

Legislating (for) the Folk: The American Folklife Center in the U.S. National Imaginary

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Abstract: A legislative act of the U.S. Congress established the American Folklife Center in the National Library in 1976. In addition to its extensive collections from the U.S., the Archive of the American Folklife Center holds ethnographic archival materials from cultures around the world, dating from the late nineteenth century to the present. Through discussion of case studies of Center activities, this presentation will examine some of the challenges confronting the Center in its mission to advocate for traditional cultural expressions and folklore in national and international arenas. Examples range from the Center’s ethnographic documentary surveys of cultural communities to preservation of archival materials and their dissemination to participation in policy-making fora such as the World Intellectual Property Organization.

From Legislation to Ethics

One of the broad aims of this joint presentation is to juxtapose national or parliamentary policies and acts, on the one hand, against the local concerns and community infra-politics that inform the conduct of daily social life in those specific places, on the other. Such interactions are fraught with tension, to state the obvious. The case studies we present with regard to the topic of managing archival collections of cultural knowledge and intangible cultural heritage highlight profound, perhaps fundamentally irreconcilable, contradictions between these two realms. We will specifically relate these tensions to central questions of how, why, and in what ways can and should we preserve, maintain and make artifacts and items of the past available for present and future projects. In this regard, this presentation’s focus is in line with one of the central themes running through this symposium: the tension between preservation and circulation of materials in culture archives.

The classic formulation of the anthropologist Edmund Leach is that the discursive acts of myth and ritual are emblematic of the social order, but that the social order is predicated on a “language of argument, not a chorus of harmony” (Leach 1954:278). Extending this perspective to our own experiences and positions, we are interested in positioning the archival institution as a mediating site, poised between competing truth-claims; contrasting rhetorical positions; different political projects; and counterpoised cultural practices, ethical standards and value systems -- all of which are, of course, central to the formation of “the national imaginary” (Ginsburg 1995) as well as the local community.

To begin: The Congressional Act that established the American Folklife Center in 1976 is cited as the "American Folklife Preservation Act," Public Law 94-201. The purpose of the Act is to establish a Center to “develop and implement...programs to preserve, support, revitalize, and disseminate American folklife” and to develop an archive of documentation in all formats “which represent or illustrate some aspect of American folklife.” The history of the writing of this legislation and lobbying Congress for its passage by the folklorist Archie Green and others is a fascinating political story in itself; but we can’t tell all the stories that we’d like to in this gathering. We’ll begin by giving some quotes from this Act, to show the concepts that are embodied in this legislation. Here’s a few examples (for a full text of PL 94-201, please consult the website: http://www.loc.gov/folklife/public_law.html):

(1) that the diversity inherent in American folklife has contributed greatly to the cultural richness of the Nation and has fostered a sense of individuality and identity among the American people;

(4) that it is appropriate and necessary for the Federal Government to support research and scholarship in American folklife in order to contribute to an understanding of the complex problems of the basic desires, beliefs, and values of the American people in both rural and urban areas;

(6) that it is in the interest of the general welfare of the Nation to preserve, support, revitalize, and disseminate American folklife traditions and arts.

Several of these goals: fostering “a sense of individuality;” supporting “research and scholarship” and activities to “preserve...and disseminate” folklife, all of great value in themselves, may become problematic for certain cultural communities.

Our discussion, which moves from a consideration of legislation to issues of ethics and advocacy, will hopefully expand the previously mentioned tensions inherent in providing access to while at the same time protecting documentary collections of expressive culture.

A brief description of the Archive of Folk Culture, which in its first incarnation was known as the Archive of American Folk Song in the Music Division of the Library in 1928, sets the stage for the discussion to follow.

History of the Archive

The Library of Congress holds an immense archive of intangible cultural heritage collections. Approximately 4 million items reside in the collections of the American Folklife Center alone, making the Center one of the largest collections of ethnographic field recorded materials in the world. Among the most well known of these are wax cylinder sound recordings of American Indians made from 1890 to 1942, beginning with a March 1890 recording of Passamaquoddy people in Calais, Maine, recorded by Jesse Walter Fewkes, who subsequently made recordings of Zuni songs and ceremonies. One of the first projects undertaken by the newly created American Folklife Center was the Federal Cylinder Project, inaugurated in June 1979 as a joint effort by the Library, the Smithsonian Institution, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other federal agencies. A key goal of this project was to disseminate the newly preserved recordings

to the public, “particularly to those culture groups from which the material was originally collected.” (*The Federal Cylinder Project*, v. 1, p. 7), a point we will return to in our discussion.

In addition to large numbers of invaluable cylinder recordings documenting the culture of American Indian groups, this project included a significant number of recordings of other ethnic groups in the U.S. and elsewhere. These include recordings made at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 ranging from music of Java and Fiji to Turkish theater music; Maori music recorded in New Zealand in 1909 by Percy Grainger, who also recorded cylinders of Danish folk music in Jutland, Denmark; and Haitian music recorded by the ethnographer Melville Herskovits in 1924 -- in short, sound recordings documenting a huge range of cultural materials and not limited to cultural groups in the United States alone.

Robert Winslow Gordon, the first archivist of the Library of Congress folk music collection, which was established in 1928, recorded 825 cylinders of folk music across the U.S., from California to South Carolina, around 1930 in an effort to record every American folk song. Gordon was followed as archivist by John A. Lomax, who with his son, Alan Lomax, made thousands of field recordings for the Library of Congress between 1934 and 1942 on portable disc cutting machines. John and Alan Lomax recorded Cajun music in Louisiana; Mexican music along the Texas-Mexico border; and hundreds of hours of African American music sung and played in homes, in churches, and in prisons across the southern United States.

The ideological basis for these projects was first expressed in legislative programs enacted to provide economic recovery and relief from the Great Depression of the 1930s, otherwise known as New Deal legislation. The Lomaxes’ work for the Library included work jointly sponsored by the WPA Music Projects, WPA Writers Projects, and the WPA Joint

Committee on Folklore, all created by New Deal legislation. Subsequently, the cultural documentation work of the New Deal agencies was recast by Alan Lomax as a call for “cultural equity.” Lomax’s somewhat loosely defined notion of democracy for all local and ethnic cultures led him to argue for their right to be represented equally in the media, the schools, and in national cultural institutions

Moving rather quickly from the past into the present, the basic contours of that call continue to inform the work of the Center and Archive today. In the Center, the concept of representation of the expressive traditions of cultural communities around the world has developed well beyond the collecting impulse that drove the Lomaxes and their generation of documentary field workers. Since its establishment as a discrete service and program unit at the Library, American Folklife Center staff have provided cultural communities with the practical technical skills and a grounding in methodological principles. That is to say, we are as interested in training community members to engage in self-documentation and self-representation as we are in the standard practice of collecting and documenting community expressive traditions ourselves. Our field schools, which are intensive training programs offered in partnership with higher education institutions, are open to participation by any individual interested in learning documentation skills, which they can subsequently employ in their own communities and in their own projects.

The key point here is that the Center’s mission and philosophy of providing the space and means for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives to be expressed in the public arena is at once a goal and a challenge. This is so because our pluralistic aims involve a negotiation with communities of origin -- our research collaborators -- as to what archival artifacts and

knowledge may be documented, published and made accessible in the name of promoting community revitalization and intercultural understanding *and* conversely, what *must* remain guarded and under limited circulation in the name of protecting cultural patrimony and community sensitivities. In the course of such negotiations, we are reminded anew that the stories recorded on the miles of tape and stacks of disc recordings on our shelves are not ours to tell; that our collections are not mere empirical evidence and evidentiary documents, but are rather signposts pointing to a distant and essential past; and finally that the collective and individual memories, cultural histories and voices that our collections encapsulate are very often more precious to our patrons and interlocutors than the rarest of metals.

We want to turn now to the earlier point we made regarding the Federal Cylinder Project's expressed goal, which was to disseminate preserved recordings, "particularly to those culture groups from which the material was originally collected." (*The Federal Cylinder Project*, v. 1, p. 7),

Archival principles stress the importance of the relationship between such records, documents, or sound recordings and the **creators** of the archival materials. For ethnographic materials the **creators** are first of all the tradition bearers and community members who were recorded or documented. Creators retain rights to these materials, the rights do not (as many people often assume) "fall" automatically into the public domain. (See Preston Hardison, "Indigenous Peoples and the Commons," p. 3-4.)

Maintaining the original order of these materials and retaining the contextual information about how, when, where, why, and by whom they were recorded, is essential to maintaining these rights of the creators. The importance of understanding and maintaining relationships

between the archived materials and their creators comes forward in time in our work every day at the American Folklife Center. If we can locate the creators of the materials (or their descendants), we may establish a relationship with them, and return the recordings or other materials in formats that are accessible to them and their communities.

Case Study 1

So to begin with a case study, we want to consider the Omaha Music Project. AFC collaborated with the Omaha people, a Native American community in Nebraska in the American Midwest, from 1983 to 2000, culminating in the extensive online presentation called “*Omaha Indian Music*” - <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/omhtml/omhhome.html>

What follows is a brief summary of that relationship, drawn from detailed articles about the Federal Cylinder Project, the Omaha materials, and the documentation of related challenges of access and ethics, written by our colleagues Judith Gray, Head, American Folklife Center Reference (Gray 1994) and Laurel McIntyre, also at the Library (McIntyre 2000).

In brief, our work with the Omaha tribe of Nebraska began in 1979, just three years after the AFC was created by an act of the U.S. Congress. Recordings preserved by the Federal Cylinder Project, a major undertaking to transfer the content of archaic wax cylinder recordings to a modern format, that is, audiotape, included Omaha songs recorded by the noted ethnologists Francis La Flesche and Alice Cunningham Fletcher between 1895 and 1897. These recordings of Omaha songs stood out because, their “sound quality was better than that of many other cylinders, their documentation was complete for a wide variety of songs, and they were among the earliest recordings of Plains Indian Music” (McIntyre, 2000)

Because of these factors, the AFC began discussions with members of the tribal council to produce a recording. Subsequently, selections of songs made between 1895 and 1905 were made in collaboration with tribal members who also provided invaluable contextual and historical information about the songs that guided and shaped the final product. For instance, tribal members noted which songs were too sacred for public dissemination; these were not selected for inclusion in the published recording.

The repatriated recordings had a broad impact on the tribe. For one,

the return of early Omaha recordings assembled by Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, Jr., fed into the tribe's ongoing efforts to reclaim cultural material that [had] been separated from the Nebraska community. The 90-year-old recordings of the Hethu'shka songs helped facilitate refocusing and revitalization of the Hethu'shka Society (a group of honored veterans) as a recognized conservator of traditional values. ...[Copies of the published recording] were given to graduating Omaha high school students as a reminder of their living traditions. Hethu'shka Society members also traveled to Washington, D.C., [in 1985] to sing some of those same songs in a concert performance on the Library's Neptune Plaza (Gray, 1994).

To this day, this project remains a unique example of a U.S. government agency working in active collaboration with cultural communities in order to repatriate and disseminate their traditional cultural materials and the AFC considers it one of our most noteworthy initiatives. It is an example that has recently been cited as “best practice” by Martin Skrydstrup and Wend Wendland in the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Newsletter (2006).

Case Study 2

A second case lies in the ethnographic cultural heritage surveys and research conducted by the Center over the past 27 years around the United States – a number of these projects were undertaken in cooperation with the U.S. National Park Service – on the Canadian border of Maine and New Brunswick; in the city of Lowell, Massachusetts; in the undeveloped New Jersey

Pine Barrens; and in the city of Paterson, New Jersey; along the Blue Ridge Parkway on the Virginia and North Carolina border; and at New River Gorge and Coal River, West Virginia. Each of these projects explored traditional life and occupations, religious communities and expressions, land use, and people's relationships to the environment and ecosystems. None of these surveys focused on just a single ethnic or cultural group, and cultural diversity in each of these places was thoroughly documented. The projects focusing on the New Jersey Pine Barrens in 1983 and in West Virginia during the 1990s are of particular interest because they focused on community and individual uses of open spaces and natural resources as a "commons" and were among the earliest projects in the country to explicitly promote "cultural conservation," that is, maintaining patterns of compatible human use and development, at the same time as natural conservation. These projects stressed the value of human activities and traditions in an ecological context.

From 1992 to 1999, the American Folklife Center, under the coordination of Mary Hufford, folklorist and staff member, undertook a documentation project on the traditional uses of the mountains in southern West Virginia's Big Coal River Valley. For several generations of people living in this region, ways of life have included hunting, gathering, and subsistence gardening; the coal and timber industries have been a long-established presence here as well. The focus of the Library-led project was to investigate and make available to the broader public the intimate connection between the range of traditional ecological knowledge, economic activities, subsistence patterns, religious traditions, cultural identity, and how people expressed their attitudes about their community, the land, and changes in their way of life through their stories. In their own words, community members shared their knowledge about native forest species; traditional harvesting activities for such items as spring greens, summer berries, and fish; roots

such as ginseng; and how they used the wild leek or ‘ramp’, which is native to the region. We documented community cultural events such as storytelling, baptisms in the river, cemetery customs and other activities integrally related to the local landscape.

Our work in West Virginia is particularly appropriate to consider in the context of this and similar gatherings that have as their broad and specific focus the issues surrounding “indigenous knowledge.” In particular, the topic of traditional ecological knowledge, and the larger issues surrounding patenting of genetic resources and plant species is now a critical issue in international fora such as the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and other trade related meetings. Both the American Folklore Society and the American Folklife Center participate in those gatherings; therefore, these topics are even more timely for us. In any such gathering, it is instructive to listen to the words of the author, philosopher and activist Vandana Shiva because they capture some of the essential qualities of our approach to documenting and promoting traditional cultural expressions in West Virginia. She writes, “Biodiversity has been protected through the flourishing of cultural diversity. Utilizing indigenous knowledge systems, cultures have built decentralized economies and production systems that use and reproduce biodiversity” (Shiva 1997:72).

Vandana Shiva links biodiversity with cultural diversity, a position that reflects the AFC’s emphasis on the interrelatedness of all realms of social life, not only in the West Virginia mountains, but virtually everywhere. Our work is structured by the central idea that the folklife of a community – its economy, ecology, historical memory, community identity, daily activities, and cultural practices -- is a more or less integrated whole. This idea is conditioned by our training as ethnographers and historians of community life and culture. Importantly, our

emphasis on paying heed to local concerns and cultural sensitivities means keeping in mind that the concerns of small-scale communities and minority groups are not the same as that of dominant society or the larger, national polity.

By this we mean, that when it came time to publish the results of the research in West Virginia on our website, we listened when community members asked that we not make public, via the cultural and ecological maps we put up on the site, those areas of the land where they harvested ginseng in particular. Community members were fully aware of the high prices the root fetches in the global market place. They did not wish to encourage outsiders to come into the community and rapidly deplete a traditional economic and ecological resource that had been held in common for generations. Publishing the results of our research in this manner may have fulfilled one criterion of scholarly research which requires us to be thorough and accurate in our work, but would have certainly irreparably harmed the economic and ecological well-being of the community, an ethically and morally indefensible thing to do. In this regard we want to consider that the notion of restricted or “sacred knowledge” is a concept that many types of local communities have, and not only indigenous or Native communities.

Issues Relating to Access

In the wake of critical scholarship emanating from Vine Deloria, Dell Hymes, Hayden White, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and George Stocking, to name but a few, the notion that ‘knowledge’ and the institutions and disciplines that store, disseminate, produce, and reproduce knowledge are in any way neutral actors is not only unsustainable but demonstrably untrue (at the very least hopelessly naïve). Accordingly, this final portion of the presentation brings to the fore some key critiques about the maintenance and preservation of archival collections and the

knowledge encoded in them that disrupts any confidence that archives and libraries are ‘free’ of the cultural politics and contests over representation that color every aspect of intellectual production and practice the world over. We will do so by addressing the notion of access to the archival record(s), with reference to the practices and principles that lie at the base of the documentary tradition, before tackling the issue of “indigenous knowledge.”

The practice of selectively limiting access to specialized knowledge is a key issue for any archive that holds ethnographic materials, especially materials pertaining to Native American communities in the Americas. What follows is an overview of some of the other issues that affect the accessibility of Native American ethnographic documents and recordings. Our comments do not reflect policies of the American Folklife Center or the Library of Congress regarding access. We foreground these issues in this setting as practical considerations and problems that affect all archives that hold ethnographic materials, to varying degrees.

There are several compelling reasons that impede access to ethnographic materials:

Language. In some cases, dialects or tribal languages are no longer understood by members of the younger generation, and many people lack expertise in languages of these materials, even if they have an interest in and knowledge of the culture whose documentation they wish to access or study.

Preservation. Endangered recordings in obsolete formats may have no reference copies available. Even when archives are committed to making digital preservation copies (and analog preservation copies, as well) of endangered recordings, the financial resources are rarely or never available to accomplish this all at once. In 2000, building on the success of the Federal Cylinder

Project described above, the Library of Congress and the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage of the Smithsonian Institution received a large grant to preserve sound recordings housed at both institutions. This project, known as *Save Our Sounds*, has helped establish standards and guidelines for preservation, at the same time that it has enabled the preservation of thousands of recordings. Still, this work is not complete, even for the resources in these national archives. The challenge for smaller repositories is often much greater.

Search and retrieval. For both analog and digitized recordings, another barrier to access lies in the ability to search for and retrieve the materials; for this, the creation of metadata about the recording or item -- cataloging -- is essential. Few sound recordings have transcripts; some do have logs (of varying accuracy) of the contents, but some do not. For many recordings, the content may be unknown; awaiting research and resources for cataloging. In addition, ethnomusicological and folklife materials, whether they are sound recordings, video, or still photography, cover a huge range of subjects from diverse cultures, and up until now there has been no controlled vocabulary that provides terms to aid in the search for these materials. The Ethnographic Thesaurus, a joint project of the American Folklore Society and the American Folklife Center funded by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, is nearing completion in 2007 and has been created to fill this need (please consult the American Folklore Society's website: <http://et.afsnet.org/>). Controlled vocabularies are especially crucial and valuable in the digital environment -- they are not just for indexing paper files. However, controlled terms for certain place names, personal names, or technical knowledge may be controversial with regard to local communities' values and priorities.

Rights and rights management. Here we return to the point made at the beginning – that the creators of archived intangible cultural heritage materials retain the rights to those materials. This applies not just to copyright or to issues of information in the “public domain,” but basic human rights as well, which include the right to limit access to cultural heritage materials.

Limits on Access: Some materials are limited in access because they are neglected, for example, in boxes stored in inaccessible locations, or some materials may be judged (by an archivist, curator, or administrator) to be less important than other related materials. All processing and presentation of archival materials is *selective*: it is extremely rare for collections to be processed to the item level and recent trends in archival management have been advocating for minimal processing rather than complete processing of archives.

Another example: when producing digital content for online presentations, various criteria are used to select the materials, such as sound quality, superior image quality, or more interesting content-- not everything is made available. In addition, the issue of rights management comes to the fore in what is selected. Permissions must be secured for each item that is displayed or made available on the internet; therefore materials for which the rights are easy to secure may take precedence over those where the rights issues are unresolved, creating uneven public access to archives, sometimes even within one collection.

Digital technologies enable the sequestering or hiding of knowledge as well as its dissemination. There is a long history of restricting access to materials in archives. For example, individual donors often wish to restrict access to certain portions of the archival materials they

donate, usually for a limited period of time, perhaps 20 or 50 years after the donor's death.

These types of restrictions, however, can be managed by legal agreements.

More challenging, and most importantly, the communities the archive serves may also wish to restrict access to recordings of their occupational activities, sacred rites, music, and ceremonies. They may wish to restrict access to recordings of storytelling that should only be heard at certain times of year, by certain individuals. Because indigenous knowledge has no time limit on its restricted access, as keepers of this knowledge in our archive, our general obligation to make knowledge and archival resources public can be in tension with our responsibilities to the creators of the archival materials. As a recent visitor to the American Folklife Center, Dr. Jim Enote of Zuni Pueblo, states: "People outside have the idea that knowledge should be shared...That's what universities are built around. But at Zuni we don't think that way. Some knowledge should be protected and *not shared* [our emphasis]. There are things in Zuni you can know, and things you can't. And there are certain people who deserve to be the keepers of that knowledge. It's a privilege, and the rest of us respect them for that." (in Morell, [2007](#), p. 3.)

Intellectual Property and Advocacy

The issues of access already discussed lead to a discussion of the negotiations on Intellectual Property protections at WIPO and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and other international meetings focused on patents and trade. The Director of the American Folklife Center, Dr. Peggy Bulger, serves as a delegate to the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Inter-Governmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge, and Folklore. Her participation, as well as representation by the

American Folklore Society and other governmental arts and culture organizations from the U.S., has resulted in considerable progress in understanding these critical issues. The broader issue of protection of all “indigenous knowledge” has recently been stated by the United Nations as a tenet of human rights protection.

Article 31 of the Human Rights Council’s UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed on 29 June 2006 states,

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions (p.14).

This Human Rights Council statement basically echoes the position that we have been stating in this paper, that indigenous knowledge is holistic and cannot be separated into distinct categories, tangible and intangible. The following key words are found in Preston Hardison’s argument (2007) that discussions of the notion of creating a knowledge “commons” overlook the concerns of the communities that produce so-called “indigenous knowledge”:

Indeed, indigenous cultures tend not to make property/non-property distinctions, and so the very concept of “public domain” is alien. Indigenous knowledge may superficially resemble the public domain in the sharing of it within a community. But there are often social restrictions on who, if anyone, can use certain knowledge, and under what circumstances. Some knowledge is considered secret, sacred, and an inalienable part of their own cultural heritage from time immemorial into time unending.

The two key concepts here are “inalienable” – that is knowledge that cannot become property, and “time unending,” there are no time limits that can be negotiated with regard to indigenous knowledge.

This places some of us in the field at an interesting juncture, the mediating position we mentioned earlier. The positions of Jim Enote and Preston Hardison encapsulate subjectivities and political and cultural positions at some odds with the dominant understanding that knowledge or access to it in the archives ought to be unfettered or unhindered by any considerations other than the aims and pursuit of ‘pure’ research and the unmediated documentary record. While this attitude is perhaps a relic of the past, enough anecdotal evidence remains to suggest that the notion of ‘purity’ and hence ‘authentic’ and ‘unmediated’ knowledge are still persistent tropes in the researcher’s vocabulary. Moreover, the Library’s central mission statement states explicitly that the institution aims to “make its resources available and useful to the Congress and the American people and to sustain and preserve a universal collection of knowledge and creativity for future generations” (LC website, <http://www.loc.gov/about/>, consulted on April 25, 2007).

Even as we work through these claims and counter-claims and competing rhetorical positions in our everyday working lives in the archival repository, we have to be mindful of other voices and guiding principles that structure our relationship to the archival record and our sometimes competing responsibilities to the research scholar and to the communities of origin. In triangulating these tense relationships, we are mindful of the codes of ethics of the various professional organizations to which we belong. By this we mean that in addition to being government employees and library professionals, we are also social scientists – such as folklorists and anthropologists, -- and information science and conservation specialists. As such we are trained in the methods and practices of those professions and must adhere to codes of conduct that govern our conduct with respect to local communities. All these organizations - the American Folklore Society, the American Anthropological Association, the Society of

Ethnomusicologists, and the Society of American Archivists - adhere to the basic principle that individuals and communities have the right to determine the ways in which their traditional knowledge and practices are collected, distributed, and preserved by collectors and scholars in the context of educational and cultural institutions and archival repositories. Important guidelines on ethical conduct regarding native materials held in non-native repositories have recently been developed by the First Archivists Circle -- the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* -- so we now have a code developed to meet the needs of Native archivists and communities that parallels the codes of ethics developed by professional scholarly societies.

On the other hand, and invoking the concept of the national imaginary as perpetually contested, we ought to also heed the words of other Native Americans whose views contrast to a certain extent with that of those previously cited. Native people's long-held principles of strictly abjuring recording technologies and methods with regard to documenting and preserving ancient tribal wisdoms are being negotiated and changed. Tom Hill, the Museum Director at the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario and member of the Konadaha Seneca people of the Six Nations Reserve in Canada, had this to say at a recent conference of Native American tribal librarians and museum professionals. Assessing his own community's attitudes, he notes:

As indigenous people, we know what profound change is all about – we have to date, survived many waves of it. History teaches us that technological advances can be a blessing or a curse and sometimes both. Change can be negative when we do not take charge of it, when we don't manage change to fit our political and cultural agendas. Technological change has meant that today at Grand River we are able to record traditional teachings and ceremonies such as the Thanksgiving address or ... the Great Law on digital discs and CD ROMs in order to preserve our knowledge and culture and to share it with others. Within the last 20 years, the Cayuga language has gone from an oral language to a written one.

I know there are those who see this as a positive change; others see it as negative - there is controversy. One of our respected older women in the community, in fact a faith

keeper in the longhouse, summed up her perspective this way. She said that our first reaction is to keep things a secret – this has been the only way we have kept many of our values and teachings to date. But she has decided that we must look beyond this feeling. She feels a responsibility to record as much as possible in her lifetime for the benefit of the future generations. The recordings in fact are proceeding in earnest, as are other efforts to codify traditional healing and other practices.

And there is an incredible demand for this information as many of our own people – more than ever before – want to have access to our language, our history – all that which makes us *On gwe hoh weh people* (Hill 2005).

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