation?
 6. A number of authors covered in Field’s review seem to emphasize paradoxical features of (attempted) assimilation processes. Can you indicate a few of these features? In addition, how can “assimilation” be viewed as conceptually flawed, as destined to backfire from the outset?
 7. What is your personal view with respect to the concluding paragraph? Do you like the direction in which scholarship is going?
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