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Remarks for Friday morning plenary session, Indigenous & Native Studies Meeting
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What a tough set of acts to follow. I begin by echoing Tsianina's words of thanks to Robert for his amazing work in putting this entire effort together. He has been an inspiration in his vision, his hard work, and his determination to see this initiative through. Thanks also to all the folks at the University of Oklahoma, who were fabulous hosts when we met to put the program together in January, and are showing us such an awesome time now. We are also benefiting from the generosity of tribal sponsors and numerous departments and programs on campus. To all of you, migwetch.

I just want to spend a few minutes talking about the intellectual agenda that I believe, with shades of difference no doubt, is motivating our efforts. When Robert approached me with the idea of this initiative – something he and Jace had already been in conversation about – I immediately signed on. I believed then and I believe now that we are long past due for a professional organization that reflects our maturity as a vibrant interdiscipline. If you take the founding of full-fledged departments of American Indian Studies granting undergraduate degrees as a starting point (and coming from the first such department, how can I do anything else?), we are nearing forty years as an interdiscipline. What we really mean to be talking about is of course Native American Studies and Indigenous Studies and the wonderfully fruitful ways scholarly conversations turn these days.

So how do we figure as a collectivity? Should we figure as a collectivity? Of course my answer is yes. What is for me out of whack is the seamless way that most of us read broadly across topic, region, time, place, and disciplinary perspective (to name but a few) –and the infrequency with which we come together as scholars. All of us have our favorite academic meetings where we encounter our colleagues in different fields. For me (and I think Tsianina), the American Society for Ethnohistory is a must, but that's an organization of mostly anthros and historians. For me (and Robert and Kehaulani), the American Studies Association is frequently in rotation, though not really a must. But these are limited venues for our scholarly work, and in some cases extremely frustrating places to find a "real" home that nourishes us academically and professionally. What is in my view seriously lacking is an organization that is truly broad in its orientation and that provides a location for us to forge an intellectual community – a place where we work as an interdiscipline. Put most simply, how can it be that some of the most influential work that I read is produced by scholars I never have a real chance of running into at a regularly scheduled scholarly meeting? That just doesn't make sense to me.

And so that's my pitch. From the incredible response we got from the call for papers and those who came anyway, there must be something to this – thank all of you for coming and participating in this conversation.