

## American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program at the Smithsonian Institution

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"WE ARE NOT HERE TO DEMAND OR DESTROY, but here to learn," said David Fanman, a sixty-year-old Southern Cheyenne from Oklahoma. He made the statement to Smithsonian Institution administrators after he had participated in the American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program, an attempt by the Smithsonian to make its rich collections more accessible to the Indian community. The program, which began in June 1973, reflects the changing attitudes of U.S. museum administrators toward their collections. They realize that the collections are not the playthings of a special segment of the population; the collections belong to all peoples from all backgrounds. As one Smithsonian curator expressed it, "these collections were acquired for posterity, and posterity is now."

The American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program is a function of the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian Institution. The archives, a unit of the Department of Anthropology in the National Museum of Natural History, was organized in 1965 as successor to the archives of the Bureau of American Ethnology. Since the Bureau of American Ethnology was primarily interested in North American Indians, its collections represent one of the world's greatest resources for the study of American Indians. The materials, which date from 1847, include 90,000 photographs and 3,500 cubic feet of documents, field notes, sound recordings, and papers of anthropologists and anthropological organizations.

Despite the rich holdings relating to the native Americans, very few of them visited the archives before 1973. Even worse, many seemed to think that the archives were closed to everyone except important scholars, an attitude expressed by several members of the Indian Community—Everett Burch and Eddie Box of the Southern Utes, David Warren, Director of the Research and Cultural Studies Section of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Joseph Medicine Crow, Chairman of the Crow Cultural Committee, Nelson Gorman of the Navajo Community College, and others who came to the archives. Each of these visitors was seeking to acquaint officials in the federal administrative structure with the need of the Indian peoples for knowledge about and access to the surviving records of their past. Several of them invited me to visit their reservations to meet with tribal officers and cultural committees. As a result, in the spring of 1973 I received guided tours of the Navajo and Crow reservations and participated in a

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week-long seminar in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where cultural program officers of the Ute, Nez Percé, Southern Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Zuni tribes expressed their desire for any training the Smithsonian Institution might be able to offer.

The need obviously existed for a program that would assist Indian Americans in discovering the information available to them relating to their history and culture, not only in the Smithsonian Institution but also in such important depositories as the Library of Congress and the National Archives. It was necessary to convince the administrators of these institutions of the need, and to raise enough money to launch a program to meet it. Both goals were accomplished with remarkable ease. Meetings between concerned Indians and officials of the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, and the National Endowment for the Humanities resulted in both the approval and the funding. From the Smithsonian Institution came funds to hire a program officer. Transportation and living expenses for the trainees were provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Rockefeller Foundation, the McConnell Clark Foundation, and the Cultural Studies Section of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. By June 1973, the American Indian Cultural Resources Training Program had become a reality.

Essentially, the program is designed to interest Indian Americans in becoming professional archivists and historians, and to instill in them a desire to learn more about their heritage and to share this knowledge with all Americans by publishing and preserving the surviving records of their past. Participants work out of the National Anthropological Archives, at the Library of Congress and the National Archives, as well as in the Smithsonian Institution. They work with a variety of materials relating to Indian Americans, including motion picture film, photographs, official records and private manuscripts, books, works of art, and artifacts.

The program is unique in that it leaves the selection of the participants to the individual tribal groups, who are charged with the importance of selecting candidates sophisticated enough to cope with the uncertainties of the untested program and yet sufficiently knowledgeable of their own history and culture to benefit from an intensive exposure to sound recordings, photographs, manuscripts, and other documentary materials relating to their tribes.

Thus far the tribes have made excellent selections. Eight trainees completed their internship during the pilot stage of the program. James Jefferson, a Southern Ute presently working toward his Ph.D. degree in history at the University of Utah and co-author of *The Southern Utes: A Tribal History*, found enough material to write a comprehensive history for his tribe. Augustine Smith, a Laguna Pueblo, and Lorraine Bigman, a Navajo, are both enrolled in degree-granting programs at the Navajo Community College; both are library science majors and both are employed by the college library. Sarah Yazzie, formerly a secretary employed by the Navajo Tribal Council at Window Rock, Arizona, returned to her tribe as tribal archivist. David Fanman, the aforementioned Southern Cheyenne, is currently working for the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribal Council as a field worker in an oral history program aimed at salvaging cultural information from elderly tribal members. George Sutton, an Arapaho, is now director of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Museum recently opened at Cantonment, Oklahoma. Harry Walters, a Navajo, has been appointed curator of the Navajo Cultural Center, on the campus of the Navajo Community College at Chinle, Arizona.

Mention should be made of Mrs. Harry Walters, who participated in much of the training offered the others although she was not officially a part of the pilot program. Anna Walters traced her Pawnee and Oto family history through federal records such as Army enlistment papers, census and land records, and correspondence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. As she later declared, "I have seen enlistment papers of my great grandfather, treaties actually signed by my great grandfather. . . . I have discovered so much! I feel that I have documented my Indian-ness!" When Mrs. Walters arrived, she knew nothing about the records either at the Smithsonian or at the National Archives; she is now writing a full-length family history.

Here is what other trainees have said about the program: Sarah Yazzie writes: "The three months . . . at the Smithsonian Institution were a great experience for me and I learned quite a bit. For example, I learned how to go about using the archives, what kind of records they have, what's available. I took notes on all of these and also I learned how to find what I am looking for and how to research documents from correspondence of the Indian superintendencies. I found a lot of valuable information doing research on records of the War Department, old records of Indian scouts, and old pension records of the Navajos. All these I can use in my work as an archivist for the Navajo tribe." She adds, "The Indian people have so much to learn and to research on their history. They want to do their own writing, their own teaching, and run their own museums. It is all within the training program. These are the reasons why I strongly feel the training program should be put on a permanent basis."

Her sentiments were echoed by George Sutton, who wrote, "The knowledge I have gained here is very enlightening to the Arapaho tribe. Most of our culture has disappeared or has been forgotten by the tribe. The information I received here is a great step toward retaining it for our future generations to come. Rest assured, when I return I shall inform all of my people of the knowledge I have gained through the National Anthropological Archives. I sincerely hope that through my efforts we can restore, retain, and preserve our culture."

"As for the success of this program," he continues, "one cannot judge at this very moment. Just like all other good things it takes time to see the fruits of your labor. As any new program being started, you will have certain people on both sides who oppose the program. This is more than natural. To these individuals I want to say this: give this program a chance to develop and then you can judge the results. I have already seen the results."

The trainees, for the most part, have had extended stays in Washington, visits of from six to twelve weeks. However, a group of six Northern Pueblo educators came for a one-week intensive workshop, an arrangement that also proved satisfactory. Melinda Pekarsic, director of the Head Start Program for the Northern Pueblo Agency, and Ramos Sanchez, Director of the Educational Talent Search Project, along with Allen Martinez, Joe Salazar, Juan Montoya, and Julian Martinez of his staff, attended orientation sessions at the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress. There, experts on cartography, Indian records, artifacts, and sound recordings discussed the resources of those institutions relating to the eight villages in New Mexico that constitute the Northern Pueblo Agency. The Indians were particularly interested in finding recordings of their songs and ceremonies, photographs, and documents that could be used as teaching aids in the public schools their chil-

dren attend. The All Indian Pueblo Council recently opened a cultural center in Albuquerque that houses a tribal archives containing, at least in part, copies of the recordings, documents, and photographs they located during their stay.

The results of the program thus far have been both gratifying and reassuring. Indeed, if the reports from the trainees are any measure, the program has been an outstanding success. We realize that the experience of a few individuals may not be sufficient to judge the long-range results of the program. Nevertheless, we are confident that accomplishments can be made through this program in four areas: (1) Indian communities can become more fully aware of the resources relating to their cultural history, including published and unpublished materials at national agencies such as the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives, and the Library of Congress; they can become acquainted with technical assistance that is available to them from experts in these agencies; (2) Indian communities will have an opportunity to convey their special needs to the staffs of these national resource agencies, thus establishing direct and informal channels of communication; (3) the national resource agencies will be made aware of the special needs of Indian communities and they can orient their programs and assistance efforts more effectively toward these needs; and (4) cooperation can occur between national resource agencies and the Indian community. Eventually a national resource pool of Indian and non-Indian persons can be developed, a talent pool that can be drawn on for developing new educational programs, nationally and locally, for more accurate presentation of American Indian life. For instance, we have found that the participants are in constant demand by local schools and church groups seeking persons of Indian descent who can speak intelligently on American Indian history, culture, and religion. The dialogue that is being established between Indians and non-Indians is one aspect of the program that had not been anticipated. If sustained over a period of time; the benefits to both the Indian and non-Indian communities will be incalculable.

The future of the training program appears bright. It has been approved and endorsed at every administrative level at the Smithsonian Institution up to the secretary's office. In fact, the Smithsonian has just launched a museum-wide program to help Native Americans establish and operate their own tribal museums.

The program is not without its critics, however. "The collections will be damaged or destroyed," some skeptics said. Others express the fear that militant groups will use the program as a trojan horse, as an opportunity to discover objects to demand later for tribal museums. Thus far there have been fifty-five Indian participants from fourteen tribes, and these fears have not been realized. Indeed, in their warmth, their sincerity, their desire to learn, their appreciation and even veneration of the objects of their fathers, the participants have been an inspiration to the museum people who have worked with them. There may be problems; these are to be expected. As David Fanman said in his report, "Speaking for myself, of your new program, I say it has a very good future, but it is going to take a lot of effort on both sides to make it a success, not only on your part but ours, the 'real' American Indian. Today there are skeptics on both sides. Some of our people are very anti-White and on certain things I agree with them. This program can bridge the gap of both sides and show good faith. All we are asking is a fair chance and hope you good people will give us the chance."