

## #8- Native educator at MSU teaches two worlds

(Thanks to my friend Montoya, who is Henrietta's daughter- LW)

Native educator at MSU teaches two worlds  
By JODI RAVE of the Missoulian

After 28 years at the University of Montana, Henrietta Mann is now special adviser to Montana State University president Geoff Gamble.

Photo by ELIZA WILEY/Helena Independent Record

She made Rolling Stone. She prayed at Stonehenge. And she's been called the "Indian Maya Angelou." With her spiky flat-top haircut and doctoral degree, 70-year-old Henrietta Mann is as comfortable strolling across campus in a pair of Danskos as she is praying to the Creator before hundreds in her Southern Cheyenne language.

The lifelong educator embodies the ideology of a tribal elder. And she defies it.

"She brings all those things together," said Richard West, director of the National Museum of the American Indian. "Some of the rest of us less gifted can get pieces of that, but very few of us can put it all together in one personality, in one personhood."

Mann has blended those qualities into a career teaching thousands of students about the beauty and tragedy of indigenous people. She spent 33 years in higher education - lecturing, advising, directing, attending and teaching on campuses from Harvard to the University of California at Berkeley. She capped her career as an endowed chair at Montana State University-Bozeman, retiring in June 2003.

A month later, MSU President Geoff Gamble tapped her as his special adviser. Mann since has helped him create a Council of Elders to guide MSU in working with Native students. She also serves on the university's executive committee and its Cabinet of advisers, where she's "a powerful voice for Indians and Indian students," Gamble said.

"Henrietta is a most remarkable woman," he said. "And also a very powerful woman. Spiritually powerful. Intellectually powerful. Politically powerful."

He created her new role as she reached the end of her endowed professorship.

"It dawned on me that we can't allow such an important, powerful person to fade away."

Chances are no one would have let that happen. Her calendar typically is booked months in advance. For example, since Nov. 9, she's spent only one day at her Bozeman home and isn't due to return until after the Thanksgiving holiday.

Mann continues to mentor Native and non-Native students about indigenous people, serve on national boards and is a frequently sought guest speaker.

"She's our Indian Maya Angelou, with the wisdom and knowledge she has," said Carol Mason, director of the Wakina Multi-Cultural Education Center in Helena. "She's very inspirational when she talks to our people."

Born in Clinton, Okla., in 1934, Mann began teaching California seventh-graders in 1955. She moved to the college arena in 1970 as a lecturer and coordinator for Berkeley's Native American Studies Department.

"I came in on the ground floor of Native American studies," Mann said. "I guess I was at the right place at the right time to begin to look at the need for American Indian students who were pursuing higher education to be able to study their own history, their own culture, their own philosophy."

She spent 28 years at the University of Montana in Missoula before accepting the Native American Studies endowed chair at MSU, one of a handful of such positions in the country. She has emerged as a national and international lecturer, speaking and writing on issues of Native religion, philosophy, literature, education, and the oral and written traditions of Native people.

She's taught thousands of students, 90 percent of them non-Native. Scott Carlson, a Missoula attorney, took nearly every class Mann taught at the University of Montana. She influenced him to protect the rights of others, he said.

"She's an icon for American Indian education, without question," Carlson said. "I can't think of anyone who rises to that level."

Mann's connection to culture - and her success in education - has made her a standout in higher-ed circles and in Indian Country.

"She speaks for a lot of Indian people who don't have that opportunity," said Norma Bixby, an educator from Montana's Northern Cheyenne Reservation. "I hope someone is compiling her stories and speeches ... so one day we can read to our children and say, 'This is a great lady, Dr. Henrietta Mann. These are the lessons we need to remember.'"

When speaking, Mann delivers those lessons through sharply enunciated words. Each syllable hooks its listener. Last month, she elicited a standing ovation before she even spoke at the Montana Office of Public Instruction's Indian Education Summit. She drew a second ovation as she finished.

Mike Jetty, Native dropout specialist with OPI, remembers how she brought 3,000 people at a race conference in San Francisco to their feet, too.

Mann brings to mind a Cheyenne proverb, he said: A nation is not defeated until the hearts of its women are on the ground.

"I think about Henri, just the way she walks, she walks the talk when we talk about traditional values. She is traditional values in action today, and what it means to be a contemporary Indian today."

Mann is seen as a tribal historian within her own tribe, said Quinton Roman Nose, education director for the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma. "She's a national spokesperson. She's a leader for Indian education. You name an area of Indian (education) and I'm sure she's been involved with it."

Her strong spiritual identity has not gone unnoticed. The American Red Cross asked her to pray at the World Trade Center after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

She's prayed for world peace at Stonehenge and Bear Butte, a sacred site in South Dakota. She's often asked to pray at meetings of the National Museum of the American Indian's trustee board, of which she's vice chairwoman.

In her prayers, she always considers the ancestors who remain on museum shelves, and of sacred objects yet to be returned to tribes.

"I know the depth of her feelings over the rightness of repatriation ... and making sure remains of ancestors and elders are treated with respect," said West, the museum director. "Again with Henri, this urging, this commitment is not an intellectual exercise. It's because in her spirit, in connection with her spiritual life, she knows that is the right thing to do. And she does it with intelligence and with great feeling."

It's more than a matter of fulfilling legislative mandates.

"To me, it means respect for another person's culture and their beliefs," Mann said, "how they want to show the proper respect for their ancestors."

Those are the beliefs that have guided her - and made her successful. In 1991, Rolling Stone magazine named her one of the country's top 10 professors.

"I believe that says for me, I was an effective teacher," Mann said. "I have been an academic, but at the same time, in order to be a whole human being, I also have responsibilities to the people to whom I belong and to maintain our cultural ways as a people."

"My entire goal in life is to be nothing but a good Cheyenne woman."

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