

A Promise Kept

The Inspiring Life and Works of Suzan Shown Harjo

Influential policy advocate, writer, curator, and 2014 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) will be recognized for a lifetime of achievement at “A Promise Kept: The Inspiring Life and Works of Suzan Shown Harjo.” A founding trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian, Harjo’s legacy of activism and artistic accomplishment continues to inspire Native Nations and people and influence U.S. policies about Native sovereignty and cultures.

Presented by the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian and the Institute of American Indian Arts’ Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, the symposium coincides with the 15th anniversary of the opening of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C., and the 30th anniversary of the 1989 law establishing the museum. Harjo was a leading force in the 22-year campaign to gain congressional approval for a museum honoring Native Americans. In addition, the symposium marks the 5th anniversary of the NMAI exhibition and companion book, *Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations*. Harjo was the guest curator of the award-winning exhibition and editor of the book.

September 20, 2019
9:00 a.m.–5:30 p.m.

Rasmuson Theater
National Museum of the American Indian
4th Street and Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC

Live webcast:
AmericanIndian.si.edu/multimedia/webcasts



Suzan Shown Harjo with U.S. Capitol in the background, from the National Museum of the American Indian.

PROGRAM

9:00 a.m. **Opening Poem by Joy Harjo,**
United States Poet Laureate

9:05 a.m. **Welcome by Kevin Gover,** Esq., Director,
National Museum of the American Indian

9:15 a.m. **PANEL ONE**

Dr. Robert G. Martin, President,
Institute of American Indian Arts
*Suzan Shown Harjo: Our Guardian,
Teacher, and Activist*

Patsy Phillips, Director, IAIA Museum
of Contemporary Native Arts
*Ancestors, Family Background, and
Backstage—The Pre-Determined and
the Self-Made Suzan Shown Harjo*

Dr. Gabrielle Tayac, Smithsonian
Research Associate
*Our Morning Star: The Sacred
Compass of Suzan Harjo*

10:15 a.m. **Morning Break**

10:30 a.m. **PANEL TWO**

Dr. Michael D. McNally, Professor,
Carleton College
*“No One Word for Religion”: The Struggle
for Native Religious and Cultural Rights*

Dr. James Riding In, Professor,
University of Arizona
*Repatriation Is a Human Right and
an Ongoing Struggle*

W. Richard West, Jr., Esq., President and
CEO, Autry Museum of the American West;
Founding Director Emeritus, National
Museum of the American Indian
*The National Museum of the American
Indian: A Vision Realized*

Kevin Gover, Esq., Director,
National Museum of the American Indian
*The National Museum of the American
Indian and the History of Native Nations*

12:15 p.m. **Lunch Break**

1:30 p.m. **PANEL THREE**

Jodi Archambault, Director of Indigenous
Peoples Initiatives, Wend Ventures
Honors Earned in a Life of Service

Tina Kuckkahn-Miller, Esq., Vice President
of Indigenous Arts and Education,
The Evergreen State College
*Game Changers and Rule Makers:
Harjo’s Impact on Policy Development*

Wilson Pipestem, Esq., Founding Partner,
Pipestem Law, P.C.
*Unmasking Native Personhood Beyond
Sovereign Boundaries*

2:50 p.m. **Afternoon Break**

3:05 p.m. **PANEL FOUR**

Dr. Philip J. Deloria, Professor,
Harvard University
*The Politics of Culture in a Culture of
Politics: Fighting Racist Stereotypes and
Cultural Appropriations*

Duke Ray Harjo II
*Skin in the Game: A Family’s Investment in
Taking On the Washington Football Team*

Mary Kathryn Nagle, Esq., Partner,
Pipestem Law, P.C.; Playwright
*From Performance to Poetry: The Power
of Suzan Shown Harjo’s Narrative*

Mark Trahant, Editor, *Indian Country Today*
*The World of Journalism Has Changed...
Suzan Harjo’s Message Has Not*

4:45 p.m. **Closing by Kevin Gover,** Esq., Director,
National Museum of the American Indian

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

JODI ARCHAMBAULT (Hunkpapa and Oglala Lakota) is currently the Director of Indigenous Peoples Initiatives at Wend Ventures, a social impact investment portfolio working across sectors to create positive change. She was previously a Policy Advisor at Sonosky, Chambers & Sachse, a national Native American rights law firm. Between 2009 and 2015, Archambault was a political appointee for President Barack Obama, serving as the Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs on the White House Domestic Policy Council. She is an enrolled member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.

PHILIP J. DELORIA (Standing Rock Sioux) is Professor of History at Harvard University, where his research and teaching focus on the social, cultural, and political histories of the relations among American Indian peoples and the United States, as well as the comparative and connective histories of indigenous peoples in a global context. He is the author of *Playing Indian* (1998) and *Indians in Unexpected Places* (2004) as well as numerous other writings. His most recent book, co-authored with Alexander Olson is *American Studies: A User's Guide* (2017). Deloria is a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, the past president of the American Studies Association, and a trustee of the National Museum of the American Indian.

KEVIN GOVER (Pawnee), Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, has guided the museum through the opening of several critically acclaimed exhibitions and major initiatives since he began as director in 2007. Gover served as the U.S. Interior Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs from 1997 to 2000 under President Bill Clinton, winning praise for his efforts to rebuild long-neglected Indian schools and expand tribal and Bureau of Indian Affairs police forces throughout the country. His tenure as Assistant Secretary is perhaps best-known for his apology to Native American people for the historical conduct of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Gover previously practiced law

at Steptoe & Johnson LLP in Washington, DC, and was on the faculty at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University.

DUKE R. HARJO II, a Mvskoke citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, is the son of Suzan Shown Harjo and Frank Ray Harjo. A true combination of his parents, he has worn many hats: from DJ to dot-com webmonkey, from nontraditional college student to Assistant Dean of Admission at his alma mater Reed College, from once aspiring professor to stay-at-home dad and PTA president. Currently, Harjo is the primary caregiver for sons Frankie and Desi, an advocate for educational inclusion focusing on Native representation in Portland, Oregon public schools, and a provider of informational support to families with children managing special needs. Harjo says he is honored to participate in this project as the least credentialed and most unlikely member of a group whose individual and collective efforts have given so much to Native and non-Native Peoples.

JOY HARJO (Muscogee Creek) was appointed the 23rd United States poet laureate in June 2019, and is the first Native American person to be selected for the role. The recipient of numerous awards, Harjo is a poet, musician, and playwright. The author of numerous books of poetry, including *She Had Some Horses*, *In Mad Love and War*, *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*, *How We Became Human: New and Selected Poems*, and most recently, *American Sunrise*, she has also written a memoir, *Crazy Brave*, and literature for children and young adults. She has taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Tennessee. A noted musician, Harjo has performed with her saxophone nationally and internationally, solo and with her band, the Arrow Dynamics.

TINA KUCKKAHN-MILLER became the first Vice President of Indigenous Arts and Education at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, in 2018. She served

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as the founding director of the college's "House of Welcome" Longhouse Education and Cultural Center from 1996–2019. As vice president she continues to oversee the mission of the Longhouse to promote Native arts and cultures, in addition to providing support for undergraduate and graduate Native programs. With degrees in education and law from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Kuckkahn-Miller teaches in the Master of Public Administration Program. Affiliated with both the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa (enrolled) and the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa tribes, she works with tribal peoples and artists from throughout the Pacific Rim in her roles at Evergreen.

ROBERT G. MARTIN (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), President of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), has led the development of a comprehensive strategic plan and a campus facilities master plan resulting in academic program expansion, growth in student enrollment, construction of five new buildings on campus, and the launch of a successful capital campaign. Martin was formerly Associate Head of the American Indian Studies program at the University of Arizona. He also served as President of Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute in Albuquerque and President of Haskell Indian Nations University. Under his guidance, Haskell made the transition from junior college to a university offering baccalaureate programs. In 2010 Martin received the Tribal College President of the Year Award.

MICHAEL D. MCNALLY is John M. and Elizabeth W. Musser Professor of Religion at Carleton College. He is author of *Ojibwe Singers: Hymns, Grief, and a Culture in Motion* (2000), *Honoring Elders: Aging, Authority, and Ojibwe Religion* (2009), and *Defend the Sacred: Native American Religious Freedom beyond the First Amendment* (forthcoming from Princeton Univ. Press, 2020). Research for the latter book, supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship, turned significantly on oral history interviews conducted with Suzan Shown Harjo.

MARY KATHRYN NAGLE (Cherokee Nation) is a playwright and a partner at Pipestem Law, where she works to protect tribal sovereignty and the inherent right of Indian Nations to protect their women and children from domestic violence and sexual assault. Nagle is an alum of the 2013 Public Theater Emerging Writers Program. Productions include *Miss Lead* (Amerinda, 59E59), *Fairly Traceable* (Native Voices at the Autry), *Sovereignty* (Arena Stage), *Manahatta* (Oregon Shakespeare Festival), *Return to Niobrara* (Rose Theater), and *Crossing Mnisose* (Portland Center Stage). She has received commissions from Arena Stage, the Rose Theater, Portland Center Stage, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Yale Repertory Theatre, and Round House Theater. In 2019, Marin Theatre Company will produce *Sovereignty*, and the Yale Repertory Theatre will produce *Manahatta*.

PATSY PHILLIPS is in her twelfth year as the Director of the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (MoCNA) and periodically teaches museum courses at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, NM. Prior to MoCNA Phillips worked at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. (2000–2008) and Atlatl in Phoenix, AZ (1996–2000). Phillips organizes and/or sponsors contemporary Native art exhibitions at the Venice Biennale, Sydney Biennale and documenta. She writes biographies of Native artists including her most recent essay, *No Rules Make Art: The Life and Art of C. Maxx Stevens* to be published in *American Indian Art 101*, based on the IAIA collection and edited by Dr. Nancy Marie Mithlo (UNM 2020). She is a member of the Cherokee Nation.

WILSON PIPESTEM is a founder of Pipestem Law and letan Consulting, law and advocacy firms that protect the rights of tribal governments and American Indians. He represents and advises tribal governments on a range of issues from treaty rights to minerals production to gaming. Advocating before Congress and federal administrative agencies, Pipestem helps tribes reacquire lands lost as the result of misguided federal policies

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through both congressional enactment and administrative decision. In 2013, Wilson played a prominent role in the enactment of the Violence Against Women Act reauthorization that reaffirms the inherent sovereign rights of tribal courts to exercise criminal jurisdiction over all persons who commit domestic violence crimes against Native women. He is a citizen of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe and an Osage Headright Owner.

JAMES RIDING IN is a Pawnee scholar, activist, writer, and editor. He is a founding member of American Indian Studies at Arizona State University, where he teaches courses addressing such matters as sovereignty, repatriation, sacred sites, activism, federal Indian law and policy, religious freedom, human rights, and colonization/decolonization. Riding In's scholarly work about such topics as repatriation, negative stereotypes, racism, cultural rights, and Pawnee history appear in various academic journals and books. His research privileges oral history and traditional knowledge while promoting community-based research methods that transcend disciplinary boundaries. He is co-editor of the book, *Native Historians Write Back: Decolonizing American Indian History*, and the editor of *Wicazo Sa Review: A Journal of Native American Studies*.

GABRIELLE TAYAC (Piscataway) is a Smithsonian Research Associate. An activist scholar committed to empowering Indigenous perspectives, Tayac's scholarly research focuses on hemispheric American Indian identity, multiracialism, Indigenous religions, and social movements, maintaining a regional specialization in the Chesapeake Bay. She served on NMAI's staff for 18 years as an educator, historian, and curator. She engages deeply in community relationships and public discourse. She just returned from a two year journey to uplift the voices of Indigenous elder women leaders, sponsored by Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. Tayac earned her Ph.D. and M.A. in Sociology from Harvard University, and her B.S. in Social Work and American Indian Studies from Cornell University.

MARK TRAHANT (Shoshone-Bannock Tribes) is Editor of *Indian Country Today*. A member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, he is the former editorial page editor of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and a Kaiser Family Foundation Media Fellow. Trahant was previously a professor at the University of North Dakota and at the University of Alaska Anchorage. He is the author of *The Last Great Battle of the Indian Wars* (2010) and *Pictures of Our Nobler Selves: A History of Native American Contributions to News Media* (1996) and has contributed to such collections as *Lewis and Clark Through Indian Eyes: Nine Indian Writers on the Legacy of Expedition* (ed. Alvin M. Josephy, 2006).

W. RICHARD WEST, JR. serves as the President and CEO of the Autry Museum of the American West in Los Angeles, and is Director Emeritus and Founding Director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. He is a citizen of the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma and a member of the Southern Cheyenne Society of Peace Chiefs. West currently is a member of the Board of Directors of ICOM-US and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, and previously served on the Boards of the Ford Foundation, Stanford University, and the Kaiser Family Foundation. He also was Chair of the Board of Directors of the American Alliance of Museums (1998–2000) and Vice President of the International Council of Museums (2007–2010).

Suzan Shown Harjo



Photo by Lucy Fowler Williams, Penn Museum

SUZAN SHOWN HARJO (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) is a distinguished Native rights advocate, poet, writer, and curator. A founding trustee of the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, her legacy of activism and artistic accomplishment continues to inspire Native Peoples and influence U.S. policies respecting Native Nations' sovereignty and cultures. In 2014, President Barack Obama awarded her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States' highest civilian honor.

Harjo is widely recognized for her intensive efforts to address issues at the core of Native American identity: treaty rights, sacred places' protection, religious freedom, language revitalization, arts promotion, and ending "Indian" stereotypes and cultural appropriation in popular culture. Her social and political activism and commitment to achieving Native rights and justice are lifelong and can be found in her earliest years as a public figure in poetry, theater, and journalism. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, she directed drama and literature programming for WBAI-FM in New York City, where she also co-produced with Frank Ray Harjo "Seeing Red," the first national Native news show in the U.S. In 1974, the Harjo family relocated to Washington, D.C. for her position as news director of the American Indian Press Association, and she quickly moved into advocacy because of the paucity of Native people working to develop federal Indian policy. A political appointee for legislation and Indian liaison in President Jimmy Carter's administration, she was principal author of the *President's Report to Congress on American Indian Religious Freedom*

and the Native policy section in the first U.S. report on compliance with the Helsinki Accords' human rights and self-determination provisions (both, 1979). Since 1984, she has served as President of The Morning Star Institute, which supported the cultural rights activities of the National Congress of American Indians during the 1980s, when she was NCAI executive director. She is one of seven Native people who filed the landmark lawsuit, *Harjo et al v. Pro Football, Inc.*, regarding the name of Washington's pro football team, and she organized the identical *Blackhorse* case filed by Native young people. The cases spanned a quarter-century of litigation, 1992–2017, but their victories on the merits were overturned.

Harjo was part of the coalition that first envisioned the NMAI in 1967. In 1984, in her NCAI and Morning Star roles, and as a trustee of the Museum of the American Indian (NMAI's predecessor museum and collection), she initiated talks with Smithsonian Secretary Robert McCormick Adams that led to the new national



David Bradley (White Earth Ojibwe), *Portrait of Suzan Shown Harjo*, 1996.
Mixed media: acrylic, horse hair, elk teeth on canvas, 30 × 24 1/4 in.
MoCNA Collection: CHP-182. Photograph by Jason S. Ordaz.

museum. A principal drafter of the 1989–1990 NMAI and repatriations laws, she was primary writer of the NMAI trustees’ policies on repatriation, identity, and exhibitions, and a drafter of its bylaws and collections policy. She chaired its first public programs committee and served on the search and selection committees for the museum’s founding director and architect for the NMAI Museum on the Mall.

“Dr. Harjo’s achievements for IAIA and NMAI are lasting features of our institutions,” said Patsy Phillips, director of IAIA’s Museum of Contemporary Native Arts. “Her contributions to arts and letters, activism and laws, and institution-building are amazing and the reason she is so widely recognized and awarded, including by IAIA, whose Honorary Doctorate in Humanities she earned with a lifetime of realized ideas and hard work.”

In addition to curating and editing *Nation to Nation*, she has curated numerous other exhibitions, including the first two collections of artwork by contemporary Native artists ever shown in the United States House and Senate Rotundas, *Visions from Native America* (1992). Her poetry is widely anthologized and published, including in *Blood of the Sun: Artists Respond to the Poetry of Suzan Shown Harjo*, curated by America Meredith in Santa Fe (2011). Harjo was host of the first three seasons of NMAI’s *Native Writers Series* and directed the NMAI *Native Languages Repository Project*. She is one of eight Native women honored on “Winyan Wánakikśín” (“Women Defenders of Others”), a buffalo horn belt created by artists Kevin Pourier (Oglala Lakota) and Valerie Pourier (Oglala Lakota), newly placed on exhibit in the museum’s Potomac Atrium.

“Suzan has worked tirelessly on behalf of Native peoples as an activist, journalist, and leader,” said Kevin Gover, director of the National Museum of the American Indian. “Her list of achievements is long and includes being the founding president of The Morning Star Institute, a national Native rights organization that promotes Native peoples’ traditions, cultures, and arts. Her continued work as an inspiring leader and role model has made Indian Country proud.”



President Barack Obama presented Suzan Shown Harjo a 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom in the East Room of the White House. “She has helped preserve a million acres of Indian land; helped develop laws preserving tribal sovereignty; she’s repatriated sacred cultural items to tribes while expanding museums that celebrate Native life,” Obama noted. “Because of Suzan, more young Native Americans are growing up with pride in their heritage and with faith in their future. And she’s taught all of us that Native values make Americans stronger.”