

# **The Munsee Lunaape Way: Decolonizing Newark-NYC | Documenting the Estuarial Ecoscape**

Rutgers-Newark Honors College  
Fall 2020, 6 Credits Research Seminar Lab  
Tuesdays 2:30 – 5:20 pm via Blackboard

Jack Tchen (ki/kin)  
... with lots of help from my friends and colleagues.

This research seminar lab is a collaborative research project working with Munsee Lunaape Local knowledge bearers along with Algonquian language scholars, historians, ecologists, digital mappers, and artists, to explore the many facets of Indigenous life, present, past and future in the Newark-Northern NJ-NYC estuarial region. Lunaape / Lenape peoples (and those anthropologist call “paleo” Indians) have been in this estuarial region for millennia--building a complex, rich cultivation, fishing, hunting, and foraging culture continuously from some 12,000 years ago. How can we recover this presence of these original “grandfather” peoples that decolonizes the untrue yet pesky mythos of the “purchase of Manhattan”? - the fabled 1626 origin story of the region. Since Nieuw Amsterdam Governor Kieft’s 1643 massacre and the 1666 “purchase” of Newark by a splinter group of Puritans. This fabulously biodiverse commons region become an extension of Dutch and British colonization and extractive processes--quickly becoming dispossessed, enslaved, stripped of its natural bounty, industrialized, and colonized ultimately developed centuries later into the commodified, parceled, privatized ecoscape we take for granted today.

*At what cost do we continue to pay forward?*

*How might the US’s and our regional governments lack of ability to grapple with global warming/climate justice be linked to this inability to reckon with foundational historical injustices to peoples and to land/waters?*

*How might our efforts to grapple with global warming/climate justice draw from the deep practices and philosophies of Indigenous peoples?*

The Lunaape Way Eco Justice Lab will surface the disappeared lives of the estuary--using storytelling techniques to reconstruct the surviving historical fragments of the Munsee Lunaape relations to the soil, air, fire, and waters. Over 400 years of genocide and dispossession the deep knowledge of the estuarial life and ecologies of Lunaape peoples has been scattered to all corners of North America. Yet revitalizing that Indigenous philosophy, respecting the lands and waters, and reckoning with the unresolved past is foundational in dealing with environmental and climate degradation.

In addition to emphasizing critical storytelling, the 3-credit Lunaape Way Lab will be experimenting with experimental, multi-sensory digital mappings of the estuarial region. The decolonizing mapping approach we’ll be taking is both to work towards a better accounting of the dramatic changes on the lands and waters before 1776 and continuing thereafter, but also as a creative collaborative learning canvas for students and faculty to better understand the multi-layered meanings, politics, and poetics of place-making.

Extending the Lunaape regional mapping research of the New York-Newark Public History Project (PHP), we'll make the working maps available to all students in Lunaape Way. Student projects will include a grounding of all, including humans, as being "ki"<sup>1</sup> or "being of the living earth" creative research project ([Kimmerer, "Speaking of Nature," Orion Magazine](#), March/April 2017) and a collaborative site project focused on the Northern New Jersey watershed portion of the larger estuarial region extending east to Long Island. We want to remap, rather restore the original ecoscape as it existed prior to colonial settlement and dispossession of the Native peoples.

### **Protocols**

Rutgers-Newark, the quad-state region, North America, the Western Hemisphere, in Pacific?? worlds are on Native/Indigenous lands and waters, sky and cosmos, whom they have been caretakers, not only in/of the past, but to this day, and into the future. In particular, we are in Lunaapehoking (Land of the Lunaape) and other Algonquian-language sovereign residents. The convergence of the Raritan, Passaic, Hackensack, Hudson rivers, and Long Island Sound have and continue to be the gathering places and crossroads of many Native Peoples far, wide, and near. It was a convergence place of landed and watery pathways for the region and for North America.

The [U.S. Department of Arts and Culture](#), an activist non-profit organization, has taken an excellent forward approach. Link to their site and watch the video.

Sit with this shift in being and understanding for a while. Take as long as you need. Then, as you can, please learn the acknowledgement protocols that work for you. Write notes in your logbook and be prepared to offer your insights on Zoom and in other assignments.

### **Full disclosure**

I am not Native American / Indigenous, nor a practitioner of, Native and/or Indigenous cultures. Nor am not an experts in Native American and/or Indigenous studies. Who I'm not necessarily humbles who I imagine I am. As someone born into an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist Chinese family, my existence is defined by being anti-racist anchor baby an organizer who seeks to create new, decolonizing perspectives and organizational practices. My three years and counting of work with Munsee Lunaape Elders and community organizers means I'm a practitioner of allyship and responding to their requests for help. By so doing, I seek to explore both the possibilities of what we can do with Native/Indigenous peoples, but also my limits. We are lucky to be able to work closely with Turtle Clan Ramapough Chief Vincent Mann and Clan Mother Michaeline Picaro Mann. And we are also lucky to have Kerry Hardy add his considerable scholarship to our mix. He is not Indigenous, actually he's a genuine Yankee whose ancestors arrived to the Maine colony as indentures. Kerry has become knowledgeable of Wabanaki and now Lunaape deep history. Vinny, Mikie, Kerry, and others will help us find individual and group interconnections and how to contribute to this historic reckoning with the disappeared Homelands of the Munsee Lunaape.

*What is your "subject position" in relation to Native American and Indigenous peoples,*

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer proposes we use the term "ki" to confer personhood to all living things from the Native American point of view. Besides creatures and plants--water, wind, rocks, and earth are also considered alive with "personhood." Man made items are not. The plural, she proposes is "kin." Being playful, I've integrated these references to "I" or "he" as ki and "his" or "her" to kis. Words and syntax embed basic values and relationships.

*research & futurity? To the culture and experience? We, both non-Native and Native, have complex, intersected relations but often they are invisibilized, disappeared, buried, and ignored.*

For example, Jack says “kis” life’s work has been building the foundation for invisibilized and disappeared knowledge claims, primarily with the Chinese and Asian diasporic communities in the Americas. Ki is always trying to decolonize, de-imperialize, and de-Cold War-ify (in the formulations of Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1999, 2014 & Chen Kuan-Hsing’s *Asia as Method*, 2010). Jack’s approach to NA/I questions unfolds in relation to kis own intersected, faceted subject position which is both different and sometimes similar and gives ki a critical basis to make comparisons. David Bunn Martine was telling Jack in the oral tradition with strong aural memories (in comparison, for example, to visual-word oriented memory), 1609 and colonization was like it just happened. Jack has the same memory from his mother of the British waged Opium Wars against China. Different subject positions but relatable, if each is understood as deep and complex phenomenon.

*Most importantly, it is now increasingly possible for non-Native/Indigenous researchers to do this work because there has been an amazing efflorescence of excellent scholarship generated primarily by Native American and Indigenous scholars, archivist, and organizers. This scholarship is both academic and university based, but also notably building on the sheer commitment and tenacity of Native American and Indigenous communities collecting, documenting, preserving, conserving, and protesting over decades and hundreds of years to the point that academics have been gaining academic, museum, and library positions.*

## **Basics**<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

### **A dialogue-driven & chronotopic approach**<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

We believe a liberating, dialogic pedagogy needs to engage active learners in identifying from where we each come from in the world, imagine ourselves going, and how we consciously and unconsciously position ourselves in society and globally. These basic issues of identification are at once personal and political, social and cross-cultural, domestic and transnational. Communicating across our differences, honest analysis, rethinking, and the process of re-researching buried archives and fragments are some of the tools we’ll be using to deconstruct and reconstruct, decode and recode a more critical knowledge. This will require both an ethics of care and of critical generosity.

Our re-search and re-membling will be collaborative, dialogue-driven, personal and political, reflexive and ongoing. We won’t provide “answers” for you to regurgitate. We’ll all be formulating provisional questions and provisional answers with the goal of improving our approximations of understanding what this phenomenon has and is about. The honest feedback we provide each other is key to make this active learning process work.

*Chrono-tope*: Chronos or time and topos or place. Time, contrary to Greenwich Mean Time mechanics, is a cultural historical construct that can be infinitely meaningful and manipulated. GMT is a global standard because it stems from British colonialism and global economic-cultural imperialism. Today more than ever, the sun rises and sets according to the mechanical and now atomic time of the British Empire’s past glory. In a land which First Nations/native peoples first named, what names do we use? In what language? All stories and explorations are grounded in the moment of the here and now with an emphasis of some other time and other place “back,” “now,” or to come. What is the “Present”? “Past”? “Future”? We’ll be exploring

power relationships in these three temporal frames but always being mindful of their relations to the originating time of reference—the momentous “now” of the formulator. What is our “now”?

What about topos? Home, a place of social practices and beliefs, is part of the cultural cartography of here/there, insider/outsider, us/them, citizen/alien, etc. A chronotope, therefore, is the cultural-bound meaning we tie to a specific case study between the here/now we take for granted and some other time/place. Chronotopes can be with a past moment read from the present back, or a projection into “the future” as in much science fiction.

### **Note-taking & communication**

Taking lots of notes, in your primary language, is the most important work for you to learn, master, and obsessively partake in this semester. Please keep all your notes and fieldnotes in one volume. Ideally a bound, hardcover 100 page notebook. If you have notes from somewhere else or a scribble on a piece of paper, just tape it into the notebook. When you read, write your notes into this. This will be the primary, low tech research notebook.

We need to learn how to communicate more precisely and clearly. And as the world become more multi- mediated and digitized and globalized, we need to do so in a decolonized, multi-lingual, cross-cultural way.

Syntax is key. The proper ways we learn self-presentation is through the way we learn to speak, move, and express ourselves socially within historic-cultural contexts. Creativity necessarily is expressive in relation to such “proper” patterning. Given these differences, how do we figure out how to communicate across these differences?

### **Course Requirements**

Conceptually, students need to be conversant with an array of theoretical perspectives that can elaborate their own particular and disciplinary interests and to locate their own creative subject position and expressive vantage. Practically, we’re asking you to:

- *show up!* and give your honest effort, this is a collaborative, interdependent team effort;
- *formulate* your own informed, engaged story in relation to Lunaape, Algonquian-language, and <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>Native metro regionals; <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- *learn* to gather, document, interpret with a decolonizing, questioning approach; and <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- *develop* a piece of storytelling that works to displace dispossessing, colonizing myths.

<sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>Students are expected to do all readings for the week in which they are assigned and to consider them in relation to the larger questions we are raising. Start citing and trying out ideas in your assignments, discussions, and with family and friends. But please be humble, non-jargoned, and clear when used in communicative situations where what you say and how you express it actually matter. How can you convert this process of “academic” learning into something that matters in its realness. <sup>[L]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

### **Expectations**

We don’t believe in grades but are required to give them. We believe in effort, engagement, cultivating insights, collaboration, and sustained work. We also believe in regular self-evaluation and giving feedback. And getting feedback from “others” is also essential. So, attendance is important. So is working in groups. And honest engagement with each other, and with Leora and Jack are imperative. We are all enculturated within various powerful culturally

normative systems and our senses are habituated to find comfort and meaning within them. Yet, meaning cannot just be found in the “head” but must integrate “heart” and “soul,” smell, taste, touching with the Western “higher” senses of sight and sound, right and left, upper and lower, and in how we live our lives and practice our theories. This, to us, is what critical cross-cultural researchers are made of.

There will be weekly assignments posted on the site. This will include rounds on you requirements bulleted above.

Your grade will be based on your critical, honest self-assessment and if we agree. A realistic self-awareness of your strengths and areas for improvement is key in this process. **We’ll be asking you to write self-evaluations for the midterm grade and at the end of the term.** Attendance and participation, in class and online, are key. The effort you put in and how gained insights shift and deepen your understanding will be what you’ll be asked to measure yourself against.

### **Manhates? Mannahatta? Manaháhtaan?**

The debate over the original way to name this island, and its original meaning, is one of the challenges of Munsee/Unami Lunaape language reconstruction. And as we know from the work of Paulo Freire, “naming” is a profound process of literacy and illiteracy (Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970). To misname or to obscure the naming process is foundational to the work of our gleaning methodology. Therefore, our work is also a question of decolonizing the foundational history of this NYC’s unprecedented global financialization of every parsec of daily life during this obscene, violating Trumpian Gilded Age.

To reclaim speaking and visibility, also requires the prerequisite of gathering the fragments of what has been dispossessed, disenfranchised and dismembered. The engaged, layered, multi-organized knowledge of the Lunaape peoples linked to the coastal estuaries of Manaháhtaan has been scattered to all corners of North America and the royal colonial museums, collections, and archives of Europe. We seek to facilitate a process to pull these “fragments” together and, when appropriate, making it accessible for all to understand the deep and profound culture of Lunaape and Native American eastern coastal peoples. Revitalizing that indigenous philosophy, respecting the people, and reckoning with the unresolved past is foundational towards an enhanced understanding of how to change the here and now, especially in the era of environmental and climate degradation.

As the Eco Justice Lab we will be researching pre-colonial place in Northern New Jersey, with a particular focus on analyzing place names to better understand historic uses of the land and water by the Lunaape. We will be designing a shareable “living archive” of these mappings with fresh storytelling techniques to both challenge myths, archive origin stories, and convey the simultaneous presence of pasts and futures of our region.

### **The Eco Justice Lab**

The goal of this research seminar in the land of Lunaapehoking is to contribute to an ongoing research project gathering the scattered fragments of Lunaape and NY-NJ regional stories, documents, memories, and objects into a “living archive” to support Lunaape efforts to reestablish a dominant presence and educate locals about the need to recognize the continuing impact of this history. The name of the Eco Justice Lab seminar is meant to evoke that we as practitioners of allyship are creating space for and privileging Lunaape ways of

thinking and being, as well as emphasizing that the land on which we work, live, and play is Lunaape / Algonquian stewarded land and waters.

This research effort necessarily has to challenge a series of barriers that reinforce the pervasive invisibilizing notions -- the First People are no longer here, were “noble” but “primitive,” and are not part of the “modern” world (Jean M. O’Brien, *Firsting and Lasting*, 2010). Such mythic ways of believing have to be constantly challenged before we can begin to understand the plentiful evidence surrounding us to the contrary—the living evidence of Lunaape and Native Peoples are in what Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) called “survivance” mode all around us, if we would only honestly open our “hearts and minds.”

### ***On questions of Native American & Indigenous identities***

We’ll be abiding by the Native American Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) guidelines, attached below, on Native American and Indigenous identity questions. We are not accepting the European and Euro-American perseveration on “the races of mankind” categories and racialization practices, especially as measured by profiling, phenotype, genotype, and blood quantum. The high ethical standards expressed below for Identity fraud are also applicable for all non-Native claims of who we each are as far more than a self-commodification or identity-choice process. The question of “who claims you” is also a foundational social and cultural question about the theory, history, and ongoing impacts of Western liberalism. Highlights are added below.

### ***NAISA Council Statement on Indigenous Identity Fraud***

Issues of Indigenous identity are complex. Hundreds of years of ongoing colonialism around the world have contributed to this complexity. However, such complexity does not mean that there are no ethical considerations in claiming Indigenous identity or relationships with particular Indigenous peoples. To falsely claim such belonging is Indigenous identity fraud.

As scholars of Native American and Indigenous Studies, we are expected to undertake our work with a commitment to the communities with whom we work, about whom we write, and among whom we conduct research -- we are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards of our profession. Further, as scholars it is incumbent upon us to be honest about both our ancestries and our involvement with, and ties to, Indigenous communities. This is true whether we are Indigenous or non-Indigenous. In no way are we implying that one must be Indigenous in order to undertake Native American and Indigenous Studies.

We are simply stating that we must be honest about our identity claims, whatever our particular positionalities. **Belonging does not arise simply from individual feelings – it is not simply who you claim to be, but also who claims you.** When someone articulates connections to a particular people, the measure of truth cannot simply be a person’s belief but **must come from relationships with Indigenous people**, recognizing that there may be disagreements among Indigenous people over the legitimacy of a particular person’s or group’s claims. According to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues statement on Indigenous identity, the test is “Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and accepted by the community as their member.”\*

Being dishonest about one’s identity and one’s connections to Indigenous communities damages the integrity of the discipline and field of Native American and Indigenous Studies and is harmful to Indigenous peoples. If we believe in Indigenous self-determination as a value

and goal, then questions of identity and integrity in its expression cannot be treated as merely a distraction from supposedly more important issues. Falsifying one's identity or relationship to particular Indigenous peoples is an act of appropriation continuous with other forms of colonial violence. The harmful effects of cultural and identity appropriation have been clearly articulated by Native American and Indigenous Studies scholars over the past four decades, and it is our responsibility to be aware of these critiques.

The issue is not one of enrollment, or blood quantum, or recognition by the state, or meeting any particular set of criteria for defining "proper" or "authentic" Indigenous identity. **The issue is honesty and integrity in engaging the complexities, difficulties, and messiness of our histories (individual and collective), our relations to each other, and our connections to the people and peoples who serve as the subjects of our scholarship.**

For these reasons, the Council of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association expresses its conviction that we are all responsible to act in an ethical fashion by standing against Indigenous identity fraud.

Approved by NAISA Council, 15 September 2015

(Compare and contrast this statement to Jimmie Durham's end statement on this YouTube video from his Whitney Museum exhibit "[At the Center of the World.](#)" This is an ongoing question we'll be asking seminar as a whole and each ourselves.)