



Bridgewater State University

## Virtual Commons - Bridgewater State University

---

Anthropology Faculty Publications

Anthropology Department

---

2011

### Anthropologists and Two Spirit People: Building Bridges and Sharing Knowledge

Sandra Faiman-Silva

*Bridgewater State University*, [sfaimansilva@bridgew.edu](mailto:sfaimansilva@bridgew.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://vc.bridgew.edu/anthro\\_fac](https://vc.bridgew.edu/anthro_fac)



Part of the [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

#### Virtual Commons Citation

Faiman-Silva, Sandra (2011). Anthropologists and Two Spirit People: Building Bridges and Sharing Knowledge. In *Anthropology Faculty Publications*. Paper 23.

Available at: [https://vc.bridgew.edu/anthro\\_fac/23](https://vc.bridgew.edu/anthro_fac/23)

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Anthropologists and Two Spirit People: Building Bridges and Sharing Knowledge<sup>1</sup>  
By Sandra Faiman-Silva, Ph.D.  
AAA November 19, 2011, Montreal

IN STOCKING SYMPOSIUM IN THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

We were special to the Sioux, Cheyenne, Ponca  
And the Crow who valued our worth and did not spit  
Names at our lifted skirts nor kicked our nakedness.  
We had power with the people!

And if we cared to carry the lance, or dance  
Over enemy scalps and take buffalo  
Then that, too, was good for the Nation,  
And contrary to our stand we walked backwards.  
-- Maurice Kenny (Mohawk)<sup>2</sup>

Native Americans and anthropologists have had a complex and sometimes stormy relationship, as each defined itself relative to the other according to its own positioned reality: one as colonized peoples and the other as both agents of colonial elites and as experts on the colonized. Anthropologists were among the first to document indigenous gender variance practices, calling them “berdache” (sic.), a term rent with ambiguities. As Sabine Lang (1998:6) notes, the term borrowed from Arabic signified “kept boy” or “male prostitute,” and was applied by eighteenth-century French travelers and missionaries to Native American gender variance practices and those who practiced them, including transvestism, gender role crossing, and homosexual relationships.

As a student of anthropology in the 1960s, I learned about the *berdache*-- “women who dress and behave as men,” and “men who dress and behave as women”—in my first anthropology course. The prototypes for these gender transgressors were the Blackfeet ‘manly hearted women,’ and Plains *contraires*. Like my peers, I was intrigued by the exotic anomalous conduct represented by *berdache*, and committed the concept to my anthropological memory. Later I taught introductory courses in anthropology, and I

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor and Chair, Anthropology Department, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, MA 02325, (508-531-2369) [sfaimansilva@bridgew.edu](mailto:sfaimansilva@bridgew.edu). C 2011 Do not reproduce without permission.

<sup>2</sup> *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, p. 154

dutifully taught my students about the *berdache*, using examples from the Plains and elsewhere. It was not until later that scholars, including myself, began to deconstruct the term *berdache*, interrogating its meaning and appropriateness as a gloss for what today we call *two spirits*.

Not only was the term *berdache* troubling to Native American *two spirits*; the relationship between Native Americans and anthropologists was troublesome generally. In 1969 Vine Deloria Jr. published his book, *Custer Died for your Sins*, and memorialized the uneasy relationship with his statement that “Anthropologists are the bane of the existence of Native people.” His words stung, but they did not undermine my resolve to pursue my passion for cross-cultural understandings, promote cultural relativism, and develop tools to build bridges across divides of difference. I became an anthropologist; and I firmly believed that anthropologists could indeed work with native peoples as co-participants in knowledge production and dissemination.

Many Native Americans, as Deloria chillingly reminded us, viewed anthropologists with searing hostility and even disdain; however, it was anthropologists who had collected and recorded the rich cultural heritage of hundreds of Native American tribes that today constitute the cultural record of post-contact tribal life. Throughout Native North America, anthropologists have worked in hundreds of Native American communities since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, collecting valuable data on native cultural practices and producing an enduring record of tribal beliefs, rituals, traditions, and social change phenomena. Among the ethnographic and descriptive documents was evidence of *berdache* traditions throughout Native North America (see Williams 1986, Lang 1988).

Jonathan Ned Katz in *Native Americans/Gay Americans 1528-1876* (NY: Crowell 1976), compiled early accounts of homosexuality among Native Americans, recorded by prominent Jesuits and other missionaries and travelers, and anthropological and

ethnological scholars. Lafitau's "Men who dress as women" was published in *Customs of the American Savages* (1711-17), Devereaux's study of Sahaykwisa, a Mohave homosexual, appeared in 1937, and reports by notable anthropologists in the twentieth century were written by Oscar Lewis among the Piegan (1941), Robert Lowie among the Crow, Leslie Spier among the Klamath, W.W. Hill. Navaho (1935), and Dorothea Leighton and Clyde Kluckhohn among the Navajo.<sup>3</sup>

Sue-Ellen Jacobs' 1968 article in *Colorado Anthropologist*, "Berdache: A Brief Review of the Literature," was a later pre-Stonewall article on gender variance. The 1980s, a period of more intensive GLBT activism, especially around the AIDS crisis, saw increased attention by anthropologists, historians and other scholars to the subject of the *berdache*. Notable were articles by Whitehead (1981), Callender and Cochems (1983), Blackwood (1984), Medicine (1983), and Roscoe (1987), and the text by Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (1986). Paula Gunn Allen's 1981 article, "Lesbians in American Indian Culture," and the 1988 collection edited by Will Roscoe, *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, brought Native American voices to the *berdache* discussion for the first time.

A landmark ethnography about Native North American *berdaches* was *The Zuni Man- Woman* (1991) by Will Roscoe, which traced the life of We'wha, a Zuni *lhamana* (*berdache*). For gay American Indians We'wha represented the essence of what would later be called *two spirits*. According to Will Roscoe<sup>4</sup>

Two spirits often held honored and influential positions. We'wha was an accomplished potter and weaver, and a recognized expert in Zuni religion. That such an individual could become a representative for his tribe underscores the degree to which individual differences in gender and sexuality were accepted. In most tribes the ability to combine male and female skills was not viewed as a liability but a talent. It came as no surprise to the Zunis that We'wha would travel

---

<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.outhistory.org/wiki/Native\\_Americans/Gay\\_Americans\\_1528-1976](http://www.outhistory.org/wiki/Native_Americans/Gay_Americans_1528-1976).

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.willsworld.org/zunibook/zunibook.html> (retrieved 11/5/2011),

thousands of miles, overcoming the obstacles of language and culture, to live and mingle with the leaders of a powerful nation. Berdaches were expected to be extraordinary.

Gay American Indian co-founder Randy Burns (N Paiute) and other *two spirits*, gay men, and lesbians, found the story of We'wha empowering in their own quest to reconnect with their *two spirit* heritage. According to Burns,

Since We'Wha, the Zuni Princess, visited President Grover Cleveland in Washington, DC in the late 1800s, he was the talk of the town, where he showed his formidable social skills and demonstrated his rug weaving style at the Smithsonian Institution. He was a person of great stature and today he would be called a transgendered person. He was respected and appreciated, and was not frowned upon by his tribal people. He was a true leader for his time.”<sup>5</sup>

The narrative on We'wha's life brought to gay American Indians new knowledge of their own indigenous heritage, at a time when many felt homophobia and ostracism against gay American Indians in their own communities. That in earlier eras their people had revered gender non-conformists had been largely lost to later generations, due to post-contact subjugation of Indian peoples as a result of colonization, Christianization, and stigmatization of everything that was not Euro-American. This rediscovery of the *two spirit* legacy in anthropological and other literature fostered a desire by gay American Indians--scholars and activists—to rediscover this legacy and participate in researching Native American culture and history. Native Americans would play a central role in raising the consciousness of anthropologists as they worked to eliminate the stigma of the term *berdache* in the academy.

Native Americans both within and outside the academy broadened and at times complicated the discourse on *berdaches* in several ways: First, they showed that there was indeed a richly diverse contemporary Gay American Indian community whose very

---

<sup>5</sup> Randy Burns, Abstract, AAA Session, “Where are Native American Two Spirit People, Pre- and Post-AIDS?: A Tribute to Bea Medicine,” November 18, 2004, San Francisco, CA.

existence problematized the term *berdache*. Second, Native Americans could and would speak for themselves about their *berdache* heritage, and their voices must be included in conversations in the academy on gender variance. Third was the lack of research on topics related to contemporary gay American Indians, so-called *berdaches*, and gender diversity in Native American communities generally (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 1993: 8). One significant outcome was a critique of the pejorative term *berdache* (see Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 1997: 9-10). In describing what prompted later meetings and eventual collaborations between anthropologists and Gay American Indians in the early 1990s, Randy Burns said,

Over the years many words have been used to describe our unique Two Spirit tradition, words like "berdache," an Arabic term referring to a young kept male slave used for sexual pleasure and often cross-dressed. Early on many European explorers used this term to describe what they had witnessed in tribes west of the Mississippi. Most famous was George Catlin (ca. 1940s), who paid tribute in "Dance to the Berdache." Other terms were also used, such as "hermaphrodite," "Amazon-like," "transvestite," "feminine," "morphological," "other," and the term "sodomite." Years later came clinical terms, such as lesbian, bisexual, and gay Native American. Gay American Indians (GAI) met with AAA members at the 1992 San Francisco Annual Meeting. We discussed the term "berdache." We politely asked that the term be replaced by the contemporary term "Two Spirit." We felt that the term "berdache" was outdated, an insult to our Native women's community, and that our tradition goes beyond sexual identity.<sup>6</sup>

As Burns and other Gay American Indians argued, the time had come to abandon *berdache* as a gloss for Native American GLBTQs.

Gay American Indian activism was intimately linked to larger forces in GLBT activism that surfaced the 1980s, especially surrounding the AIDS epidemic. One strand of GLBT mainstreaming following Stonewall was expressed in activist organizations, such as ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and Queer Nation, which used street theatre, confrontation tactics and resistance politics to render visible the political oppression of

---

<sup>6</sup> Randy Burns, Abstract, AAA Session, "Where are Native American Two Spirit People, Pre- and Post-AIDS?: A Tribute to Bea Medicine," November 18, 2004, San Francisco, CA.

sexual minorities. Reflecting this activism in the broader GLBT movement, the Gay American Indians of San Francisco was founded in 1975 by Randy Burns (Northern Paiute) and Barbara Cameron (Hunkpapa). According to Burns,

Moving here to the Bay Area, I had never met so many Native American queer people all in one place. For me it was a safe place to be. On summer breaks I worked at various Indian programs here in [San Francisco] where I got a chance to truly meet other Native people from other tribal and cultural backgrounds than mine. After work and school we would travel in packs so we wouldn't be asked to provide three pieces of identification. The Castro District was notorious for carding dark-skinned native people. Even our official tribal identification cards were not satisfactory, so we hung out in gay areas that catered and provided a gay, Indian-friendly atmosphere.<sup>7</sup>

Said Burns, "GAI's purpose was to provide a safe place to socialize and to share with each other about our rich history that we had in tribal societies"<sup>8</sup>

Randy Burns was not just a gay American Indian who happened to live in San Francisco. He was a passionate advocate for Native people, a poet, philosopher, and spirited and generous gay activist, in an era when three movements intersected: gay and lesbian liberation, the AIDS epidemic, and the feminist movement. Following the 1969 Stonewall riots, gay and lesbian activists gained more visibility, especially in GLBT residential enclaves, such as San Francisco's Castro district, Key West, Florida, and Provincetown, MA. As the AIDS epidemic grew, activism increased, with supporters and allies working to de-stigmatize HIV-AIDS and lobby for better access to health care and HIV drugs. Also, by the mid-1980s increased attention was being paid to gender and sexuality research in the academy, in feminist and GLBT research, post-modernism and later queer theory.

Many Native Americans by the mid-1970s were relocating from rural reservations

---

<sup>7</sup> From: (<http://sfpride.org/?ifr=articles/gay-indian-storyteller.html>) (Retrieved 11/3/11)

<sup>8</sup> From: (<http://sfpride.org/?ifr=articles/gay-indian-storyteller.html>) (Retrieved 11/3/11).

to urban centers throughout the Mid-and Far West, a by-product of tribal termination and urban location movements during the Nixon era. Native American urban relocation also fostered an Indian gay movement, linked to the increasingly visible GLBT community nation-wide. The GAI movement that began in San Francisco was one outcome of this urban population shift, combined with GLBT Native Americans 'coming out,' just as GLBT visibility was increasing nation-wide. The 'coming out' journey for most Native Americans was not easy, although it may have been easier in the urban settings than on the reservation. As Randy Burns notes, being gay and American Indian in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century was difficult. His early years were spent in Northern California, and later on Nevada's Pyramid Lake Indian Reservation, and his early experiences allude to the intolerance of Native Americans toward gender and cultural non-conformists:

Because I was not raised on the reservation by Indian standards—meaning the way I dressed, the way I spoke English, and my different behavior—the rez boys taunted and physically abused me by pushing, shoving, punching, writing on my clothes, and putting tacks under my seat daily. My sisters told me to fight back, but my late mother always told me to be kind and ignore those bullies.<sup>9</sup>

As a gay American Indian, Burns and his peers confronted the reality of homophobia that pervaded American Indian communities at the time, a legacy of colonialism and cultural annihilation.

Although Native American *berdache* traditions had been documented in hundreds of tribes throughout Native North America in colonial and early modern accounts; by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Native Americans were largely silent about their ancient gender non-heteronormative cultural practices. According to Harlan Pruden, founder of the New York-based Northeast Two-Spirit Society (in Albert 2005), "... the history of acceptance toward

---

<sup>9</sup> From: Albert 2005, <http://sfpride.org/?ifr=articles/gay-indian-storyteller.html> (Retrieved 11/5/11)



queer identity in American Indian culture has been concealed by two major factors: colonial suppression of Native sexual tolerance, and Christian Indians' rejection of traditional practice." Early missionaries and government officials disparaged and stigmatized tribal practices that diverged from Euro-centric norms and values. They viewed such practices as abhorrent to Christian beliefs, and insisted that Native Americans give up all remnants of gender-crossing practices. As tribes were forcibly converted to Christianity and their cultural heritages exterminated, they abandoned *berdache* traditions, virtually rendering them extinct in the indigenous imaginary by the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Not only did many Native American tribes reject their *berdache* cultural heritage, but by the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century the cultural memory of this heritage had been largely lost. Natives either did not recollect or chose to not acknowledge that some of their members had ever embraced gender boundary-crossing, either as men-who-dress-as women, or women-who-dress-as-men. According to Will Roscoe (Ed., 1998 : 101-102),

"...the 'disapperaring of the berdache was the end result of actions by countless government officials, school teachers, missionaries, and local whites....[B]erdaches were rounded up, their hair was cut, and their role was suppressed. In government- and church-run boarding schools children with third- and fourth gender tendencies were quickly spotted and severely sanctioned."

Fearing ostracism and marginalization by their tribes, *bedarche* traditionalists went underground, and homophobia gripped many Native American tribes. Two Spirt Maurice Kenny (Mohawk) (in Roscoe, Ed. 1998: 101), said, "...it was just about impossible to stand up and say who you were [on the reservation]. If you had a job you'd get fired. Your family might disown you. You certainly would be ridiculed." Navajo anthropologist Wesley Thomas, said

Homophobia was taught to us as a component of Western education and religion....We were presented with an entirely new set of taboos, which did not correspond to our own models and which focused on sexual behavior rather than the intricate roles Two-Spirit people played. As a result of this misrepresentation, our nations no longer accepted us as they once had. (Rahimi 2005)

Homophobia was so virulent that, according to Randy Burns, at least one gay Indian in the early 1990s was murdered in an attack at Pine Ridge Reservation (Roscoe, Ed. 1998: 101).

Indian *two spirits*, although fearful of disclosing gender-bending cultural practices so hated by Europeans and Euro-Americans, kept the knowledge alive in private and discrete ways. Two gay Native Americans, Sabrina Wolf and Miko Thomas, a mixed heritage Chickasaw, reported in 2004 how their native elders reacted when they came out. Wolf came out to her grandmother. Said Wolf,

I started by telling her, 'I'm different,'" the white-haired, soft butch activist recalls. And she had this look of, 'Yeah, I know.' And then she said, "There's people like you at home [among Indians], and it's a good thing."<sup>10</sup>

Thomas also reported that his mixed heritage grandfather and father reacted to his coming out with "nonchalance," while his white mother was more disturbed and less accepting. Throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and well into the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, gay American Indians had little access to information about the rich *berdache* traditions rooted deep in their Native American cultural roots, more than 150 of which were documented in anthropological, ethnological, historical, and missionary histories (see Lang 1998, Roscoe, Williams 1986, Thomas and Jacobs

Gay American Indians often experienced negativity when they sought information from tribal members about their tribe's *two spirit* heritage. Miko Thomas, when he asked a tribal elder about homosexuality in the past in his Oklahoma tribal community, was told, "There are no gay Indians. There were never any gay Indians." Others received more positive but still ambiguous signals from elders when their tribe's *two spirit* heritage. A mixed heritage Native American *two spirit*, Ben Geboe, who grew up on a Sioux reservation in South Dakota, said,

---

<sup>10</sup> Albert 2005, <http://inthe fray.org/content/view/870/39/> (retrieved 11/5/11)

“People knew that I was very effeminate.” Though he was sometimes called *winkte*, a Sioux word that translates, roughly, as “woman’s way,” Geboe explains that “it was never derogatory, never meant as an insult. It was more a kind of joking, a subtle ribbing.” Both his Sioux and his Norwegian family were supportive of his coming out (Albert 2005, Ibid.)

At a time when little was known by many gay and lesbian Native Americans of their *two spirit* heritage and many members were stigmatized and ostracized for being gay, GLBT Native Americans turned to anthropological and historic accounts to rediscover their cultural roots in the *berdache* traditions. What they found was a rich cultural heritage reported in more than 150 native tribes throughout the continent from the Great Plains to the Mississippi River Valley. *Berdaches* were often highly respected and even esteemed gender nonconformists who performed ritual and social roles related to religious practices, warfare, and child-rearing. They took on the dress, social roles, and demeanor of members of the opposite sex, sometimes engaged in same-sex co-habitation, and often possessed supernatural powers as adepts.

As Native American *two spirits* researched their own cultural roots, collaborations between gay Native Americans/*two spirits* and anthropologists on gender, sexuality, and *berdache* studies commenced. These collaborations were premised on the assumption, “...that there should be a true dialogue between native and non-Native people who have dealt with, or want to do so, the topic of Native American gender diversity and sexuality” (Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 1997: xiii). Jacobs, Thomas and Lang (1997:8), said, “We agreed with two-spirit friends that for too long discussions of Native American gender diversity and sexuality had taken place without benefit of shared discourse with Native Americans....” (Ibid. 8). From the perspective of GAI, central issues in the debate focused on the term *berdache* in anthropological and other scholarly discourse, and the absence of native voices in research and scholarship on *berdache*, two spirit, and gay American Indians. The natives were saying loud and clear, *We can and must speak for ourselves*; and anthropologists were

obliged to listen and take notice. In the late 1980s some gay American Indians began to use the term *two spirit*. The term 'two spirit' was formally embraced by Native American queers in 1990 at the International Two-Spirit Gathering in Winnipeg, to replace the more pejorative term *berdache*, used by scholars since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. According to Rahimi (2005), "The term 'Two-Spirit' refers to a belief among some tribes that there are people who manifest both masculine and feminine spiritual qualities."

In the late 1980s gay American Indians of San Francisco, led by Randy Burns and Erna Pahe (Navajo), collaborated with researcher Will Roscoe to produce the volume, *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology* (1988). This was the first time gay American Indians were given voice in defining and elaborating on their *berdache* and gay American Indian heritage. The volume was also the first collaboration between GAI and anthropologically-informed scholars on the *berdache*. Will Roscoe had worked with the Gay American Indian History Project since its founding in 1984. Using historical and contemporary accounts, through history, poetry, and narrative, Native American writers talked about their experiences as contemporary gay American Indians confronting homophobia and racism. They wrote about their experiences growing up gay on and off the reservation, and dramatically illuminated their connection to their *two spirit* heritage.

Following the publication of *Living the Spirit* (Roscoe, Ed. 1988) collaborations began in earnest between anthropologists and gay American Indians to share scholarship and redefine the *berdache*. Instrumental in this effort were Native Americans, including former tribal judge Clyde M. Hall (Lemhi Shoshoni), film producer Doyle V. Robertson (Sisseton/Whapeton Dakota), mental health educator Terry Tafoya (Taos/Warm Springs), professor and poet Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo), and others. Spearheading the joint project were anthropologists Sue Ellen Jacobs, the late Bea Medicine (Lakota), Wesley Thomas (Navajo), and Sabine Lang. These individuals were leaders in a community of

scholars, activists, anthropologists, and GLBTQ American Indians who met in preliminary meetings in 1992, including a gathering in November, 1992 at Randy Burns' apartment in San Francisco, which was also the headquarters of the Gay American Indians of San Francisco. At this and subsequent meetings, participants talked about Gay American Indian/anthropological collaborations in research and scholarship, and consciousness-raising on the *berdache*.

Sue Ellen Jacobs, Wesley Thomas (Navajo), and Sabine Lang were each actively researching contemporary *berdache* traditions in US Native American communities, drawing attention to enduring features of *two spirit* traditions in 20<sup>th</sup> century Gay American Indian life. Jacobs' 1968 article, "The Berdache: A Brief Review of the Literature," was a landmark in early systematic documentation of the Native American *berdache*. Lang (1997, 1998), a post-doctoral student, and Thomas (1993), a graduate student, both at the University of Washington, had each researched Native American *berdache* traditions, Thomas as an insider and Lang as an outsider. In 1993 they partnered with Native American activists, including anthropologist Bea Medicine, writers, and others, in a joint conference funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, followed by scholarly sessions at the AAA on the Native American 'berdache,' titled, "Revisiting the 'North American Berdache' Empirically and Theoretically." According to organizers ((Jacobs, Thomas and Lang 1997:9), the conference, which preceded the AAA session, was intended to bring Native Americans and non-Native anthropologists 'face to face,' where anthropologists would "... clearly articulate their theories and other ideas about Native American sexuality and gender diversity, past and present ..." in a "... private, 'closed' conference where we could sort out differences that might appear in our papers before we read them in public at the AAA session"

The 1992 informal meeting in San Francisco was the first time I had met Bea

Medicine and Randy Burns, and each would be crucial to the nascent anthropologist/GAI collaborations incubating that year. Their participation, along with that of anthropologists Sue Ellen Jacobs and Wesley Thomas, an anthropology graduate student and a Navajo *two spirit*, signaled an important and focal bridging of the divide between anthropologists and Native Americans. Bea Medicine played a particularly important role in these collaborations. A feminist anthropologist, and member of the Lakota tribe, Bea was founder of Warrior Women, Inc., and worked on behalf of Native American Indians, particularly women, both within her community and in the academy. According to Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang (1997: xiii), “Without her support this entire enterprise...would have failed in its overall objective: to engage two-spirit Native Americans in direct conversation with those non-Native scholars who have written about them in order to bring to light the differences between ‘lived life’ and the way it is characterized in anthropological and historical writings....” Bea Medicine’s own positionality as a Native American anthropologist exemplified the ambiguous relationship between anthropologists and Native Americans—herself both an insider and outsider—which she alluded to in her article, “Learning to be an Anthropologist and Remaining ‘Native.’” She said, “The ambiguities inherent in these two roles of being an ‘anthro’ while at the same time remaining a ‘Native’...speak to the very heart of ‘being’ and ‘doing’ in anthropology.” She continued, by saying: “My desire to be an anthropologist has been my undoing and my rebirth in a very personal way....”

At these early planning meetings the concept materialized to work in earnest to organize scholarly sessions at the 1993 AAA Annual Meetings at which gay Native American would participate as scholarly co-equals with anthropologists to share scholarship on gender, sexuality, and *two spirit* and *berdache* sexuality and history. One result was that the term *berdache* was abandoned and replaced by *two spirit* as the appropriate nomenclature

for Native Americans who are neither man nor woman, both man and woman. This transformative work allowed modern-day gay and lesbian Native Americans to affirm and authenticate their place as native experts on their own *two spirit* traditions, as they connected with their own pasts and legitimized their gay realities, countering the hostility and disdain many felt from members of their own native communities. As noted, the participation of feminist anthropologist and Native American activist, Bea Medicine (Lakota), as a representative of the Native American mainstream, helped to authenticate gay American Indian ties to their indigenous roots. The active participation of Native scholars with anthropologists in defining, refining, and interrogating historic and contemporary *two spirit* traditions, fostered the transformation of not only the natives themselves, but also the anthropological conversation on a stigmatized and marginalized discourse on Native American gender and sexuality. Both Native Americans and anthropologists could not lay claim to the authentic *two spirit* Native American tradition, and connect it to contemporary Native American GLBT and *two spirit* traditions.

As an insider/outsider myself, I believe that Bea Medicine's early participation and her willingness to embrace GAI/Queer/Gay anthropologists' scholarly and social collaborations affirmed for both constituencies the importance, relevance, and timeliness of our work. Bea offered gay American Indians the hope that their own communities would one day welcome them home; her presence also validated their personal stories as important social scientific scholarship (*the personal is political*); and she gave non-Native Anthropologists room to work productively with American Indians, thereby challenging Vine Deloria's 1969 claims in *Custer Died for Your Sins* that anthropologists were part of the problem rather than agents for problem-solving and illumination.

Dr. Bea Medicine was a bridge-builder—an activist anthropologist in the best sense—who courageously entered domains of inquiry that she knew were right, just, and

necessary, to move forward the causes of all Native American people, and in so doing the causes of global citizenship and progressive anthropology. Her work on behalf of Native American *two spirit* people has brought us full circle from early anthropology's work to document the lifeways of *two spirits* in dozens of indigenous communities, to the 21<sup>st</sup> century when *two spirit* people are reclaiming their rightful place in Native American history, society, and culture. In 2004 Bea Medicine and Sue Ellen Jacobs were honored at AAA in sessions organized by Gay American Indian (GAI) Randy Burns and me, a member of the Society of Lesbian and Gay Anthropologists (SOLGA, now called the Association for Queer Anthropology), culminating in an evening of poetry and entertainment by members of the GAI community. Participants in the session honoring Bea, *Where are Native American Two Spirit People, Pre- and Post-AIDS?: A Tribute to Bea Medicine*, included Erna Pahe (Navajo), Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) Clyde Hall (Shoshone-Bannock), and anthropologist Sue Ellen Jacobs. To honor Sue Ellen Jacobs, a session, *Researching Native American Two Spirit People: A Tribute to Sue-Allen Jacobs*," brought together Wesley Thomas (Navajo), Randy Burns (N Paiute), anthropologist Evelyn Blackwood, and Bea Medicine (Lakota). Dozens of members of the San Francisco GAI community attended the day-long conference to honor the collaboration between anthropologists and *two spirit* people, and the event concluding with an evening of food and entertainment provided by GAI, poetry by Sabrina Wolf, Jaynie, Jack Forbes, and Paula Gunn Allen. The festivities also featured a Thunder Stomp Dance by the San Francisco-based Earth Dance Theatre and other entertainment.

Later, in 2006, following the passing of Bea Medicine, Randy Burns and I had the opportunity to host a celebration of the life of Dr. Bea Medicine, at the AAA Annual Meeting. As I noted in my remarks that evening, Dr. Bea Medicine's contributions to anthropology and to the *two spirit* legacy, exemplifies the ambiguous heritage of our own discipline of



anthropology. Ours is a disciplinary child of colonialism, yet our lens of inquiry and our methods of praxis, as Bea well-knew, can be—at their most effective—insightful, inspiring, even revolutionary. Our discipline, I think Bea believed, offered perhaps the best analytic perspective humanity can rely on to comprehend, interpret, understand, and solve our global community’s myriad challenges--yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Anthropology’s relationship with Native American *two spirit* people, formerly known by the pejorative term *berdache*, brought knowledge to late 20<sup>th</sup> Century GLBTQ American Indians that 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> (or as Arnold Pilling said, 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup>) alternate gender individuals had long existed throughout much of Native North America. The early and on-going research into *two spirits* helped Gay American Indians to ‘come out of the closet’ and into the broader community. Randy Burns, and other gay American Indians, as earlier described, worked to give voice to the painful histories of Native American *two spirit* brothers and sisters as they struggled to find a home between the two worlds of closeted gay America and their often hostile, wary, and unwelcoming tribal homelands. Gay American Indians ‘came out’ in San Francisco in 1975 and showed that the *berdache*—now reinvented as *two spirit*—had indeed survived colonization, missionizing, US government subversion, and Native American reaction. Early ethnographies helped gay American Indians take the long walk home by describing *two spirits*, leaving a legacy of cultural knowledge now being recovered, rediscovered, analyzed, and re-interpreted by contemporary GLBTQ American Indians.

As gay American Indians and anthropologists collaborated in scholarly discussions, the inevitable interrogation of the concept *berdache* occurred. As earlier noted, for more than a century anthropology students were taught the concept *berdache* in introductory courses, as a gloss for the many manifestations of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> genders found throughout Native North America. It was not until collaborations began, that both anthropologists and

*two spirit* people determined that the disdainful connotations associated with the term were unacceptable in contemporary anthropological discourse and in the Native American gay community. The time had come for anthropology to abandon the *berdache*, and the 1997 publication of *Two Spirit People* by Jacobs, Thomas and Lang marked the formal acknowledgement that *berdache* must go.

Collaborative work between anthropologists and native subjects has become mainstream in anthropology today, a by-product of post-modernist feminist insistence that multiply positioned voices and discourses must be represented in the academy, and that *natives must speak for themselves*. Although collaborations between anthropologists, *two spirit* and gay American Indians have not erased suspicions of anthropologists due to our legacy as handmaidens of colonialism, it does provide a model for how our discipline can work across the divide of subject and scholar, native and outsider, to produce scholarship that is truly collaborative. Indeed, the collaborative enterprise represents the essence of the best of anthropology, as a vehicle for giving voice to others respectfully and with precision; and it is the only effective way to break down suspicion and hostility toward the academic enterprise of our discipline.

Albert, Emily

- 2005 "Rainbow and Red: Queer American Indians from New York to San Francisco are showing both their spirits." *In the Fray*, December 5, In <http://inthefray.org/content/view/870/39/>. Retrieved November 5, 2011.

Allen, Paula Gunn

- 1981 "Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures," *Conditions: Seven*, 67-87.

Blackwood, Evelyn

- 1984 "Sexuality and gender in certain Native American tribes: The case of cross-gender females," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*," 10:227-42.

Callendar, Charles, and Lee M. Cochems

- 1983 "The North American 'Berdache.'" *Current Anthropology* 24(4): 443-70.

Devereaux, George

- 1937 "Institutionalized homosexuality of the Mojave Indians," *Human Biology*, 9: 498-527.

Hill, W.W.

- 1935 "The status of the hermaphrodite in and transvestite in Navaho culture," *American Anthropologist*, 37: 27-68.

Jacobs, Sue Ellen, Wesley Thomas, and Sabine Lang,

- 1997 *Two Spirit People: Native American Gender Identity, Sexuality, and Spirituality*. Urbana, IL: U Illinois Press.

Katz, Jonathan Ned

- 1976 *Native Americans/Gay Americans 1528-1876*. NY: Crowell.
- Lafitau, Joseph Francois
- [1821] 1976 "Men who dress as women," in J. Katz (ed.). *Gay American History*, P. 299. New York: Crowell.
- Lang, Sabine Lang
- 1997 *The Other Way: Gender Variance and Homosexuality among Contemporary Native Americans*. Austin: U Texas Press.
- 1998 *Men as Women, Women as Men: Changing Gender in Native American Cultures*. Austin: U Texas Press.
- Lewis, Oscar
- 1941 "Manly-hearted women among the Northern Piegan," *American Anthropologist*. 43(n.s.) 173-87.
- Medicine, Bea
- 1983 "Warrior Women': Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women," in *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*. Ed. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, 143-73. Landham: University Press of America.
- Rahami, Shadi.
- nd **"Gay Native Americans Rediscover 'Two-Spirit' Identity,"** in [http://www.imdiversity.com/villages/native/dialogue\\_opinion\\_letters/pns\\_gay\\_twospirits\\_0305.asp](http://www.imdiversity.com/villages/native/dialogue_opinion_letters/pns_gay_twospirits_0305.asp), [retrieved November 5, 2011].
- Roscoe, Will
- 1987 "Bibliography of Berdache and Alternative Gender Roles among North American Indians," *Journal of Homosexuality* 24(3-4) 81-171.
- 1991 *The Zuni Man- Woman*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico.
- Roscoe, Will, Ed.
- 1988 *Living the Spirit, A Gay American Indian Anthology*, New York: St.

Martin's Press, 1988.

- 1998      *Changing Ones. Third and Fourth Genders in Native North America.*  
New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Thomas, Wesley
- 1993      "A Traditional Navajo's perspective on Navajo cultural constructions  
of gender," Paper presented at "Revisiting the 'North American  
Berdache' Empirically and Theoretically." 92<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of  
the American Anthropological Association, Washington, DC.
- Whitehead, Harriet
- 1981      "The Bow and the burdenstrap: A new look at Institutionalized  
homosexuality in Native North America." In *Sexual Meanings: The  
Cultural Construction of Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Sherry B. Ortner  
and Harriet Whitehead, 80-115. New York: Cambridge U Press.
- Williams, Walter
- 1986      *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture.*  
Boston: Beacon Press.