

American Indian Studies and Intersectionality of Ethnic Studies

Gail Morris, Nuuchahnulth, Native American Program Manager, Seattle Public
Schools

Where We Begin...

“When we look at the history of the United States of America, we are U.S. history...U.S. history doesn't begin with Plymouth Rock; it doesn't begin with Lewis and Clark; it begins with us.”

--Gail Morris, Native American Program Manager, Seattle Public Schools (*Through Ethnic Studies, Schools Push to Include Marginalized Perspectives*. Edutopia, May 21, 2021)

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American Indian studies should have a theoretical and methodological focus sufficient to organize an academic discipline. American Indian nations, or more generally indigenous nations, form distinct political and cultural groups that are informed by creation and cultural teachings that encourage preservation of self-government, community, and stewardship of land within the context of surrounding nation-states that prefer assimilation and political inclusion to recognition of indigenous goals and values. Most contemporary theories of group action can provide only partial explanations for the conservative cultural and political organization of indigenous peoples and for their cultural and political continuity to the present. The distinct cultural, institutional, and political organization and nonconsensual relations of American Indian nations with the U.S. government constitutes a unique pattern of social-cultural organization and cultural and political contestations. A primary focus of American Indian studies as a discipline is to conceptualize, research, and explain patterns of American Indian individual and collective community choices and strategies when confronted with relations with the American state and society. American Indian cultural emphasis on maintaining culture, identity, self-government, and stewardship of

What is American Indian Studies?

In Search of Theory and Method In American Indian Studies, Duane Champagne, American Indian Quarterly, Vol. 31, 2007

What is ethnic studies?

... the interdisciplinary study of race and ethnicity, as understood through the perspectives of major underrepresented racial groups in the United States.

...the teaching of histories, cultures, and intellectual traditions of people of color in the United States to promote social transformation

We are nations...we are in treaty relationships with the United States.

American Indians had such different needs during the civil rights era — we sought a measure of separation from the US mainstream political culture, not assimilation relative to exercising the civil liberties of this nation. – Dr. Joshua Reid (University of Washington, History, American Indian Studies)

...American Indians do not form an ethnic group, they are composed of thousands of independent nations, communities, and cultures that have very different and specific identities.

Indian country is more like the multitude of nations that form the United Nations than a shared ethnicity.

The concept of ethnicity oversimplifies American Indian identities and homogenizes the cultural, political, and diversity of American Indian identities.

What is the difference between American Indian and ethnic studies?

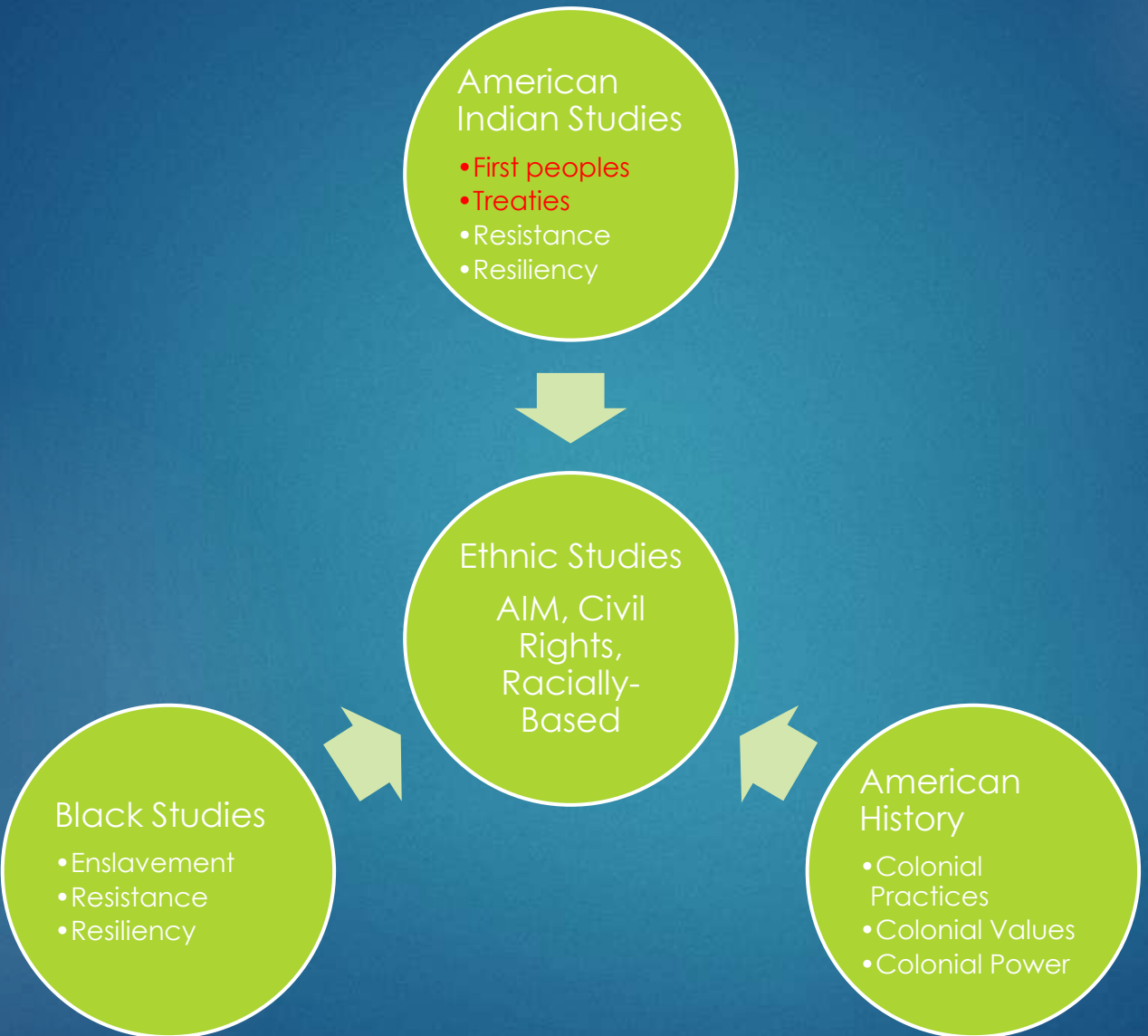
What is the big deal?

Indigenous
Invisibility is often
the unintended
byproduct of a
central focus on
ethnic studies.

“...research literature mostly attends to African American and Latino ethnic communities and severely neglects the views of indigenous populations in the U.S. and the relationship between tribal identification and U.S. civic identification.”

(Castro and Knowles 2017)

Where the disciplines intersect



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(Thank you.)