In the decades since the passing of the Pamajewon ruling in Canada and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in the United States, gaming has come to play a crucial role in how Indigenous peoples are represented and read by both Indians and non-Indians alike. This collection presents a transnational examination of North American gaming and considers the role Indigenous artists and scholars play in producing depictions of Indigenous gambling.

In an effort to offer a more complete and nuanced picture of Indigenous gaming in terms of sign and strategy than currently exists in academia or the general public, Gambling on Authenticity crosses both disciplinary and geographic boundaries. The case studies presented offer a historically and politically nuanced analysis of gaming that collectively creates an interdisciplinary reading of gaming informed by both the social sciences and the humanities.

A great tool for the classroom, Gambling on Authenticity works to illuminate the not-so-new Indian being formed in the public’s consciousness by and through gaming.

“Gambling on Authenticity is a timely, informative, and readable collection of essays showing that Indian gaming involves so much more than economic development or politics. . . . The interdisciplinary range—from representations of Indian gaming in literature and art to ethnographic and rhetorical studies of gaming controversies—and the attention to differences among tribal nations as well as U.S. vs. Canadian regulations and practices make this an outstanding collection.”—Nancy J. Peterson, Professor of English and American Studies, Purdue University, and author of Against Amnesia: Contemporary Women Writers and the Crises of Historical Memory.

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Gambling on Authenticity
Gambling on Authenticity
GAMING, THE NOBLE SAVAGE, AND THE NOT-SO-NEW INDIAN

EDITED BY
Becca Gercken AND Julie Pelletier
To my parents, my first and best teachers.
BECCA GERCKEN

To Zack and Mary Beth, who believe in me.
JULIE PELLETIER
In May 2009, Susan Applegate Krouse, PhD, was scheduled to present “Miracle on Canal Street” at one of the first meetings of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), at a panel she had organized. Instead, she asked me, her former graduate student, to read her paper, as I was on the same panel. She and her husband, Ned Krouse, took a long-postponed trip to France instead. The decision was timely but bittersweet, made in the aftermath of a cancer diagnosis. Susan walked on in June 2010, her life and her work prematurely ended. The following is the abstract of “Miracle on Canal Street: Forest County Potawatomi Charitable Giving,” which she submitted to NAISA:

The Forest County Potawatomi Community operates a highly successful tribal gaming enterprise and contributes substantially to a variety of charities. The charitable giving is clearly part of the tribe’s effort to give back to their communities, but it is also good business and helps them maintain good relations with the public and with local and state governments. Tribal philanthropy on a large scale is new to Indian Country. This piece examines the decisions made by the tribe in their charitable giving and the image they present with their philanthropic choices.

(Susan Applegate Krouse, 2009)

As sometimes happens with conference panels, the presenters were inspired with the idea of putting together a book, with our papers expanded into chapters. Darrel Manitowabi was on the NAISA panel in 2009; he and I also presented papers related to Indian casinos. As the panel organizer, Susan was one of the individuals taking the lead, and some ideas were tossed around over the next few months, between bouts of chemo and the inevitable distractions and obligations that derail the best intentions. Then, too soon, Susan was too ill to carry on. That particular book project didn’t come to fruition, but we believe that she would have eagerly contributed to this book. We dedicate this book to her memory.
Contents

ixFOREWORD
LeAnne Howe

xvINTRODUCTION
Becca Gercken

xxvPAN-TRIBAL NATIONALIST FANTASY
Scott Andrews

xxviiCOLUMBUS DAY 2092
Scott Andrews

1Raised Stakes: Writing on/and the New Game of Chance
Becca Gercken

23An Interview with Jim Denomie
Heid E. Erdrich
33 The Noble Savage as Entrepreneur: Indian Gaming Success
Julie Pelletier

57 (Re)Imagining First Nations Casinos: A Necessary Response
to Ensure Economic Development
Yale D. Belanger

85 Casinos, Culture, and Cash: How Gambling Has Affected
Minnesota Tribal Nations
Caroline Laurent

111 “It’s a Question of Fairness”: Fee-to-Trust and Opposition to
Haudenosaunee Land Rights and Economic Development
Meghan Y. McCune

135 Masking Anishinaabe Bimaadiziwin: Uncovering Cultural
Representation at Casino Rama
Darrel Manitowabi

159 ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS
Foreword

LeAnne Howe

Noble Savage: She's too intense for me. And I feel nothing. No emotion. In fact, I’m off all females—even lost my lust for attacking white chicks.

(PAUSE.)

Therapist: (He writes furiously on a yellow pad, but says nothing.)

Noble Savage: People expect me to be strong. Wise. Stoic. Without guilt. A man capable of a few symbolic acts. Ugh—is that what I'm supposed to say?

Therapist: (He continues writing.)

Noble Savage: I don’t feel like maiming. Scalping. Burning wagon trains. I’m developing hemorrhoids from riding bareback. It’s an impossible role. The truth is I’m conflicted. I don’t know who I am. What should I do, Doc?

Therapist: I’m afraid we’ve run out of time. Let’s take this up during our next visit.

I've been thinking about American Indians as "Noble Savages" for decades, hence, the series of Noble Savage poems in Evidence of Red (2005). Recently one of my new poems, "Noble Savage Learns to Tweet" from 99 Poems for the 99 Percent: An Anthology of Poetry, has had new life as a video poem.¹

All this interest in "noble savagery" comes from my brother and me watching
black-and-white Westerns as teenagers, although we didn't have the vocabulary to discuss them in, *uh-hem*, sophisticated ways. What follows is more or less an accurate account of our dialogue after seeing a weekly Western on Oklahoma City's Channel Five.

"Crap," I say as the end credits roll.

  My brother shrugs. "Whaddaya expect; it's *Stagecoach* and John Wayne."

  Some might call this rhetorical style stoic. I prefer concise.

  Same time the next week. Another Western. Indians shot to pieces.

  "Crap."

  "Whaddaya expect; it's *Arizona* and Jean Arthur," says my brother.

  The following week.

  "Crap."

  "Whaddaya expect; it's *Duel in the Sun* and Gregory Peck."

  (By now you know what I said.)

  "Whaddaya expect; it's *Broken Arrow* and Jimmy Stewart."

  Silence.

  "Whaddaya expect; it's *Broken Lance* and Spencer Tracy."

  "Crimony." (Developing verbal skills.)

  "Whaddaya expect; it's *The Unforgiven* and Audrey Hepburn."

  "$%*@$#@!" (Taking the Lord's name in vain.)

  Then one Friday night, Channel Five had a salute to silent films, and we watch our first and last silent Western together. My brother, bored witless, says he'll never watch another silent film as long as he lives.


  "Crappo," says my brother, adding the "o" for emphasis. "Westerns are all the same; Indians are either suck-ups to white people, or they are the bad guys."

That about sums up our viewing experiences in the late 1960s. At the time there were two kinds of movie roles for Indians in film: Noble Savages or just plain Savages; both were played by non-Indian actors. My brother and I didn't know these terms, but were developing our movie critic's skills. Instead of thumbs up or down, the simple one-word "crap" was used.

Today American Indians and American Indian Nations have made great strides in economic development because of Indian gaming. Each summer and all holidays I return home to Ada, Oklahoma, where my grandmother and mother once lived.
Their home is now mine. Ada is the seat of the government for the Chickasaw Nation, whose lands include the south-central region of Oklahoma. Located in Ada proper are the Chickasaw Nation's Arts and Humanities complex, the Chickasaw Nation hospital, a Bedré Chocolatier gift shop, and many other tribal businesses. In the Chickasaw Nation's 2011 report to the Oklahoma Indian Affairs Commission, the Chickasaw Nation operations include seventeen casinos, eighteen smoke shops, a chocolate factory in Davis, a hospital, several museums, and a publishing house, with a combined economic impact of $13 billion annually. The tribe employs some 10,000 people and is growing by leaps every year.

Yet the image of the Noble Savage still prevails across America, its history dating back to early filmmakers. Film scholar and Washington and Lee University professor Harvey Markowitz has demonstrated in his insightful introduction in *Seeing Red—Hollywood's Pixeled Skins: American Indians and Film* that early American films lacked an identity of their own until exhibitors showed an interest in Indians and Western themes. Markowitz writes:

> Given the concomitant rise in U.S. nationalism and world influence beginning in the early twentieth century, it should come as no surprise that some of these features focused on the challenges of creating movies that both reflected and promoted American identity and exceptionalism. Consider the editorial “What Is an American Subject?,” which appeared in the January 22, 1910 edition of *The Moving Picture World*. The inspiration for this piece emerged from its author's discovery of two growing sentiments among U.S. motion-picture exhibitors, both in keeping with the nationalistic temper of the times: first, “the desirability of providing American film subjects for American motion picture audiences . . . as against the imported film that . . . usually has the drawback of not dealing with a subject suitable for an American audience,” and second, the “urgent necessity of American subjects made by American labor.”

Markowitz further writes that “the beginning of the filmmaking industry in the United States suffered from an identity crisis. What would come to signal ‘American’ for early film exhibitors would be Indians, either as subjects or the absent presence in Westerns.” In this way American films are symbiotically connected with the images of Noble Savages or Savages as a baby’s umbilical cord is tied to its mother. As a result, the consequences for American Indians have been detrimental to the ways in which we see ourselves.
Psychologist and University of Arizona professor Stephanie A. Fryberg has shown in her research that the effects of “Indian stereotypes” contribute to low self-esteem, lower grades in school, and high dropout rates of American Indians in high school and college.

Contemporary American Indians, for example, exist beyond the reach of most Americans. That is, most Americans have no direct, personal experience with American Indians (Pewewardy, 1995). The relative invisibility of American Indians is, in part, the result of population size and segregated residential living. American Indians constitute 1.5% of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006), and about 34% of American Indians live on Indian reservations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Moreover, only 57% of American Indians live in metropolitan areas, which is the lowest metropolitan percentage of any racial group (Office of Minority Health, 2008). One consequence of this relative invisibility is that the views of most Americans about American Indians are formed and fostered by indirectly acquired information (e.g., media representations of American Indians).

Fryberg goes on to explain that the negative impact on Natives’ self-esteem as a consequence of seeing, viewing, and being confronted with stereotypical representations of American Indian imagery is endemic in the United States. “American Indian mascots and other fictionalized, idealized, and noncontemporary representations may be associated with low self-esteem and in-group ratings because they do not provide guidelines or images for how to realize positive and contemporary selves.”

Furthermore, Fryberg’s research explains why my brother and I became such “cranky social critics.” Each week we watched as American Indians failed, either by deeds or by way of life. “Indians in headdresses” continue to show up in contemporary movies that are not about American Indians. Films as wide-ranging as De-Lovely (2004), The Birdcage (1996), Blazing Saddles (1974), Hidalgo (2004), and even Ma and Pa Kettle (1949) all contain random stereotypical images of Indians that early filmmakers solidified.

Like the Noble Savage in my poem, American Indians suffer from an identity crisis that is difficult to escape even in the twenty-first century. The essays in Gambling on Authenticity: Gaming, the Noble Savage and the Not-So-New Indian edited by Gercken and Pelletier seek to complicate, enlighten, and trouble the stereotypes...
that still haunt us, or send us to therapy. That is, if we are fortunate enough to live in a community that has a therapist.

NOTES


3. *Arizona*, directed by Wesley Ruggles (1940; Tucson, AZ), DVD.
5. *Broken Arrow*, directed by Delmar Davis (1950; Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007), DVD.
9. Ibid., vii.
12. Ibid., 216.
Introduction

Becca Gercken

There are clear and profound differences between Indigenous gaming in the United States and Canada, and yet academics and nonacademics, American and Canadian Indians, and European Americans and European Canadians make sweeping generalizations about North American Aboriginal casinos. Assumptions are made about the sameness of Indigenous gaming in North America, from its origins to its impact. With Gambling on Authenticity, we attempt to explain why people look for these similarities and even imagine them when they are not there. The goal of our analysis of gaming in its various functions—both cultural and economic—is twofold: to clarify how gaming is used to talk about Indian-ness in both academic and nonacademic conversations, and to explore what the rhetoric surrounding Indigenous gaming reveals about perceptions of and anxiety over Indigenous sovereignty.

In an effort to offer a more complete and nuanced picture of gaming as sign and strategy than currently exists in academia or the general public, Gambling on Authenticity crosses both disciplinary and geographic boundaries. There is a growing body of scholarship on gaming in North America, but virtually all of it focuses on economics or politics, stays either above or below the 49th parallel, and often focuses on a particular tribe’s or band’s gaming operation. This collection instead
offers a transnational examination of North American gaming and considers the role Indigenous artists and scholars play in producing representations of Indigenous gambling. Each case study offers a historically and politically nuanced analysis of gaming, and, together, the studies create an interdisciplinary reading of gaming informed by both the social sciences and the humanities. *Gambling on Authenticity* works to illuminate the not-so-new Indian being formed in the public's consciousness by and through gaming, asking readers to consider how Indigenous identity is being undone, reconstructed, and reimagined in the Indian casino era.

The Congress finds that . . . Indian tribes have the exclusive rights to regulate the gaming activity on Indian lands if the gaming activity is not specifically prohibited by Federal law and is conducted within a State which does not, as a matter of criminal law and public policy, prohibit such a gaming activity.

—United States Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, October 17, 1988

It used to be that claims of Indigenous identity were most likely to be met with the question, “How Indian are you?” Now an Indigenous person is just as likely to be asked, “How much casino money do you get?” Indian gaming has entered the public consciousness in such a way that it is associated with all Indians, regardless of whether or not their tribe has a casino. The pervasiveness of Indian gaming in North Americans’ conception of contemporary Indian identity has transformed some Indian stereotypes, while reinforcing others and creating new ones. Given how central gaming has become to conversations about Indians—our identity, our economy, our sovereignty—it is surprising to look back and see how little media attention it received, especially at the national level, when Indian gaming was made legal in the United States.

On October 17, 1988, when the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) passed, there were few big newspaper headlines and no magazine articles. A simple search of newspapers in the months surrounding the passage of IGRA reveals a spike in articles in September and October, but the number never exceeds 100 and drops off precipitously by December 1988. In the few states in which Indian gaming was in
place—Florida, Minnesota, and California—the act received some media coverage, but the story was local, tied only to nearby Indian nations and the potential impact on the state’s economy.3

Today, Indian gaming exists in twenty-eight states, and 43 percent of the 566 federally recognized tribes have gaming operations. However, even with increased public awareness of the expansion of gaming and the economic and political power it has brought to tribes, there was still little buzz outside of Indian Country when Jon Tester, Democratic senator from Montana, led a reexamination of IGRA in 2014. Tester acknowledged that “while gaming is not a cure-all for the challenges facing Indian Country, it has provided numerous benefits to the communities who operate successful facilities. We need to make sure all tribal nations can determine the best possible future for their people, whether that’s gaming or not.”4 Tester’s comments reveal progress in federal-Indian relations: the phrase “tribal nations” acknowledges sovereignty (at least of federally recognized tribes). Moreover, the recognition that tribes themselves “can determine the best possible future for their people” precludes any hint of the Marshall Trilogy’s paternalistic legacy.5 Yet even with these signs of progress in federal-Indian relations, Native Americans expressed anxiety about the actions of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA); Indian Country Today’s headline for July 28, 2014, read, “Indian Gaming Reform: What Is Congress Plotting, and How Will SCIA [Senate Committee on Indian Affairs] Chair Jon Tester Respond?”6

In order to be an aboriginal right an activity must be an element of a practice, custom, or traditional integral to the distinctive culture of the aboriginal group claiming the right.

—R. v. Pamajewon, August 22, 1996

Another Casino, Another Controversy

—CBC News Canada, April 18, 2000

In Canada, the story about gaming is different both because of Indigenous Canadians’ relationship to their government and because of their definition of aboriginal identity. First Nations people describe themselves as having status, which would be like an American Indian saying he or she is enrolled; similarly, they might describe themselves as a “treaty Indian.” Claiming Indigenous identity in Canada can be
just as contentious as claiming Indigenous identity in the United States, although blood quantum does not get invoked in aboriginal identity politics in the ways that it does in America. Another crucial difference in Canada’s Indigenous gaming story is that provinces, not First Nations, own casinos. Because tribes do not own their casinos, status members do not encounter the same questions about casino money in Canada that enrolled members face in the United States. The differences in the American Indian versus Aboriginal Canadian gaming experience can be traced to the laws that made gaming possible. As mentioned earlier, IGRA asserts that gaming is possible because of federally recognized tribes’ sovereign status. The finding in Canada’s most crucial gaming case, R. v. Pamajewon, is different:

In order to be an aboriginal right an activity must be an element of a practice, custom, or traditional integral to the distinctive culture of the aboriginal group claiming the right. The Court must first identify the exact nature of the activity claimed to be a right and must then go on to determine whether that activity could be said to be “a defining feature of the culture in question” prior to contact with the Europeans.7

The decision to allow gaming was tied to Canada’s Indian Act and was not about the sovereign right granted to aboriginal people on their own land base; rather, it was about the right to regulate what happened on that land.8 In spite of the court’s recognition of this right, the court gave the power to regulate gaming to the provinces, not to First Nations peoples. And while there is a perception that American Indian tribes have more control over their gaming operations than do Canadian tribes and in fact do oversee the day-to-day operation of their casinos, the fact remains that American Indigenous gaming is regulated by IGRA. Therefore, the more crucial distinction between the Pamajewon ruling and IGRA is that in Canada, tribes must establish a historical cultural connection to gaming—a requirement not found in IGRA. This connection is to be determined by the court, a disturbing and contradictory erasure of aboriginal peoples’ cultural sovereignty.

It is perhaps because of these differences in legal findings that Canada has not seen the growth in Indigenous gaming witnessed in the United States. However, as Kevin Libin observes in the National Post, “In Canada so far, 14 First Nations casinos have opened since 1996, when North Battleford’s Gold Eagle and Prince Albert’s Northern Lights pioneered the Canadian industry in Saskatchewan, inspired by the success of Foxwoods.”9
Indian Gaming stopped being a local story in the United States and Canada long ago. People know—and have opinions—about gaming regardless of whether or not there is an Indian casino near them, and that knowledge comes from our understanding—and sometimes misunderstanding—of gaming’s impact. It has transformed Indian Country and Indian relationships with state and provincial as well as federal governments. It has changed the conversation about many reservation and reserve economies and put sovereignty in the spotlight and often under siege.

This collection examines how Indigenous communities, leaders, and artists in the United States and Canada employ and subvert perceptions of Indigenous peoples and their cultural practices in the context of gaming. It also engages the relevance of gaming to questions central to contemporary Indian life, including identity and sovereignty. We are analyzing not just Indian casinos themselves, but what they have come to mean for Indians and non-Indians alike. By examining the performance of Indian-ness in the context of gaming—from casino art to Indian entrepreneurship to depictions of casinos in American Indian literature—each chapter considers the profound ambiguity of the stereotypical Indian-ness that pervades gaming culture and also marks the moments when Indians resist the stereotype not in spite of gaming, but because of gaming. We study not only these cultural performances and what motivates them but also how these performances are read.

The book opens with “Raised Stakes: Writing on/and the New Game of Chance” in which Becca Gercken examines literary representations of gaming, focusing on works by Jim Northrup, Louis Owens, Stephen Graham Jones, Gerald Vizenor, and Louise Erdrich. Gercken argues that gaming is shorthand recognized by both Indian and non-Indian readers alike and that it serves as a mechanism to foreground questions of identity, authenticity, and sovereignty in a compact yet complicated space. Her analysis suggests that contemporary Indigenous writers reveal a profound ambivalence toward gaming as their texts teach us about gaming’s peril and its protection, its limitations, and its possibilities.

Heid E. Erdrich considers a different type of representation of Indian gaming through her interview with painter Jim Denomie, a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Ojibwe. Working through critic Dean Rader’s framework of Indigenous art as “engaged resistance,” Erdrich’s conversation with Denomie about
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