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ENG 739.01

URC Presentation

Larry Spotted Crow Mann

As part of our ENG 739 American Indian Literature in the 21st Century course, each of us picked a Native American author who resides in the New England region. I picked Larry Spotted Crow Mann because not only is he an author, but he is also a musician. As a musician myself, I think creating music forces you to think in different ways and is a challenging yet satisfying way to express yourself. Music is also a good insight into one’s culture and how it affects their creative processes.

For the class, we created Wikipedia pages for the authors we researched as well as writing an article for them in the Omeka database “Writing of Indigenous New England.” My URC presentation was roughly based on the Omeka page I created about him.

Larry Spotted Crow Mann

Larry Spotted Crow Mann is a Native author and musician belonging to the Nipmuc tribe. At an early age, Mann developed a strong interest in his tribe and has since worked to educate the public about Nipmuc history and culture (Sacks). On his role of promoting Nipmuc traditions and history, he states: “I’m somebody who is dedicated to my culture and tradition, and through that I hope to bring forth the intrinsic connection we all have as human beings. I love to learn new things and from other cultures” (Volain). His writing and music are shaped to not only honor traditions, but also to reach out to uninformed audiences and teach them about his tribe that has been long part of American history.

Music

As a musician, he is a member of the Quabbin Lake Singers, along with his three sons Anoki, Nantai, and Manixit. The group has a focus on upholding and honoring culture with their music – during performances, the four wear traditional clothing to honor their ancestors. Mann holds the role of Drum Keeper in the group, a role that requires him to “ensure the Drum is being honored and played in a manner for the particular ceremony taking place.” The Drum is a sacred object in Native American culture that must be respected, as it is “the heartbeat of Mother Earth” and “allows us to pray and communicate with the natural elements of the world and beyond” (Volain).
Writing

Nowadays, the Quabbin Lake Singers do not perform as often as they used to, but Mann now devotes the majority of his creative energies to writing. His writing career began in his youth when he wrote letters to the government in order to draw attention to issues that the Nipmuc people face. Additionally, he has been writing prose and poetry since his teens. He wrote his first book, a collection of short stories and poetry titled *Tales from the Whispering Basket*, because he wanted to not only acknowledge Nipmuc history, culture, and contributions to the foundations of America, but also to explore his ability to write in the different genre styles (Volain). He has also contributed to *Indian Country Today Magazine*.

While the majority of his work details Nipmuc culture and history, he also branches out to write about themes that aren’t directly related to his tribe. One of the short stories from *Tales from the Whispering Basket* entitled “Deadly Deeds” describes a man from the fictional town “Namtac” leasing a small cottage in the town of “Dinac.” While the townsfolk are initially puzzled by his presence, they come to harass and assault him four weeks after he rents the cottage. After uncomfortably living there for a year, he takes a look at the lease again only to be shocked:

“As I read the fine print, I freaked out so bad I coughed up hair! It states: *We the citizens and the town of Dinac shall only lease and rent to our kind. All others may stay for a respite but must depart after four weeks. Those who choose to stay past that time period risk life and limb. All those who stay one year shall be eaten!*’ So, do you see my dilemma? I’m not a ‘Dinac,’ I’m a ‘Namtac!’ Those Dinac’s have been barking and chasing my kind for centuries! We scratch and fight but I’m stranded and outnumbered! I hear them coming! So, please, read your lease well lest you end up renting from a bunch of dogs!” (Mann 75)

The story displays his imaginative prose and, based on the last sentence, a hint of humor, but the idea of a group of people united under a common distinction (what race they belong to, where they come from, where they live now, etc.) oppressing another is certainly a familiar topic for Native Americans. This piece of fiction is more playful — and more extreme, at the same time — with the topic than the other stories and poems in his book.

Personal Life and Upbringing

With his wife, daughter, and three sons, Mann currently lives in Webster, Massachusetts in Worchester County, a place where his ancestors have lived “since time immemorial.” However, Mann was born and raised in Springfield, Massachusetts (Urban). Despite his people’s rich history in the area, he still felt different and out-of-place among the other kids: “Our people have always been here, but when you’re a
kid and there are very few people who can identify with who you are, you actually begin to feel like an outsider on the very Earth your people have been on for thousands of years.”

Environmental Activism

Mann has also participated in environmental activism, such as working with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in order to protect an indigenous fish local to the Worcester area ("It's Not Just..."). He has stated that "[the] Earth is not something for you to rip apart. It's there for everyone to share and understand." In line with this, he believes that if Indian culture had progressed on its own without European influence, it would have created technology that is more environmentally-friendly than what is commonly used today in Western culture (Steeves).

The Nipmuc Tribe

The Nipmuc tribe is based in central New England, mainly within Worchester County, Massachusetts, but used to inhabit territory reaching from southern New Hampshire to northern Connecticut and Rhode Island. They lived in villages such as Wabaquasset, Agawam, and Quaboag, utilizing a lifestyle including hunting, gathering, and planting. Since European arrival, they participated in King Philip’s War and all the wars on American soil such as the Revolutionary and Civil Wars (Toney).

Today, the Nipmucs are not federally recognized, due to failing to meet all the necessary criteria for federal recognition as set by the Office of Federal Acknowledgement of the BIA ("Martin issues…”). The OFA’s denial of recognition is based on the findings of John Milton Earle in an 1861 report regarding the Native population of Massachusetts. Earle noted that some tribes within the Nipmuc Nation had little property and was unsure of the tribal status of members who married white or African American individuals, unwittingly skewing the lineage of many of today’s Nipmuc Indians as recorded by the federal government (Thee). As of 2009, the Nipmuc tribe consists of roughly 3000 members. Today, they seek to restore their culture and obtain federal recognition. Mann states that “when you look at of what our people went through, it’s almost impossible to get [federal] recognition” (Filipov). Mann is one of many Nipmucs trying to bring back both cultural practices and tribal pride, hoping the public will recognize them even if the government won’t.

Works Cited:


Sacks, Pamela H. “Webster man keeps Nipmuc tradition alive.” Telegram & Gazette.


Urban, Cori. “Springfield native Larry Spotted Crow Mann authors new book titled ‘Tales from the Whispering Basket.’” masslive.com

Further Reading:

Interview with Larry Spotted Crow Mann and performance with the Quabbin Lake Singers.

Official Website of the Nipmuc Nation, Nipmuc Nation.

Mann, Larry Spotted Crow. “BIO.” Tales from the Whispering Basket.


Mann, Larry Spotted Crow. “Last Thoughts on Columbus Day—For This Year, at Least”. Indian Country Today Media Network, 10 October 2012. Web. 1 April 2013.
Overall, it was refreshing to research someone who was so dedicated to his heritage and his culture to the point where he spends most of his time trying to educate the public about what it means to be Native American and what kinds of positive things they’ve contributed to the nation. I was afraid my Wikipedia article about him wouldn’t do him justice, but once he saw it, he was very happy with it. The Wikipedia article itself has managed to survive Wikipedia’s editors and rigorous guidelines, as well as inappropriate edits. For a person who is trying to promote his tribe and his culture, the internet is a valuable resource and I think that the Wikipedia article on Mann will give anyone a good jumping-off point for further research.