

## ***New Voices Conference***

# **Using Applied American Studies to Restore and Renovate the Colorado Plateau's Historic Gardens at La Posada**

**Patrick Pynes**

Osiyo, tohitsu.<sup>1</sup>

Yá'át'ééh. Shí éí Patrick Pynes, yíníshyé. Tsalagi dóóné'é nishlí. Shizhé'é bilagáana nílí.<sup>2</sup>

Hola. Buenas tardes. Yo soy Patricio Piñones. Mis madres son de los Cherokees. Mis padres son de los gringos.<sup>3</sup>

Greetings. My name is Patrick Pynes. My mother's mother's mother's people come from the Cherokees of Southern Appalachia, via Tennessee, Arkansas, and Texas. My father's father's father's people come from the Celts of Ireland, via South Carolina, Alabama, and Texas.

The Pynes got here before the American Revolution. Their descendants fought against the Tories, and later the Yankees and North Vietnamese.

My Cherokee ancestors had already been living here for thousands of years when Columbus, De Soto, and Coronado showed up. Many Cherokees fought *with* the Tories during the Revolution, believing that the British would help them to protect their lands from the American colonists. Later, some of their mixed-blood descendants—my maternal ancestors—were slaveholders who fought for the Confederacy. They served on the same losing side with my Irish American forebears, who were not slaveholders.

With biological roots on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, and with cultural roots on either side of the Rio Grande, I'm a blue-eyed American mestizo. My

tap roots are anchored in the limestone bones of the Texas hill country, where one of the first Americans, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, once lived on prickly pears, during his long walk across the continent. I was born in Victoria, Texas, near where the Guadalupe River empties into the Gulf of Mexico. Along with American English, I speak, read, and write some Spanish and Navajo, and a smattering of Cherokee.

It's good to be here in Wyoming for the first time, to be in the home state of the Bear's Lodge, the place they call in English "Beelzebub's Butte," or is it "Devil's Tower"? Bear's Lodge is one of the most important places in American land and literature. I've been there many times in books, especially in the words of Kiowa/Cherokee writer N. Scott Momaday, who wrote *The Way to Rainy Mountain*.<sup>4</sup> In that excellent essay and story, which I have taught many times, Bear's Lodge is the place that connects the Kiowas to the land and sky.

The Kiowas' story about Bear's Lodge creates a relationship between them and a specific place on this continent. For the Kiowas, the Bear's Lodge is both a place and a story, the two being indivisible. The relationship between the people, their language, and the land is sacred, language becoming land, land becoming language. These kinds of complex relationships between American land, language, and culture have always been fascinating to me.

The winding, switchback trail I have chosen to follow in pursuing this fascination led me to the American Studies Program at the University of New Mexico. For me, American studies is the last best place in academia. There is no other place in higher education where I could have cultivated such interests. There was no other program at UNM that would have nurtured such interests.

I live near Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, just outside Flagstaff, Arizona with my partner Lisa Kirkwood and our three daughters. I say "Arizona . . . ," but, as a Cherokee descendant, I find that I don't have a great deal of respect for states or state boundaries.

Across North America, state boundaries and governments were imposed upon Native people and carved out of their lands, by people who demonstrated profound ignorance and disrespect for Native peoples' sovereign rights. In the 1830s, the state of Georgia seized the Cherokees' last remaining lands in the Southeast, and the federal government and its military were complicit in this thievery, forcing the Cherokees to move westward onto lands that the United States had already taken from other tribes. Today, many states and the federal government are still violating the sovereign rights of indigenous people.<sup>5</sup>

So, in light and dark of this American history, I prefer to say that I've come to the northern Great Plains from two different but related places, having traveled east and north via train and automobile. One place I come from is a somewhat undefinable cultural space called "The Southwest," which encompasses El Norte, lands that were part of the Republic of Mexico until 1848, when the United States used its military power to take El Norte for its own. The Mexican North became the American Southwest.

The second place I come from is called the Colorado Plateau, a somewhat more definable natural and cultural bioregion. The Plateau is a vast, arid portion of the North American continent, encompassing the region between the middle Rio Grande valley and San Juan Mountains on the east, the Uinta Mountains on the north, the Wasatch Mountains and lower Colorado River on the west, and the Mogollon Rim on the south.

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In *America*,<sup>6</sup> Frenchman Jean Baudrillard has written, “Europe has never been a continent. You can see that by its skies. As soon as you set foot in America, you feel the presence of an entire continent—space there is the very form of thought” (16).

Many Native people see the North American continent as a giant Turtle Island. As such, the Colorado Plateau is the most stable plate among the many plates that make up the turtle’s shell. Over time, this plate has been slowly raised up and worn down, eroded by wind and water. But because this plate is so thick and stable, there are no real mountain ranges here, only a few scattered volcanoes and extruded laccoliths. The thinner sections of the plate have allowed the turtle’s interior body heat to rise upward and break through the surface, as hot blood, or magma.

Near the center of the Colorado Plateau, the land looks like someone struck the plate with a giant mallet. The land split and fractured, like a jigsaw puzzle, and now the shattered pieces are slowly falling apart. This plate may be relatively stable, but it is also always changing, always in motion. Being in motion and being relatively stable in comparison to other plates is part of the Plateau’s distinct character.

On either side of this stable, eroded plate, the turtle’s shell has been buckled and uplifted by powerful interior forces. The plate to the east of the Colorado Plateau isn’t as thick or stable; over time, the shell has bulged upward and its crust has been severely twisted. We call this plate the Rocky Mountains; it is the turtle’s uplifted spine, snow-covered roof of the continent.

The plate to the west of the Colorado Plateau is called the Basin and Range. It is a vast washboard of narrow, elongated fault-block mountain ranges, trending north/south, with shallow basins stretching in between. Stephen Trimble has called this plate “the sagebrush ocean,”<sup>7</sup> and that is precisely the way it smells and feels—unless you’re breathing tobacco smoke in a Las Vegas casino.

The plate adjacent to the Colorado Plateau on the south is covered by saguaro and other cacti, creating scenes that many people associate with the place called Arizona, not knowing that there are also vast coniferous forests located there. The boundary between the Sonoran Desert and the Colorado Plateau is a long, semi-arid strip called the Mogollon Rim. This Rim is covered with a vast, dense forest, the largest continuous ponderosa pine forest in the world.

In the summer of 2002, the ponderosa pine forest that joins and separates the two plates on the turtle's back became extremely hot and dry. When the forests caught fire, as they always do in early summer—frequent fires being as essential to their ecological health as deep, slowly melting winter snows—the trees burned hotter, faster, and farther than anyone had ever seen them burn before. For weeks the Colorado Plateau was shrouded in a thick haze of smoke and ash, as if one of its volcanoes were erupting. The apocalypse seemed near.

As the fires raged eastward across the Rim, moving toward New Mexico, huge chunks of the White Mountain Apache tribe's forests were burned to black ash. You might say that this green but dry part of the planet's surface became a blister, burning itself off the earth's body, creating new skin that is just now beginning to heal. For a century people repressed fire, and when the skin got too hot and dry, with no relief in sight, a blister had to form. The pent-up energy of fire erupted again, out of human control, burning the forests white hot.

I come, then, from two overlapping places: the desert Southwest, and the beautiful, diverse Colorado Plateau, most stable plate on Turtle Island's back, my home bioregion. Surrounded by the ponderosa pine forests of the upper Mogollon Rim, Flagstaff is located on the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau. Sedona—New Age Fantasyland of Red Rocks, crystal shops, and vortex tours, is located twenty miles south of Flagstaff, three thousand feet lower, near the base of the Mogollon Rim.

When I wake up in the morning and look outside my west window, I see the San Francisco Peaks, remains of an ancient volcano. The tops of the Peaks reach up to nearly 13,000 feet above sea level. Our house is actually located in a vast field of red pumice and black lava, spewed less than one thousand years ago from nearby Sunset Crater, a cinder cone. Before the Apollo astronauts drove the lunar rover on the moon, they trained on the cinder lakes, located less than two miles from our front door.

The Colorado Plateau is like that—you feel as if this place is located at the Center of the World—where the earth has been stripped bare, exposing skin and bones. But this raw nakedness can also seem extraterrestrial, the land apparently belonging to the surface of another planet. Especially strange, beautiful places like these can be found near Capitol Reef National Monument in southeast Utah. The land there is colored green, purple, and black.

Like the Bear's Lodge on the northern Great Plains, many places on the Colorado Plateau are considered sacred. The San Francisco Peaks are one of the most important of these sacred places. Although I am not indigenous to the Colorado Plateau, I understand that the Peaks are sacred, just as the Smoky Mountains are sacred to the Cherokees.

Besides Spanglish, the sacred San Francisco Peaks are named in at least thirteen other languages, all of them indigenous. From Apache to Zuni, these indigenous place names refer to the presence of life-giving water. The Zunis of far western New Mexico, for example, call the Peaks "the mountain with volcanic water caches."

The Peaks are especially important to the Navajo and Hopi Tribes, both of whom have lands that are—depending on how you see the issue of sovereignty—surrounded by or part of the state of Arizona. The Navajo Nation, largest Indian nation within the United States, both in terms of land-base and population, completely surrounds the Hopi Reservation. If you take the Navajos' claims to sovereignty over their own lands seriously, this means that the Hopis do not share a common border with the United States. Hopi sovereignty pre-dates and exists apart from U.S. sovereignty, although the U.S. claims to hold the tribe's lands "in trust." When they interact with the federal government, the Hopi and Navajo tribal governments are forced to deal with the corrupt and severely outmoded Bureau of Indian Affairs, whose origins are in the War Department, not the State Department.

The Navajo word for the San Francisco Peaks is Dook'o'oslííd, meaning "never thaws on top" in English. In Navajo cultural tradition, the Peaks mark the western edge of their traditional homeland. Many Diné perceive their traditional homeland as a vast hogan, the hexagon-shaped dwelling that Navajos have used for thousands of years. Sacred mountain of the west, the Peaks are the western post of this hogan.

A few years ago, when I was finishing my Ph.D. in American studies at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, writing a dissertation about the natural and cultural effects of industrial timber harvesting in the Navajo Nation's vast ponderosa pine forests, I could look out the window of my department's main seminar room and see Mt. Taylor, Tsoodzil, sacred mountain of the south. Being able to see the southern post of the hogan from a classroom window was very comforting and inspiring.

Now, a few years later, I wake up every morning and see the hogan's western post. The San Francisco Peaks are located about 250 miles due west of Mt. Taylor. Both mountains rise out of the Colorado Plateau just north of Interstate 40. Sometimes the Peaks are covered in snow, other times they're draped in clouds, but usually the mountain is bathed in morning sunlight.

The San Francisco Peaks are also extremely important to the Hopis. The Hopi word for the Peaks is Nuvatukyaovi. For the Hopis, Nuvatukyaovi is absolutely vital to their spiritual, cultural, and agricultural traditions. The Peaks are the dwelling place of the Hopi kats'inas. The kats'inas are spirits of the Hopi ancestors, rain and snow clouds who bring life-giving moisture to an otherwise arid landscape.

The Hopis live in numerous villages located atop several sandstone mesas about sixty miles east of the Peaks. The villages are located on the fingertips of a vast, elevated coal-rich basin called Black Mesa. Imagine Black Mesa as a human hand, turned palm down upon the earth, fingers pointed southwestward. The highest elevations on Black Mesa begin more than forty miles northeast of the Hopi villages, where the hand meets the wrist. There are forests of piñon pine, juniper, and ponderosa pine up there.

From there the mesa gradually slopes down to the Hopi mesas and buttes, precious water funneling into the usually dry washes between the fingers. These washes and arroyos ultimately drain into the Little Colorado River. The Little Colorado drains into the “big” Colorado River above—east—of the Grand Canyon.

For countless generations, Hopi farmers have been growing blue corn and other crops in these arroyos and washes, and near perennial springs. Farming in the high desert is an act of faith, and the Hopis are master horticulturalists, and a people of great faith.

Underneath Black Mesa there is an enormous bed of coal, as well as a vast pool of underground fossil water called the Navajo aquifer. A British-owned energy corporation is mining the water and coal to create profits. They use millions of gallons of pristine aquifer water to create coal slurry, which is then transported via pipeline to a generating station in Nevada. There the coal is burned to generate huge amounts of electricity. Electricity from Black Mesa coal helps to power giant Southwest cities like Las Vegas, Phoenix, and Los Angeles. Originally created by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Hopi tribal government is almost entirely dependent upon the royalties that come from this mining. At the same time, the population of people living in Hopiland has been increasing, creating greater demand for water. Hopiland has always been dry, but now it is getting drier. Even the springs are drying up, threatening the continuation of Hopi cultural and spiritual traditions. There can be no doubt that the dying springs are a direct result of coal and water mining on Black Mesa.<sup>8</sup>

Many Hopis and non-Hopis are trying to figure out ways to enable the Hopis to survive and prosper without the coal and/or water mining that is happening on their lands. Their survival as an indigenous people may depend upon the kinds of alternatives that are created to solve this problem. The problem is called *Koyaanisqatsi*, meaning in English “life out of balance” or “life disintegrating.”

The San Francisco Peaks are a vital and constant presence in Hopi land and culture. From the Hopis’ point of view, their sacred relationships to the mountain keep the world in dynamic balance. From the geographic perspective of the Hopi villages, the Peaks stand like a beacon on the western horizon, a cardinal point on the spiritual compass. They are central to Hopi sacred ecology.

For many indigenous people like the Navajos and Hopis, the land is a sacred “book” that can and must be “read,” because the land holds the stories that we are living in. This “we” includes plants, animals, people, and all the rest of our relations. Like us, our ancestors are also living in these stories, inhabiting these places. As anthropologist Keith Basso has shown, for indigenous people, places and names for places are stories in themselves. The act of naming weaves together land, language, and culture.<sup>9</sup>

Every morning, when I wake up and look out my western window to see the San Francisco Peaks, I am reminded of the many names and stories that are

associated with this special place on the Colorado Plateau. A little later, as I drive to work, rolling downhill among caravans of east-bound semis on Interstate-40, I look up and see the Peaks in my rearview mirror.

Gradually the Mogollon Rim's ponderosa pine forests give way to piñon and juniper, and then the last shrubby trees disappear. Below six thousand feet there is only bare red rock and brown soil, and clumps of native grasses. Not enough rain or snow falls in these lower elevations to support trees.

A little further along I-40 eastbound, I look to my left, or north, and see the cinder cones that sit along the eastern edge of the San Francisco volcanic field. Beyond the last cinder cone, on the northeast, above the Little Colorado River valley, I can see the distant buttes and mesas of Hopi land. They look like worn, scattered teeth.

Seeing the Hopi buttes on my left and Nuvatukyaovi in my rearview mirror, I am compelled to turn on my car's radio to 88.1, KUYI, the Hopi tribe's public radio station, broadcasting from the village of Hotevilla. The DJ alternates back and forth between Hopi and English. Often he speaks both languages in the same sentence.

I don't speak Hopi, so I can only follow the English. The music the DJ plays is richly eclectic, and I crank it up. Reggae is big on the Hopi Rez, and the first song I hear is by Maxi Priest. The deep, looping bass lines are perfect, reminding me of The Clash, beloved punks who introduced me to reggae in 1979.

A traditional San Juan Pueblo song follows the reggae, a chorus of several older men's voices and shaking rattles blending into a haunting, ancient sound. After that comes a contemporary Plains Indian style pow-wow song. I crank the bass full throttle to hear the heartbeat drums, and the vehicle keeps rolling eastward. My ultimate destination is Winslow, 55 miles east of Flagstaff.

As I come to the first of Winslow's three exits, I see a freight train on my right, headed west, the tracks roughly following the route of I-40. In Navajo, Winslow is known as beesh sinil, "iron rails lying in position." The train looks to be cruising at about eighty miles an hour. Now I see the surreal badlands and rainbow colors of the Painted Desert on my left, southeast of the Hopi villages.

I turn off the radio, apply the brakes, and exit the Interstate on the south side access road. As I turn left onto old Route 66, a short remaining segment of the historic Mother Road, I see a sign pointing east. It says "La Posada."

"La Posada"—en Ingles, it means "The Resting Place."

While it's true that I've rested at La Posada Hotel a few times, having spent nights in beautiful rooms named for Will Rogers, Frank Sinatra, and John Wayne('s Teeth),<sup>10</sup> this rest has come only after a hard day's work in the gardens. You see, La Posada Hotel is the place where I work, as Gardens Manager. I'm also President of the non-profit La Posada Foundation, which is directing a

major restoration and renovation project in the gardens. I've been working at La Posada for two and a half years, and I'm hoping to be there a while longer yet.

I first saw La Posada in late November 2000. When I walked in through the out door, it was love at first sight. Our relationship is still evolving, and I think I'm pretty lucky to be part of this beautiful and historic place. Unlike many other people I've known, I love the place where I work, and I love the work that I do.

That doesn't mean, however, that the work is easy. Often it is quite difficult, especially in summertime, when the high desert heat, aridity, and strong winds can make brutal demands upon my body. At times, balancing the intellectual, physical, and social demands of my job can seem impossible.

Nevertheless, I love my job and the place where I work. Working at La Posada allows me to combine many of my passions for land, language, culture, art, and history, and for the multicultural Southwest and Colorado Plateau.

In several ways my work at La Posada involves doing a kind of hands-on, applied version of American studies, in a distinctly non-academic context. I think that my background in interdisciplinary American studies has prepared me fairly well for the work that I do, and for the place that I do it in. It also helps that I worked full or part-time as an organic gardener and beekeeper during most of my years as a graduate student in American studies.

By sharpening my understanding of how specific places on the Colorado Plateau are connected to one another, creating a whole biocultural region, my doctoral work in American studies has enriched and informed my work at La Posada. Without this knowledge and understanding, which are still developing, my work in Winslow would be less meaningful, enjoyable, or successful.

Although I don't yet make huge amounts of money as Manager of The Gardens at La Posada, I make pretty much enough, in the sense that "enough IS enough." And my other rewards are great. For me, there is nothing more rich and satisfying than seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling the fruits of my own labor. I like working outdoors. I like working with and for the land, and I like learning from the land. This desire to have direct, almost daily contact with the land is the main reason why I am a gardener.

Three or four days each week I commute 110 miles round trip from Flagstaff to Winslow, to get to work at La Posada. For reasons I won't go into here, at this point in my family's life we have chosen to live in Flagstaff, a small city of about 75,000 people, rather than in Winslow, a small town of about 10,000 people. Usually I spend one night per week in the hotel, to conserve energy.

When I turn east onto old Route 66, and drive two miles through downtown Winslow to arrive at La Posada, I am following a route to the hotel that is very different from the route that people once followed when they came here. Because the hotel's origins are in the railroad's expansion into the Southwest, and because of changes in technology and transportation patterns following World War II,



the hotel's "magnetic poles" have switched. For La Posada, what was once a primarily east and south-facing orientation has become a north and west-facing orientation, especially for people who come to the hotel via automobile from the west, as I do.

These shifts in geographic orientation are what I was referring to when I said that my first visit to La Posada involved going "in through the out door." During its glory years between the Great Depression and World War II, La Posada primarily served west-bound railroad passengers. These were people who were traveling from east to west. At that time there was little automobile traffic on the Colorado Plateau. That's because there were still very few paved roads; road building did not begin in earnest on the Plateau until World War II, when the region's valuable timber, coal, and uranium resources were first incorporated into the nation's economy.<sup>11</sup>

With few good roads to drive on, anyone wanting to visit the Colorado Plateau's interior had to take the train. During the early 1880s, the first railroad tracks had been constructed across this part of the Southwest, from the Rio Grande to the Pacific. In the beginning, train passengers had no comfortable places to stay in or good places to eat in as they traveled across the Colorado Plateau. To fulfill these needs, the Fred Harvey Company built Harvey Houses across the Southwest, including one that opened in Winslow in 1887.

When the Santa Fe Railway teamed with the Fred Harvey Company to build La Posada Hotel in 1929-1930, they hired Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter, one of the first female architects in the United States, to design the hotel for the comfort and convenience of railroad tourists and travelers. Railroad tourists were coming to the Colorado Plateau in increasing numbers, to enjoy natural and cultural wonders like the Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, Canyon de Chelly, and the Hopi villages. Winslow's La Posada was to be a hub for this kind of regional tourism, offering tourists all the comforts and amenities of urban areas "back east."

Colter designed the hotel so that passengers could step right off their trains and stroll directly into La Posada. She also placed the hotel's train station along La Posada's southeast side, only yards from the tracks, and connected the station to the hotel with a covered walkway.

La Posada, last of the Southwest's great railroad hotels, thus had its original front entrance located on the south side, facing the tracks. Colter placed La Posada's "back door" on the north side, facing the road that would eventually become Route 66, the main thoroughfare through downtown Winslow.

Now also known as Second Avenue, Route 66 and the nearby railroad tracks roughly parallel the routes of old Indian trails and military roads that once connected New Mexico to California. The passenger trains that brought most of La Posada's guests to Winslow came mainly from the east, moving west. Today, most hotel guests and visitors drive up to La Posada's north-facing entrance on Route 66. In this part of town, Route 66 is a wide one-way street that flows from west to east.

After La Posada closed its doors in 1957, primarily as a result of the steady decline in railroad passenger traffic after World War II, Interstate 40 was constructed. It passes through Winslow two miles north of La Posada. In many ways, the area around La Posada is a rich palimpsest of new, old, and even older roads, one layer laid down on top of another. While digging holes to plant trees in the gardens, I have often encountered old asphalt roads, brick walkways, and other railroad-related “artifacts” several feet underground. Who would have thought that a gardener could also be an amateur archaeologist, digging up fragments of history while planting new trees? It can only happen in a place like La Posada.

The way in which La Posada combines a rich sense of the history of the Southwest while embodying the Colorado Plateau’s propensity for constant motion and change is one of the things I like most about the place. You go in the front door, but, historically speaking, it’s really the back door. Although the hotel hasn’t moved more than an inch since 1930, the front and rear entrances have switched positions, revolving 180 degrees.

Although much has changed at La Posada since it opened in the spring of 1930, much has stayed the same. Stepping inside from bright sunshine to dim coolness on a hot summer’s day, you feel as if you have entered a quiet sanctuary, perhaps an ancient Catholic church in Mexico or Guatemala. There is a spiritual quality about the hotel’s interior that can only be experienced.

Although only two Amtrak trains per day still carry human passengers past the hotel, an unending parade of freight trains continues to rumble by La Posada’s south side, day and night, just as they did during the 30’s, 40’s, and 50’s. Diners in the hotel’s Turquoise Room Restaurant look up to watch the trains through south-facing windows. Gazing upon La Posada’s Spanish Colonial-style exterior, one can easily imagine being in colonial New Spain or Mexico during the nineteenth century. Colter imagined La Posada as the hacienda of a wealthy Spanish Don, abandoned and turned into a hotel. She designed the hotel and gardens so that every detail was connected in some way to this narrative, and to many other stories, both real and imaginary. At La Posada, nearly everything tells a story.

An Arts and Crafts-influenced Spanish colonial revival style dominates the hotel’s interior and exterior, but Colter also blended numerous elements borrowed from the Colorado Plateau’s indigenous cultures into La Posada’s design. She had a life-long passion for indigenous Southwestern arts and cultures, both Navajo and Hopi. As a result of Colter’s blending of cultural elements, the hotel and gardens illustrate the realities and creative possibilities of the Southwestern *mestizaje*. Colter combined and cross-pollinated indigenous and European cultural elements into new, distinctly American forms. These forms are also distinctly Southwestern. Just about anywhere you look, indoors and out, the hotel seems very much at home in its natural and cultural surroundings, to “fit right in” to the local and regional landscape. In Colter’s creative, organic vision

of the Southwest, fantasy and reality mingle together in complex, powerful, and compelling ways. In Winslow, at La Posada, this vision continues to resonate.

In the end, what I am really trying to articulate here is the notion that the Southwest's complex history was not and is not being preserved at La Posada. Except for the jewelry in the gift shop, nothing is being put under glass, or frozen in time. We have no desire to create a museum, nor did Colter. La Posada Hotel and its more than eight acres of gardens are a place where the past is being expressed and experienced as *living* history. The people who are working to restore and to renovate the hotel and gardens are trying to find creative ways to continue Colter's vision. To merely preserve her vision would be to extinguish it.

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Finding ways to restore Colter's vision for The Gardens at La Posada, while simultaneously "renovating" them for present and future needs is one of the most interesting dimensions of my job. Many historians consider La Posada to be Colter's masterpiece. Of the many different buildings that she designed for the Santa Fe Railway and the Fred Harvey Company across the Southwest, La Posada was her favorite. When the hotel closed in 1957, Colter was discouraged and depressed. She died soon after in Santa Fe.

The Gardens at La Posada were unique in that they were the only gardens that Colter designed during her entire career, spanning nearly fifty years. Many of her other Fred Harvey creations did not include extensive gardens. Unfortunately, the formal gardens that Colter designed to surround La Posada as an oasis in the Painted Desert were never finished. The Depression struck right in the middle of the hotel's construction, and Colter's original plans were truncated.

We know something about the gardens that Colter envisioned from historic photographs and as a result of the discovery of her original plans on microfilm in a Santa Fe Railway archive in Kansas.<sup>12</sup> By comparing and contrasting these historic plans and photos with the gardens that exist today, we can see what parts of Colter's original plan were actually constructed, what parts were left out, and what parts were erased by time.

Since efforts to re-open the hotel began in 1997, nearly 40 of La Posada's original 75 rooms have been completely restored and/or renovated, following the spirit and many of the specific details found in Colter's original design. Between 1957 and 1997, the Santa Fe Railway transformed La Posada from a luxury hotel into a regional corporate headquarters, a modern office building complete with fluorescent lighting, cubicles, and acoustic tile ceilings. The hotel's unrestored east wing is still such a place today.

In the process, the hotel's interior was almost completely gutted, and all of Colter's beautiful furnishings and custom design features were auctioned. During the past few years, many of these room furnishings and other interior features

have been returned to the hotel. The public has fallen in love with La Posada all over again. During the summer tourist season, from April to October, the entire hotel is often booked solid, particularly on weekends. During wintertime, getting a room without a reservation is easier.

Our plans to restore and renovate the hotel's gardens are the next stage in La Posada's renaissance. This renaissance has sparked an economic re-awakening in historic downtown Winslow, which was virtually deserted and moribund only ten years ago. During the past two years, an espresso house, two art galleries, and a restored movie theater have opened within two blocks of La Posada. Several other places are presently under construction. Wages are still low, and jobs are relatively scarce, as they are in all of the Southwest's reservation border towns, but more local residents are beginning to find work in occupations that are not directly tied to the railroad or the local prison. Things are looking up.

We hope that our plans for restoring and renovating the gardens will help to invigorate this renaissance. The Gardens at La Posada have always been open to the public, and they have always been a vital part of Winslow's social fabric, a source of community pride. So far we have applied for and received a \$500,000 federal matching grant through the Arizona Department of Transportation to help fund the project, and we are actively seeking more funding from both private and public sources. The revised gardens we have envisioned will cost at least one million dollars to create.

Christine Ten Eyck, a well-known landscape architect based in Phoenix, has designed a revised landscape plan. Ten Eyck's design, which organizes the gardens into several distinct but interconnected spaces, or rooms, is based upon her knowledge of Colter's original design; upon her consultations with Allan Affeldt, owner of La Posada; and upon her conversations with me, the hotel's Gardens Manager. My main concern is that the revised gardens should be culturally and ecologically appropriate to this part of the Colorado Plateau.

After working at La Posada for more than two years, I have come to know the gardens' diverse microclimates intimately, and I've learned a lot about the characteristics of its clayish, alkaline soils and its seasonal patterns of sunlight, shadow, and wind. Through trial and error, analysis of historic photographs, and discussions with other local gardeners, I have begun to understand the kinds of plant species that will thrive in Winslow, and which will not. Hollyhocks, globe mallow, and winter squash are some of the plants that love this place. Many other species do not like it here at all, and would prefer to live much further east. It *is* possible to have bountiful, successful gardens in such a harsh biophysical environment, but the gardener must learn to accept, adjust to, and work *with* the Colorado Plateau's dominant characteristics, rather than against them.

This need to adjust to La Posada's natural, cultural, and historical realities compels us to always keep in mind that, to be successful, our project must synthesize restoration, renovation, and innovation in a balanced fashion. Our

project is historical and restorative in the sense that we want to bring back several of Colter's original design features. For example, Colter's original plan shows a semi-dwarf fruit orchard in the gardens' southwest corner. When I began working in the gardens, I found a dense grove of non-native Siberian elm trees occupying the space where the orchard should have been. To begin restoring the orchard, which actually had never been planted, we cut down the Siberian elms and replaced them with nearly twenty "antique" fruit trees, including apples, pears, plums, peaches, and cherries. Along with the gardens' quinces, flowering pomegranates, and wild honeybee colonies, these non-native fruit trees were among the species that Europeans like Colter's Spanish Don brought to the Americas, as part of the Columbian exchange.

But Colter's vision of the American *mestizaje* is also profoundly organic and indigenous. Colter had a passionate interest in the indigenous lands and cultures of the Colorado Plateau, and she spent several years of her life studying the land and its peoples. Before designing innovative structures like Hermit's Rest and Hopi House in Grand Canyon National Park, Colter spent several months in the field, intensely studying some of the many thousands of ancestral Puebloan architectural sites that dot the Four Corners region, such as Hovenweep, Chaco Canyon, and Mesa Verde. She became an expert in Anasazi-style masonry architecture and often provided hands-on instruction and assistance to the stonemasons who worked for her.

As a steward of the gardens she designed, and as an independent scholar of American studies, I find that I share many of Colter's passions for the Colorado Plateau's indigenous lands and cultures. Like Colter, I have consciously incorporated indigenous principles into my own work at La Posada, and I have also converted the gardens from dependence upon chemical fertilizers and pesticides to an all-organic approach.

Colter's propensities for indigenous and organic design principles are clearly evident in The Gardens at La Posada. Thick masonry walls border the edges of the gardens on all sides. A vast, dry expanse of broken sedimentary rocks, slabs, and boulders surrounds Winslow, and Colter used these abundant local materials throughout the hotel and gardens. Following Colter's design principles, which were based upon ancient Anasazi techniques, we have constructed unheated cold frames at the base of the gardens' south-facing masonry walls. These rock walls capture, store, and slowly release solar energy from the low winter sun, allowing us to grow fresh, organic winter produce for The Turquoise Room, La Posada's excellent restaurant. We have plans to build more cold frames along other south-facing masonry walls, and to start a small-scale organic salad growing business.

Like the semi-dwarf fruit orchard, there are food-growing areas shown on Colter's original plans, but she did not design the gardens with specific plant species in mind. The primary features of her original design are generally more aesthetic than ecological. This absence of specific plant species is good, because

it means that we can revise the ecological structure of the gardens, while we restore several of Colter's aesthetic features simultaneously.

Many native plants of the Southwest, including agaves, yuccas, and cold-hardy cacti, were planted in the original Gardens at La Posada, especially on the hotter, drier, and windier south side. Over time, however, the gardens were allowed to become much less indigenous, especially after the hotel closed in 1957. Expansive bluegrass lawns and groves of Siberian elms gradually took over the grounds. Neither of these species is indigenous to the Southwest, and both present significant ecological problems. Bluegrass lawns, for example, require large amounts of water to stay alive and green in the desert. Although few people want to face the facts of aridity, this way of wasting water is not ecologically or economically sustainable over the long-term.

For ecological, economic, aesthetic, and spiritual reasons, we have decided to "go native" in The Gardens at La Posada. During last year's severe drought, we allowed several bluegrass lawns to die, in anticipation of replacing them with native plants and hardscape features. We have already replaced bluegrass lawns that were located in especially hot, dry microclimates with drought-tolerant native grasses and wildflowers.

In general, the primary ecological objective of our renovation and restoration project at La Posada is to convert the gardens from non-native to native plant species of the Southwest. Some non-native species from other arid regions of the earth will also be part of our plant palette. Indigenous plants of the Colorado Plateau like big sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush, banana yucca, and buffaloberry are very well-adapted to our bioregion's aridity, high winds, poor soils, alkaline water, and temperature extremes. Carefully and thoughtfully designed, a native plants garden can be beautiful, sustainable, and ecologically diverse. By converting the gardens to mostly native plants, and by creating a few modest water features, we hope to attract even more birds and pollinating insects to the gardens and to educate the public about the beauty, practicality, and sustainability of gardening with native plants.

Towards achieving these goals, I spend a fair amount of my time at La Posada doing work that I consider a kind of hands-on version of applied American studies. Like other professional gardeners, I spend many hours each week pruning, planting, raking, weeding, mowing, and fertilizing. But I also spend several hours per week doing hands-on research and writing, just as I did in academia, as a graduate student, and later as a professor of writing, environmental studies, and applied indigenous studies.

Sometimes I spend part of the same hour doing both kinds of work, moving back and forth between my indoor office and the gardens. Other days I focus entirely upon hands-on gardening, or doing hands-on research, like writing a grant proposal to a potential funding source. However, all the work that I do as Gardens Manager is interwoven, just as American studies brings together several different disciplinary perspectives into a complex view of the whole.

Right now, for example, I am compiling lists of possible native species that we hope to plant in different areas of the gardens. The choices I am making about the plants we want to use are based upon the integration of three variables: my hands-on knowledge of the garden's microclimates; the layout of Ten Eyck's revised garden design plan; and my knowledge of the botany and ecology of the Southwest, which I studied in depth as part of my coursework, graduate research, and teaching in American studies. If I need to consult with a biologist or a botanist with specialized training, I'll not hesitate to do so, confident that I can speak at least some of their scientific language fluently.

At the same time that I am researching native plants, I am also using my writing and research skills to create a complex application form for the National Park Service. This document is part of our effort to have La Posada Hotel and Gardens officially recognized as a National Historic Landmark. The hotel, gardens, and attached train station are already listed on the National Register of Historic Places as La Posada Historic District, but there are certain advantages for us if we can also have the historic district recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

To write that rather lengthy document, I am using the sorts of interdisciplinary research and writing skills that I learned and practiced while I worked on my dissertation, "Churros, Chainsaws, and Ceremonies: A History of the Navajo Forest." As a bureaucratic document that follows a specific format, the application for National Historic Landmark status is not all that different from my dissertation proposal, except that it's much longer.

Writing this document will require me to use my knowledge of history, biology, ecology, geology, architecture, anthropology, and several other disciplines, and to weave them together American studies-style, as a means of illuminating my subject: the hotel and gardens at La Posada, their relationship to one another, and their complex relationships to specific places and points in time. My work will receive no grade, but if the Park Service's Advisory Board agrees with my thesis, and designates La Posada as a National Historic Landmark, then my work will have succeeded, and hands-on, applied American studies will have served me well. As a result, new "La Posada National Historic Landmark" signs will go up on I-40 westbound and eastbound. Perhaps more travelers will see the signs and exit the interstate, increasing the number of visitors to Winslow, to La Posada, and to the hotel's acres of gardens. Once they're here, who knows what good things might happen?

At the end of another day of work at The Resting Place, I drive my car onto the interstate, heading west into the setting sun, towards home: Flagstaff and the San Francisco Peaks. Winslow, La Posada, and the gardens are also part of my home on the Colorado Plateau, but until tomorrow, I will leave them behind. The journey homeward is the part I like best about my daily commute. For nearly an hour, I have the pleasure of gazing at the San Francisco Peaks, as the

volcano's east slopes loom ever closer. About halfway to Flagstaff, on the lower edge of the piñon-juniper woodland, the Peaks are still far enough away to give me a sense of how the mountain fits into the larger landscape. At the same time, the Peaks are close enough so that I can see the finer textures of its montane and subalpine forests, scree fields, and deeply wrinkled slopes.

Each day the earth dresses the Peaks in different clothing. For me, the Peaks are always beautiful, but they are even more beautiful when scattered cumulus clouds drift across the Colorado Plateau's deep turquoise skies, signifying the presence of Pacific moisture. Clouds make the mountain luminous, deepening its colors and textures. . . .

### PostScript (Coda)

The original version of this essay (which was read aloud in its entirety at the New Voices Forum at the University of Wyoming), went on from here for perhaps two or three more pages, ending with a rather "Romantic" quotation from the mixed-blood poet Linda Hogan. The original conclusion was written in longhand during my train ride from Flagstaff to Raton, New Mexico. From Raton I drove a rental car to Laramie. However, I was never satisfied with that conclusion.

So, during the long train ride back from Raton to Flagstaff, with the experience of New Voices still fresh in my mind, I wrote another conclusion in longhand, in several raw, unedited pieces, as if I were writing in a journal. Here are some of the pieces:

New Voices was fascinating, and all five of the others (Andaluna, Carolyn, Davarian, John, and Stephen) impressed me with their great intelligence and passion. We *do* share something in common, something that is merely signified by "Ph.D. in American studies," but I'm not sure what that is, except for a way of thinking and doing that refuses simple boundaries, disciplinary or otherwise, and that insists on flexibility, curiosity, fearlessness, and a willingness or desire to cross boundaries.

Why should the highest levels of academia, especially in the humanities, be, for all intents and purposes, separate from the rest of the world? Why, as Baudrillard writes, are "American intellectuals shut away on their campuses"?<sup>13</sup> Why not make a liberal arts education, particularly at the master's level, richly connected to real communities? Academics complain about being considered irrelevant, so why not make attempts to be relevant, even if a few compromises and sacrifices must be made?

The way it is now, American studies scholars and their kindred spirits are increasingly marginalized and irrelevant, yet comfortably imprisoned in academia, assuming you can get a job. The U.S. and the world keep getting more inflexible and conservative—anti-American studies—but rather than try to change the trajectory of things by *engaging the real world directly*, in hands-



on, practical ways, most of us (that means YOU) seem content to complain about the mainstream while doing little or nothing about it. We've been teaching young people exceptionally well in classrooms for decades, but the world continues to "go to hell in a handbasket." The values we hold dear are being slaughtered "out there." We need a radically different approach—we need to get our hands dirty, and we must try to reach a wider audience outside the walls of academia. Teaching what is essentially a narrow segment of the population (post-adolescent youth) is just not "cutting it." Neither is political involvement at night or on the weekends. Look around, amigos and amigas. Most people outside academia don't even know you exist, nor do they give a damn about papers such as this one. Why the hell should they?

Here's what I think we should do: get involved in communities directly, and in practical, hands-on ways. If you're really serious about changing things, either shut up about it, leave academia immediately, or outsmart those with more power and figure out a way to stay inside academia and actually change things. Make a real difference somehow. Or quit yer whining. Surely your increased relevance and practical influence upon the world will be worth the compromises, assuming that they really have to be made. What are you afraid of?

It seems to me that the alternative to getting directly involved in communities and with concrete, real-world issues is to face ever increasing disconnection and irrelevance. The powers that be in state legislatures will use this irrelevance as an excuse to cut funding to the bone, and beyond. If worse comes to worse, they would like to amputate you, and they barely tolerate you now as relatively harmless appendices. Academics might survive as monks in a monastery, but why not engage in communities and see what happens? Or at least allow some of us to try? As an experiment?

As for me, I refuse to suffocate in academia. Therefore, I do not work in academia, nor did I ever really plan to (although I once had a tenure track position at an excellent urban community college near Seattle, before finishing the Ph.D.).

We need a new model for what interdisciplinary studies in higher education can and should do. I think that we need to *do* much more in *relationship* to communities, both natural and cultural, outside the physical boundaries of classrooms and campuses. We need more hands-on, applied American studies practitioners, even ones with Ph.D.s. . . .

Ironically, I can think more deeply and clearly from a position outside the academy, but I need the academy occasionally to help inspire and focus my thinking. I need infrequent interaction with people who read, write, talk, and think a lot. There were plenty of thinkers to talk to and to listen to at New Voices in Laramie. It was truly a grand, memorable, and meaningful experience. I came home inspired to keep doing what I'm doing, and to keep thinking deeply about what I'm doing, whenever possible.

## Notes

1. Written Cherokee (phonetic). American English translation = Hello, how are you?
2. Written Navajo. American English translation = Hello, it is good. I am called Patrick Pynes. My mother's people are called the Cherokees. My father's people are called the whites.
3. Spanish. American English translation = Hello, good afternoon. I'm Patrick Pynes. My mother's people come from the Cherokees. My father's people come from the white people of the United States.
4. This classic of American cultural landscape literature was first published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1969.
5. For a good general overview of indigenous sovereignty issues in the United States, see Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). See also these two excellent essays describing violations of indigenous peoples' sovereign rights: Tony Mack McClure, "Andrew Jackson: Hero or Hatchet Man?," *Cherokee Proud* (Somerville, Tennessee: Chunannee Books, 1999), 192-198, and Haunani-Kay Trask, "From a Native Daughter," *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, ed. Calvin Martin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). 171-180.
6. Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1988).
7. See Trimble's excellent bioregional study, *The Sagebrush Ocean: A Natural History of the Great Basin* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1999).
8. For a vivid description of how the strip mining of Black Mesa coal has affected Navajo culture, see Donald A. Grinde and Bruce E. Johansen, *Ecocide of Native America: Environmental Destruction of Indian Lands and Peoples* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1995). 119-143. Two contemporary websites containing detailed information about Hopi water issues on Black Mesa are maintained by the Black Mesa Trust ([www.blackmesatrust.org](http://www.blackmesatrust.org)), and the Natural Resources Defense Council ([www.nrdc.org/water/conservation/draw/drawinx.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/water/conservation/draw/drawinx.asp)).
9. Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).
10. Hear the song "John Wayne's Teeth," written by the Eaglebear Singers and Sherman Alexie, on the soundtrack of the film *Smoke Signals* (TVT Records, 1998).
11. For an in-depth study of this important period in the Colorado Plateau's history, see Arthur R. Gómez, *Quest for the Golden Circle: The Four Corners and the Metropolitan West, 1945-1970* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).
12. Allan Affeldt, owner of La Posada Hotel and his wife, the painter Tina Mion, relate that, inspired by an extended visit to the newly-opened hotel in 1997, a former Santa Fe Railway employee undertook an extensive search of the company's archives and records in Kansas, where she discovered Colter's original plan on microfilm. A framed, enlarged reproduction of Colter's 1929 garden plan now hangs on the wall in La Posada's entrance foyer.
13. Baudrillard, *America*, 23.