

Spenser Thomas Cantu

Interview of April Lindela October 8th 2009

SC: How did you make your way to Marquette?

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SC: April what is your position here at Northern Michigan University?

AL: I'm currently the director of the Center for Native American Studies.

SC: Not to ask a personal question, but what is your birthday; your age?

AL: My birthday is April twelfth nineteen sixty nine, that makes me forty years old.

SC: Where are you from originally?

AL: I grew up in downstate Michigan outside of Detroit, kinda one of those kids who moved around a lot. The parents never wanted to settle down in one place, my mother is from the six nations reserve near Oschwagen Ontario, and my father is from the Detroit area.

SC: Are you part of a tribe from that area?

AL: Yes, I have status with the six nations reserve at the Grand River of Ontario.

SC: Are they a federally recognized tribe?

AL: Through the Canadian government yes, so my status is a little different it's not like citizenship here, with tribes having recognition state or federally so status on a federal level in Canada yes.

SC: Do you receive any kind of rights from treaties with the Canadians here?

AL: No, actually not because I was born in the states and my mom because she was born in Canada under J treaty she has dual citizenship and some other rights because of her actual birthplace. Being born in the states I don't have anything in this area, geographically being a bit far away from my rez; I don't have any specific rights.

SC: Being head of the Center for Native American Studies, how did you get involved in the discipline of Native American Studies?

AL: Actually I kind of fell into it by accident, I really was...My previous two positions on the NMU campus were student services based I was an admissions counselor recruiting Native American students back in the late nineties. I then became assistant director for diversity student services and budget cuts were happening back then just as they are today and budgets being what they were I lost my position at student services. And was offered a position as an adjunct faculty for the center; during that same semester I lost a job and gained a job. The previous director Dr. Martin Leinhart left the area and recommended me as the interim director. So when I was growing up I certainly never aspired to find myself as an academic department chair. But I think

that it makes a lot of sense, it feels good and I think that my longevity at northern and my familiarity provides students with a real service....least I hope it does.

SC: How did you make your way to Marquette?

AL: I came here to go to school in January of nineteen eighty eight, and started with several majors and I finally ended up with a major in speech communications/Native American Studies major. I think I'm an anomaly that the university hired me before I had a degree; at public TV thirteen. I worked at public TV thirteen for five years prior to going into student services. I feel very lucky and fortunate to kind of have my foot in the door early and I've been here ever since.

SC: You said earlier that you recruited Native American students, why would the University (NMU) want to bring in Native American students?

AL: I think because of our geographic location were kind of...we have this unique situation not only being in the central part of five recognized tribes in the upper peninsula, but also in Wisconsin a couple in Sioux Ontario. If you do a kind of circumference around Marquette there are quite a few reserves in that area. Of course there's a lot of water too, and it makes sense. It was kind of to open the door and bring diversity to the NMU campus, because we felt that we had programs that not only appealed to Native American students but we also felt that the university would benefit.

SC: Was your first job at a college the recruiting?

AL: My first position here (NMU) was with the public broadcasting.

SC: Oh, I didn't know if they (TV 13) were loosely affiliated with NMU.

AL: Yes WNMU is part of the NMU campus.

SC: Sorry, that is one thing I didn't know much about. What activities does your current position involve, what are the major things you have to do?

AL: The major things I have to do are balancing acts of...I think one thing of being an administrator on one hand you have to be innovative and creative, but probably some of the biggest tasks would be curriculum development; watching your curriculum program. Are we offering what students want, are we offering what's needed, are we offering what's in line with other Native Studies programs? So that's a big thing I think student support, student services are we reaching out to our Native students, are we reaching out to students taking Native classes, how can we build a relationship and community amongst those students? As well as outreach, how can we be servicing the tribe's title seven coordinators in the public schools, but there's also those activities such as grant writing and teaching I am required to teach as well, so it's a bit of a balancing act.

SC: What courses do you teach?

AL: Currently this semester I am teaching NAS 405 which is American Indian education and I am teaching NAS 204 which is the Native American experience. I have taught other classes as well.

SC: I understand that there are a lot of adjunct professor in the Native American Studies department. Are you on your way to getting...non adjunct professors?

AL: The difference is having someone who is ten year track and for the first time two weeks ago we just got approval for a ten year track professor, assistant professor. He would be the Native American generalist which is the title of the position and a kind of a step in between that and the adjuncts are the term faculty. Ken Pinawanakwut our Native American language professor for example is a term faculty. Currently Dr. Adriana Grecci Greene is a term faculty so there's a couple steps and then there's the adjuncts. We do have a lot of adjuncts and we would like to see more full time staff but these folks devote as much hart, time and dedication as our full time faculty so we would hope to see them rewarded in the future with permanent positions here.

SC: What are your long term goals for the program here, what is your vision?

AL: Excellent, that's a great question. I think some of it...I have to be realistic because I want to make sure it's a collective vision I don't wanna be here on a mountain with my flag saying "this is the vision." I want to make sure it's a collective vision of faculty and students and representative concerned with Native Studies. I think we talked about a graduate certificate and that certificate could be something that looks at tribal governments it could look at a close exploration of Native American communities. What it would be like to work within a Native American organization or community because I think there are a lot of people out there that would love to have that kind of information. But they already are professionals and can't really come back to school but maybe they could do a hybrid course on the web and maybe meet a few times a semester. So graduate certificate is something we are investigating in cooperation with masters of public administration. Next we would be absolutely delighted to see a baccalaureate program in Native American Studies; a four year program that provides students with the tools to go right into the work force whether that means working for a government agency, working directly with tribes. There are so many entities that find themselves working with tribes and they would not have realized it. The DNR for example have to work closely with tribes, state legislators have to work, have to know and understand how to work with tribes. That's something we would love to see down the road, ultimately like I said full time faculty would be wonderful. We would love to see more Native students come from a wider broader reach. Obviously we concentrate on Anishenabeg country, because this is where we are; the traditional homelands of Anishenabeg people. It would be great to have a little bit of diversity even amongst tribes as well.

SC: Do you know of any universities in the state or nation that have baccalaureate programs?

AL: Sure actually within the state of Michigan I have not found any programs in the fifteen publics that have a strict concentration of a baccalaureate of Native American studies in Wisconsin I have found four. The UW of Green Bay has first nations studies institute that started in fall of oh eight. Kudos to them that's great so we have to be mindful so we're not encroaching on them either, so how could our baccalaureate program be an enhancement or different from what already being offered. So in that's all politics and I think for the most part

there are a number of programs and if somebody googled it they would see there are a wide range of programs out there.

SC: Do you know of any masters programs around?

AL: Not close by but that might be my not being as familiar with it I did a lot more research as the major and not the major the University of Michigan has a masters of American culture with an emphasis in Native American studies. It's a give and take there with what that might look like.

SC: What has Native American enrollment in the university looked like in the past decade or so? Has it increased or subsided?

AL: Great question, it has actually been very slowly increasing in fact this year we were at our highest number that I can remember we were at two thirty four. The mining journal I did an article about that so it was really excited to see that it was something of value to the community of native students on campus.

SC: Does the department do any work with the local Native communities, reservations and so on?

AL: We just recently last Saturday, October third in fact we did a joint program with Marquette title seven program; the education program. It's a program that is based on the zaadke project zaadke meaning that which comes from the earth the zaadke project is a project that we do in cooperation with the cedar tree institute but at this phase of the project what to build and paint bee houses. We did that with a number of youth from the title seven program and some of the college students here at Northern and it was one of those great collaborative active hands on projects that didn't necessarily get a lot of press, get a lot of limelight but overall was a really successful and worthwhile endeavor. Do you want me to give you a few more examples? Cause GLIFWIC, the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission was here with a few representatives from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community did a presentation on fisheries management. The UP Indian education conference was two weeks ago several tribes represented we had eight fluent speakers two Mohawk and six anishnabeg. We had about a hundred registrance to that conference so I think we really over extended ourselves for the conference on a number of different levels.

SC: Now are you familiar with the language yourself?

AL: No

SC: Did you grow up with any native speakers around, people who were fluent on the reservation area?

AL: We went and visited my mothers' reserve a lot when we were younger my mother and her mother and great aunts who were not fluent either through their experience with their schools or other schools that had been assimilated so much so the language was no as prevalent which is why I think it is important for me personally to see two Mohawk speakers come to our

conference this year. Since I've grown up and left the nest so to speak there have been really great strides to bring back the Mohawk language, in fact there's an entire immersion school where the teachers aren't necessarily certified in k through twelve curriculums. The calendar is not the Judea Christian calendar they follow. The curriculum is based on the Mohawk Thanksgiving address classes are taught in Mohawk and in English and all the teachers must be fluent in Mohawk. And they could be graduates of the school and turn around and be teaching the next year so they're not exactly looking for teachers that are standards based or certified in this thing or another, if they're fluent in Mohawk they would have a job there; and are good people of course with kids. They're really looking for the revitalization and preservation of that language that is their number one priority.

SC: is the university involved in any traditionalist movements?

AL: What do you mean exactly?

SC: Movements that are attempting to bring back the culture, language etc...

AL: Cultural preservation, When I first heard that term I really thought it was interesting because for me I do not wear buck skin; I'm not gonna go hardcore in that sense. I think for me it wasn't a matter of preserving it was a matter of living. I really thought that was an interesting term cultural preservation and I really actually explored what that meant with my own class, there's cultural preservation through, music, through language through dance; literature, film and yet an acknowledgment that culture still evolves. How is Robbie Robertson for example that played with "The Band," played with Bob Dylan, how is his music still quote unquote Native music but still a fusion of contemporary styles? So what is cultural preservation to begin with, but to answer your original question, we have drumming every Thursday night. That's not something that we as a center say's that this necessarily has to be done, students are doing that on their own and we give them a space to do that. Speaking of space cultural property within the campus was also a dialogue that we've had over the years and so as a result of that we have a fire site on campus. Where students if they wish can reserve that site, and have a talking circle or have a gathering out there as long as it's done in a respectful way. Faculty can use it for their classes; the community has used it from everything from weddings to funerals. I think the fire site shows that this place can be a home for those seeking that cultural and community connection.

SC: Were you involved in getting the language classes being brought into the curriculum?

AL: No, that was well before my time, in fact I was an undergraduate and was part of the first class when it was first introduced back in the early 90's to take language from Don Chose from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (KBIC). Those courses were really under the umbrella of the English faculty member at the time, Dr. Mellissa Hearn. Whom we affectionately dubbed the grandmother of Native American Studies at NMU, she was somebody who worked extremely long hours; just a diligent person who worked hard to make the Native American Studies minor possible. Even though there were classes well before the existence of that, she was the adhesive to bring them all together and make the minor happen. That happened in 91 and 92 so that's the time frame, and the language in her opinion and many community

members opinions was at the core of that and she made sure she had someone here teaching language at that time.

SC: Now to switch subjects, what is your view on the mascot situation, around town and nationally?

AL: One of the things I try to express in my American Indian education class, is I used to show the film "in whose honor" and used to talk about the mascot subject, and now I tend to look at it as stereotypes and comparisons of stereotypes of ethnic groups. The idea of the black face the idea of the Jewish symbolism during the holocaust, and all these things that we are familiar with because of media images. So I let the students explore on their own and I invite the students to go take pictures, and so everybody gets their own little wiki and we put up a collage of what everybody's gathered and posted up on the web, and they sometimes themselves will bring pictures of the mascots. Might be a school sign or a uniform, and these students are all over the place so it might not be just in Marquette, you never know what's gonna come in; it could be the land o lakes butter container for all I know. I think it's more powerful if they go out and discover the connection of what these stereotypes are, and what the affects they can have on people. The other thing I ask my students to do is to read articles written by youth, young college students, high school students and their reactions to such symbolisms that are out there. Because it's their peers writing these things it's actually from their kind of view point and not from my ivory tower, professor kind of perspective. I think by allowing them to do it that way they can discover what kind of affects mascots have, I think it's said in Indian country that we have so many more important issues to worry about than mascots. I have heard the rebuttal that if they cannot take us seriously when it comes to mascot then how are they gonna take us seriously when it comes to treaty rights. My personal sentiment I think it's very harmful potential for harmful effects on youth is very great and I think it causes identity issues throughout Indian country as a result.

SC: In your opinion how has the government been doing handling tribal issues, of sovereignty and their interactions with the tribes today?

AL: One of the issues that comes around today is the lack of apology from the U.S. Government, in terms of the assimilation movement , the boarding schools, residential schools, Australia, New Zealand, even now Canada the indigenous people of those areas have received apologies from their governments. We have yet to receive one from our government and that for me is one major choice on their part to look at it and sat that it is a non issue. I think as far as sovereignty goes and other issues it goes back to the question I asked earlier, they can't take Indian people seriously on so many levels when our nation's capital has the football team with the mascot that they have. Our government officials are sitting in the stands watching the game I find it a struggle to say that they're taking us seriously. Not being from a tribe in the U.S. I'd be gun shy to say that it would be more than my personal opinion. I haven't spoken to a lot of tribal officials but I have heard a lot of frustration on their part about how slow the government moves on a number of issues.

SC: Have you ever had to work with the federal government of Canada or the United States, or entities such as the B.I.A. (Bureau of Indian Affairs) or others?

AL: Not at length, the only time I had any kind of engagement with the Bureau of Indian Affairs was to do some research out of the office of Sault St. Marie. It wasn't so much working with them but "can I go search through your stuff; I need to research something." I had to look through their files. The Canadian government no I've never had to deal with them no, but my mother may have but she's never really...I've not had to.

SC: what are your views on the, I don't mean to systemize it but the pow wow system, or the pow wow culture and how it is to this day?

AL: I guess I revert back to that whole term of cultural perseverance and what are we preserving versus what are we living. For me I grew up going to pow wows, which is interesting because I didn't grow up with any knowledge of longhouse culture and natural laws based on seasons and language; none of that, but I grew up knowing about pow wows. I think for us it was caus' it was a connection to other Indian people in the Detroit area because I'm one of those urban Indians. Coming from a big populated area and for us being able to gather with other Indian people just felt good and I remember the first summer coming up here in eighty eight, a friend of mine took me to a pow wow here in Marquette. It was in this tiny little armory on the edge of campus and there were a couple of drums, a few dancers and I looking at here and thinking "I thought the Indians were up here." I did get around and got to visit more pow wows while I was up here, Baraga Sault St. Marie, Waters Meet, Hanaville, all of them and bay mills. I can see that it brings pride to people, it brings opportunity to meet with culture bearers, people who tell stories, people who can give names, people who can share talents. I can remember Charlie Shuttowin for example at pow wows inviting people to just sit with him and make baskets and that was very cool to see those type of things taking place. It promotes native artisans who bring their traditional work. Those who don't sell but make outfits and are proud of the outfits they make, so I think it has its place in the culture and I understand not all native people are connected to that in the same way and I respect that. Not all people feel the need to be pow wow goers and sing or dance and that's cool too but I think it has its place and provides a good venue for native people to discuss why culture is important to Indian people and why other gatherings are not so important.

SC: did you or your family have any involvement with the boarding school system at all?

AL: yes, what's an interesting phenomenon that connected to the boarding schools and residential schools as they're called in Canada is this idea of post traumatic stress disorder so a lot of family members won't talk about it, just like if a family member served in Vietnam. They choose not to talk about it because of the affects to them physically, emotionally. The same thing with residential schools, so yes I have relations; my mom was in one for a short time but eventually found her way out of that and ended up becoming a teacher later on in life. I think it's one of those things that we as a community even if our parents, grandparents were not directly involved we as a community are affected intergenerational and understand and have that collective historic trauma that goes along with it.

SC: What do you know about your clan system at all?

AL: The Mohawk clan system is a bit different than the Anishnabeg clan system, there's clans based on...there's nine...land, air and water and my clan is the turtle so my clan is from the earth. Being turtle clan and being from a matrilineal society where women made a lot of the final decisions; men would move in with their wives family; it was a very different mindset than what people are used to today. Clans system were very much that you do not marry within your same clan because the same clan was your relation and you had different responsibilities in regards to ceremony; again speaking from the Mohawk perspective I still have a lot to learn because I've been in Anishnabeg country for the last twenty one years. I respect that the clan system is very much still alive as a kinship system within the six nation's communities and for me I'm always proud to let people know I'm turtle clan.

SC: same as downstate.

AL: What's kind of cute is since I've been married to a Finnish guy for several years now and when I was an admissions counselor and found myself on the road a lot and would meet a lot of admissions counselors here there and remember calling my husband one time and talked about having dinner with this guy Bill and saying ahh he's turtle clan.

SC: Did you ever take any flak now for marrying a Caucasian man?

AL: oh sure, I wouldn't call it flak but a quiet, polite not talk about it in public kind of reaction. I'll never forget my mom talking to my aunts and the sentiments they had, but I couldn't ask for someone who's more respectful of my culture, and let's just say he respects that our household is matrilineal. And he understands the aspects of our culture, such as I was packing to go to a pow wow and asked him to hand me my eagle fan and he having had a beer the night prior did not want to disrespect that eagle fan. He certainly has an understanding and respect for what I'm trying to do to live my life in a way that suits me as a native person and native women. Initially it was a bit unfortunate to go through couple of those bumps to get to the other end so things are good now.

SC: is it common for native women from where you are from to marry outside the culture, do people try to avoid it or is it looked at differently?

AL: I've read that if folks are within the reservation or reserve community obviously their going to have more opportunity to meet other native people; you move away from that you're going to meet a lot of non native people. My mom did not marry a native person either she made a lot of controversy herself, she married an Arab American., She received a little flak as well he received a little flak for marrying an Indian women and those were very different times and so I think it depends; she moved away from the rez at an early age, she moved to Detroit for employment as a lot of people did back in the day so having this giant pool of non native people by geography is in my opinion what can happen when you move away from the rez.

SC: were you involved in any aspect of your father's culture?

AL: very rarely, he comes from a giant family and being involved in middle eastern food, and I didn't really get involved and part of it is he grew up Lutheran, he didn't grow up orthodox he didn't grow up Muslim so a lot of ties that people associate with Arab American communities. He didn't have the language, he did as a child but as he grew up he lost that language. I think the opportunities weren't there as much as the pow wows were there as on the rez, you drive through eh rez and there are aspects of culture all around. Even though Detroit has the highest Arab American population in the U.S. we didn't see our family that much on his side.

SC: What has been your overall experience with Northern Michigan over the years good, bad?

AL: I think that anytime that you're involved with an institution for a number of years there's going to be bruises along the way that is because of mistakes I've made and mistakes others have made. Recently one of the things we saw take place was at our homecoming parade the idea was a video game was the theme and one was the Oregon trail and students were dressed up in the Hollywood Indian costumes and doing the Hollywood whoop and interacting with the crowd; the crowds doing the chop. That was really crippling for me and devastating it took me a few days to even wrap my head around it and talk about it with other people on campus, because it was my homecoming too. I have three degrees from this university and to have friends travel to visit, driving eight hours one way and that to happen made for really uncomfortable and awkward homecoming evening for them. Sometimes mistakes can be seen as learning opportunities and I hope the university opens up a dialogue that looks into how media images, stereotypes and how biases come into play. Would this have happened if it were African American dressed up in black face, or another group of people and I think the answer would be no; and I people have been fed those images all the time through so many different media like the butter for petes sake and sports teams, and the peter pan cartoon is one that I show in class. We see these as children and they're engrained in our brains and we as children don't understand why it's inappropriate and as an adult we don't know if it's inappropriate or not and obviously the students that partook in this marching event; that question was not there for them "is this right? Should we be doing this?" I think the opportunity to talk to campus about why this is harmful is going to be happening in the upcoming days. But I've been here for twenty one years and I've hills and valleys both I can't imagine living anywhere else and I can't imagine working anywhere else.

SC: It's become socially acceptable.

AL: It's promoted by Disney it's promoted by any number of things, you name the cartoon I'll give you an example. Homer Simpson in the movie that came out there's the shamanistic women who appears, I think you can find anything from Mickey mouse to Ronald McDonald to Bugs Bunny and again it's targeted mainly at children.

SC: Thank you very much for your time April.

AL: no problem

SC: end of interview with April Lindela October eight two thousand and nine.