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I have often heard it said that the interdisciplinary complex we variously call American Indian, Native American, Indigenous, or First Nations Studies has no shared or core mission, values, theory, or methods. I would disagree – my experience over the last twenty years teaches me that there is much we share. In scholars' published work, in our mentoring of graduate students, in pedagogical philosophies and methods used in the classroom, in the applied or outreach work that is so highly valued and central to our field, I have seen several common themes: a commitment to the fundamental concept of sovereignty; a privileging or centering of Native names, experiences, voices, and narratives; an inclusive orientation that favors multiple, complicating, diverse perspectives over a monolithic "one size or story fits all" approach; a commitment to the health, well-being and vigor of life in Indian country; responsiveness to the central issues and concerns of Native nations; a dedication to transform the institutional structures of the dominant society, such as schools, colleges, and universities – however frustratingly slow and incremental that process can be.

Many of these core values and practices, I believe, are rooted in the ways we were raised. We were raised to work hard; We were raised to look after one another; We were raised to say thank you. Those of you who know me, and know my work, probably realize how reluctant I am to make generalizations about Native peoples or cultures or societies, but as I get older, some generalizations ring true to me. Being raised to recognize, acknowledge, appreciate, and give thanks for the gifts of life seems, to me, to be a central and foundational teaching or legacy of what Karuk scholar and tribal historian Julian Lang has called "the creative genius of our ancestors." We honor the legacy, we honor the creative genius of our ancestors, whenever we make the commitment to pay attention, to recognize the gifts of life, and to be thankful. That commitment is an individual decision, or series of decisions, really, that occur over and over throughout our daily life. "Indigenous epistemologies," to use the current buzz words that also refer to the creative genius of our ancestors, teach us that becoming a real person, becoming an adult, becoming a real grown-up is always and fundamentally *up to us*. Every individual must come to grips with the creative genius of their ancestors, must make the commitment, must consciously make the decision to engage with life in what we have been taught is a moral, ethical, and responsible way.

That shared commitment, I believe, is at the core of what brought the Steering Committee for this gathering together. We believe in this interdisciplinary complex I will call American Indian Studies, and we envision its power and potential in a broad and inclusive way. We offer our heartfelt thanks to our dear friend and colleague Robert Warrior, who invested an unimaginable amount of time and energy into bringing this first gathering to reality and fruition; we offer our heartfelt thanks to all the hard-working members of the local Host Committee and generous sponsors who made this gathering possible. Clearly they all believe in and act on the principle, "look after one another," be

generous. We give thanks for the diverse work and perspectives of a wide range of colleagues, and we welcome them to this gathering and those that will follow in the future. We value the substantive scholarship undertaken by our colleagues who are Native, of all our various stripes and sizes, and we also value the work undertaken by non-Native scholars, our steadfast allies. We can and must be allies but that does not mean that we simply agree with one another all the time. Respectful and civil debate and argument are absolutely necessary to the health, well-being, and vigor of American Indian Studies

We – Ines Hernandez-Avila, Kehaulani Kauanui, Tsianina Lomawaima, Jeani O'Brien, Robert Warrior, and Jace Weaver [alpha order] – constitute a steering committee. We came together because we each felt a need, and a we perceived a need beyond our individual wishes, for a professional gathering place for Native studies scholars to share and exchange our work, our passion, and our hopes for the future. We came together, frankly, because we have lost patience with gatherings predicated on a narrow and exclusive definition of who ought to be “certified” as allegedly authentic Native Studies scholars. We have lost patience with evaluations of our peers that seem more based in reified notions of race than in assessments of personal integrity or scholarly excellence. We came together because we are committed to fostering a gathering and, we hope, an organization founded on our shared appreciation for solid scholarship, for an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, and for a frank and civil exchange of ideas. We cannot and we will not control the future of this organization, whatever that might turn out to be, but we thought it important for you to know the place where we began and our hopes for HOW this process unfolds. For all the people in and beyond this room, what comes next is up to us.