Victoria L. LaPoe and Benjamin Rex LaPoe II. *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age.* East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2017. 98 pp. ISBN 9781611862263.

http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3FB2#.Wp7pqOhubIU.

The latest release from the American Indian Studies Series at MSU Press, *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age,* is a groundbreaking title. At the point of this writing, no other text has set out to generate an investigation of Native-run newsroom norms and routines. Authors Victoria L. LaPoe (Cherokee) and Benjamin Rex LaPoe II situate Native American journalists in the digital age as building on "the rich tradition of storytelling" (87) already practiced by Native peoples in diverse ways since time immemorial. Building on these oral traditions, as the digital divide in technology accessibility decreases within Native communities, more and more storytellers and journalists are turning to online platforms, which advance the visibility of Native peoples and issues (73). While the text includes traditional newsprint and radio format journalists as part of their study, the authors are especially interested in the ways in which the Internet, social media, and mobile applications have impacted reporting and dissemination of news in Indian Country. In order to understand these impacts, the authors interviewed established and burgeoning Native American news reporters affiliated with the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), Koahnic Broadcast Corporation (producers of *Native America Calling* and *National Native News*), the *Navajo Times*, Last Real Indians, Vision Maker Media, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, and others. The result is a thoughtful, useful, and very readable text that will serve both Native communities and non-Native allies interested in understanding and improving Native news coverage in the years to come.

While comparing Native and non-Native news reporting norms and routines is not the focus of this book, before getting to the findings of their interviews with Native journalists LaPoe and LaPoe II make it a point to draw several important distinctions between approaches to news coverage within and outside of Indian Country. According to the authors, non-Native media report on stories that are "revenue generating" (2), whereas "sacredness to all living things is where most Native people truly find 'profit,' success, and fulfillment" (89). This does not mean that economic concerns do not impact Native journalists – costs of production and the economic disadvantages disproportionately affecting Native communities cannot be ignored. However, generating revenue was not cited as an important concern, whereas serving the needs of Native communities was privileged in the interviews featured in the book. Additionally, because traditional Native storytelling honors multiple versions of stories, and because perspectives vary within communities instead of trying to craft an "authoritative" account of a news story like in the Associated Press, the interviews show that many Native journalists seek to "get out as many Native voices as possible" when covering an issue (76). The interviews also find that Native journalists are also acutely aware of their own positionality and the historical, legal, and political concerns affecting their people. There is a sense of accountability to their communities that is not seen in non-Native community; the author interviews with reporters at the *Navajo Times* are especially useful in elucidating this point as it relates to privacy and tribally-specific codes of moral conduct.

Additionally, since tribal members are "underrepresented in non-Native newsrooms" (2), most of the time Native peoples are completely ignored by mainstream media. When and if non-Native

coverage of Native issues does occur, it is more often than not reported through a stereotypical lens and evidences "overt and inferential racism" (21). Seen through colonial eyes, the most popular narratives of indigenous peoples perpetuated by culturally-uninformed and/or biased reporters focus on stories that misrepresent Native communities as "frozen in time," impoverished, and criminal. The authors explain that, "one method of defying these stereotypes is to support and recruit additional American Indians who are familiar with Native storytelling to enter the field of journalism" (96). In additional to internships and mentoring with Native professionals in the field, the book argues for mainstream media to increase their recruitment and promotion on reservations and within Native organizations. In this way, even as *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age* offers a basic survey of Native journalism as it stands today, it also takes a practical approach by offering solutions like these that could easily be implemented. Because of its dialogic nature, Native media is a "communal gathering place" (43) not only allowing for Native people to talk back to one another, but also to talk back to settler colonial culture at large. The authors found that those interviewed largely "viewed the Internet as a vehicle for offering counter-stereotypes and providing more truthful information and images" (93).

Even while *Indian Country* is theoretically and methodologically rich (their transparency and outlining of their research process are especially well-done), the book's primary contribution comes from its interviews. As a snowball sampling, these interviews allow for established and emerging indigenous voices in journalism to tell their stories, share their values, and push back against stereotypical views of Native peoples and communities in media. Some of those interviewed are well-accomplished movers and shakers in the field, such as Paul Natonabah and Marley Shebala, while others have rose to meet community needs only in recent years. The intergenerational scope of the text is, indeed, one of its strong suits. While this book review cannot go into each of their topics in depth, readers will find the book's organization useful. LaPoe and LaPoe II outline the primary themes emerging from their research: history/context, storytelling, digital media, and youth/future. Anyone interested in any of these topics will find those appropriate sections worth an extensive look, but the book reads well from beginning to end, and readers will benefit more by examining how those interviewed both echo and complicate one another's experiences and insights.

While this book would be especially useful for those studying and working in Native American Studies, *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age* should arguably be required reading for *all* students studying journalism and communication, both Native and non-Native. Not only does the text provide an intelligent critique of mainstream journalism's shortcomings when it comes its treatment of Native peoples and issues, it offers both broad and tribally-specific parameters for what an improved media focus on Native communities might look like in theory and practice. The authors demonstrate how contemporary Native journalism is an extension of traditional oral storytelling, but readers who are unfamiliar with those oral traditions to begin with will have a difficult time understanding the nuances of these connections— additional readings might be needed for those audiences. *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age* could have benefited from engagement with Native American Studies in general, perhaps turning to texts such as Renya K. Ramirez's (Hochunk) *Native Hubs* and Craig S. Womack (Muscogee) et. al.'s *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. This book, then, might be a great starting point for opening up increased dialogue between Native news reporters and others working in the field of

Native American Studies, especially those within letters, digital arts, and Native-led community development.

Finally, while this book features interviews with Native journalists who are actively trying to recruit Native youth for writing and videography in newsprint and online venues, the scope of the text focuses primarily on traditional news reporting while leaving out more DIY and/or underground, youth-driven reporting and editorials on Native issues. For example, the Instagram account "indigenousgoddessgang" is a collective of Native women who post about Native social issues and environmental concerns with an emphasis on indigenous women's justice, such as the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). Does this count as a form of journalism? While not traditionally trained in communications studies, such a collective: 1) informs their immediate regional, as well as international, communities about Native women's issues in Indian Country; 2) fosters community dialogue on these issues through encouraging conversation and interaction; and 3) actively redresses stereotypes while disseminating and increasing the visibility of and accessibility to Native perspectives in the media. Beyond Instagram and Facebook, there is also the world of Twitter and Snapchat, as well as YouTube channels produced by and for Native peoples unaffiliated with newsrooms proper. As the digital divide narrows and technology becomes more accessible, platforms draw many users focusing on issues within their communities, but with content generated by writers and documenters who are often not formally educated in journalism— much of this phenomenon is youth-driven. If the future of Native journalism lies in the hands of the youth, it's important to cultivate inclusion and broaden an understanding of the field to include pop culture coverage and untrained writers sharing stories and creating multimodal news media within Native communities.

Because this book investigates the newsroom norms and routines in Native media, *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age* would be a useful text for those interested in exploring media covering of critical concerns like Standing Rock and #NoDAPL, as well as Idle No More and MMIW activism. Although this book was published in 2017, it does not make mention of any of these issues, even as these key movements were and are driven by social media and grassroots-level reporting. For example, the Indigenous Environmental Network has been around since 1990, covering not just #NoDAPL, but also other rights issues, such as the faulty Enbridge Pipelines, which threaten the safety of the water and the peoples— human and otherwise— here in Anishinaabe territory. This subject also raises another important question not addressed in *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age*: as Native storytellers and journalists increasingly turn to digital technologies, how will they offset the environmental impacts of those technologies? I think this question is worth considering; however, as LaPoe and LaPoe II importantly point out in their conclusion, "storytelling culture is still the driving force of the content. Their stories are not controlled by the technology," (96).

As more and more Native-operated digital news networks emerge and expand their influence, *Indian Country: Telling a Story in a Digital Age* will be a great starting point for writers, community members and scholars looking to understand the ways in which Native peoples continually adapt to the digital age while also honoring diverse traditional values as they record, respond, and share the stories and voices that matter most.

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