History 111, Spring 2020

Dr. Madsen

Discussion questions for *This Land* and *Code Switch* podcast episodes

# First thoughts

1. What most surprised you about the *This Land* and *Code Switch* episodes? Why?

2. What did you learn in the podcasts that you hadn’t yet learned from textbooks or other sources?

# Objectivity

We’ve talked quite a bit about objectivity vs. subjectivity in this course.

* [Objectivity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/objectivity): “lack of favoritism toward one side or another; freedom from bias”
* [Subjectivity](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/subjective#h1): a perspective “modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background”
* Historians’ preference for objectivity
* Use of first-person point-of-view in writing by historians. An excerpt from Helen Sword’s [*Stylish Academic Writing*](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674064485):

Another surprising finding was the predominance of first-person pronouns in the sciences. The high percentages in medicine, evolutionary biology, and computer science (92, 100, and 82 percent, respectively) confound the commonly held assumption that scientists shun the pronouns I and we in their research writing. By contrast, only 54 percent of the higher education researchers in my data sample and only 40 percent of the historians use first-person pronouns.

Helen Sword. *Stylish Academic Writing*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2012. Kindle edition, p. 18.

* Strong objectivity, a concept originally named by Sandra Harding

[Strong objectivity explanation by Nancy Naples](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeoss286.pub2):

The notion of strong objectivity was first articulated by feminist philosopher Sandra Harding in 1987. Strong objectivity builds on the insights of feminist standpoint theory, which argues for the importance of starting from the experiences of those who have been traditionally left out of the production of knowledge. By starting from the lived experiences of women and others who have been traditionally outside of the institutions in which knowledge about social life is generated and classified, more objective and more relevant knowledge can be produced. It is argued that knowledge produced from the point of view of subordinated groups may offer stronger objectivity because of the greater motivation of these groups to understand the views or perspectives of those in positions of power.

3. Can people closer to an event/cultural phenomenon/court case provide better information than others, or can we not trust them because they’re “too close”? How do these concepts apply to *Sharp v. Murphy*? How do we balance our use of sources if traditionally such sources have been used to disenfranchise Native peoples and have led to their suffering and oppression?

# Murder, land, reservations, and resources

This case has been tried at different levels under different case names. The case was previously known as *Carpenter v. Murphy* and *Royal v. Murphy*. The current full case name is *Tommy Sharp, Interim Warden Oklahoma State Penitentiary, Petitioner v. Patrick Dwayne Murphy*.

4. Let’s think about the case itself:

* What’s going on with the case *Sharp v. Murphy*?
* Why is it about more than just a murder?
* Why does the case matter enough to have made it to the Supreme Court?
* Who are the petitioner and the respondent, who has supported each of them with amicus curiae (i.e. “friend of the court” briefs), and why does each side care?

5. The episodes we listened to included some clips of Supreme Court justices’ questions and commentary, as well as background information on the justices’ previous rulings on Native American cases.

* Which rulings, commentary, and lines of questioning did you find persuasive, and which less so? Why?
* What role does an understanding of history play in the justices’ understanding of the case, and where do you think the justices learned about history?

# Blood quantum, tribal membership, and race

5. Why is it important for indigenous Americans that “Native American” is considered a political, and not merely a racial, designation? What’s at stake in this classification? Give specific examples of what’s at stake.

6. Let’s consider blood quantum.

* Why does blood quantum matter?
* Who made up the blood quantum system, and why?
* Why do Native peoples continue to use it?
* What do you think the blood quantum system and tribal enrollment will look like two generations from now?

# Closing reflections

7. *This Land* host Rebecca Nagle and others observe that non-Native people don’t pay attention to legislation and court cases regarding indigenous Americans. Why don’t they pay attention, and what’s the result? Be specific in your answers.

8. What are the “lessons learned” from these episodes, and do they change how you understand and perceive Native nations and individuals? Will your future behavior change as a result? If so, how so? If not, why not?

(Optional discussion of Mashpee case reading/listening will follow regular class session)