

ALVITRE, Cindi (Tongva Nation)

UCLA Department of World Arts and Cultures

Native American Museum Studies

USA

Cindi Moar Alvitre is the mother of four children and grandmother of two. She is a weaver, writer, storyteller and traditional singer. She is a Tongva descendant of the Moompetam (Salt Water) Clan, the original people of Los Angeles and the southern Channel Islands. She has been Director of Ti'at Society, the Tongva maritime organization, since its inception in the late 1980s. As the co-founder of Mother Earth Clan, she has been a cultural/environmental educator and activist for nearly three decades.

She completed her B.A. in Anthropology, with an emphasis in California Indian Studies and went on to complete her Masters in History/Museology at the University of California in Riverside. Her Thesis focused on the preservation and protection of Mockingbird Canyon, a significant solstice site within Southern California. She is currently pursuing her PhD, at UCLA, in the Department of World Arts and Cultures with an emphasis in Folklore, Traditional medicine, California Indians and Native American Museum Studies. Her dissertation will focus on "The revitalization of Southern California Indian Basketry as a Healing Tradition".

She helped to organize the Catalina Island Performing Arts Program and continues to be active in theatre and performing arts on the island and in Los Angeles. As a storyteller and traditional singer, she just completed writing her first play, "Wa'aka" which will explore new ways to do storytelling to our modern youth.

She was the first woman chair of the Gabrieleno-Tongva Tribal Council. As the daughter of the late Bernard "Nino" Alvitre, she has continued the family's tradition of social activism for nearly 30 years. She has represented her community domestically and internationally in a number of different venues including opening for Nobel Laureates, Rigoberta Menchu Tum and His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She was the first woman paddler on the Moomat Ahiko, and continues in her love of paddling both outrigger and kayaks. She continues to dedicate her life to the preservation and protection of the Tongva culture.

DUNN, Carolyn (Cherokee/Muskogee/Seminole Nations)

American Studies and Ethnicity
University of Southern California
USA

Carolyn Dunn is a wife, mother, daughter, journalist, teacher, poet, fiction writer, born in Southern California. She is of Cherokee, Muskogee Creek, Seminole and Choctaw freedman ancestry on her father's side, and Cajun and French Creole on her mother's. Her fiction and poetry has appeared in numerous anthologies, including *The Color of Resistance*, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, *Through the Eye of the Deer*, *Spirit Songs*, *The Greenman and Other Tales of the Mythic Forest*, and *Sing With the Heart of A Bear: Fusions of Native and American Poetry*. Her poetry has been collected in *Outfoxing Coyote* and *Hidden Creek Journal*, and her nonfiction has appeared in journals in the US, Canada, and Germany. In addition, she is the co-editor of two anthologies of contemporary Native American writing: *Through the Eye of the Deer* (with Carol Comfort) and *Hozho: Walking in Beauty* (with Paula Gunn Allen).

After completing her Master's in American Indian Studies with an emphasis in American Indian Literature, Folklore and Mythology, Carolyn taught at Humboldt State University, and became the founding director (with Tina Toledo Rizzo) of the American Indian Theatre Collective. She is one of the original members of the Mankillers, an all-women Northern-style drum group. (The name was chosen in honor of Wilma Mankiller, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma at that time. The Mankiller name is a traditional warrior name among the Cherokee, and the group chose it as their symbol of Native women's strength, power, and resilience.) Carolyn has co-written songs in the Choctaw language with her husband, James Anderson (Choctaw) for the Mankillers' three CDs: the Nammy-nominated *All Woman Northern Drum*, *Comin' To Getcha*, and *Killing You Softly*. Her play, *Ghost Dance*, premiered as a staged reading for the Feminine Nature series at CASA 0101 Theatre for the Los Angeles Theater Project (latheaterproject.org). Currently pursuing a PhD in the Department of American Studies at the University of Southern California, her fields of study include American Indian folklore, mythology, performance, and literature. Her forthcoming book of poetry, *Echo Location*, will be published later in 2005.

She is a producer and co-host with Coyote Radio for American Indian Airwaves, a radio program on KPFK-FM in Los Angeles (www.kpfk.org).

Carolyn is the executive director of Mother Bear's Books and Gallery, and American Community Arts Organization and the Alliance of Native Americans, a non-profit that trains and mentors youth and adults in the education, wellness, and the arts.

She lives with her husband and three children in Los Angeles.

ABSTRACT

Performing Nation/Performing Identity: American Indian Storytelling, Poetry and Song in Practice

The Laguna Pueblo/Sioux/Lebanese/Scottish poet, novelist and scholar Paula Gunn Allen related a story once of how, at an MLA conference a few years ago, a colleague asked the question, “Is there such a thing as American Indian literature?”, to which Allen looked around the room and answered, chuckling, “Yes.”¹ In spite of the successes of several novels written by American Indian writers over the last thirty years, there still has been reluctance on the part of literary scholars to acknowledge the existence of an American Indian literature or literary tradition. From Hum Ishu Ma’s (Mourning Dove, or Cristal Quintasket Galler) *Cogewa the Half Blood* (published in 1927) to D’Arcy McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (published 1936) American Indian oral traditions were passed down from generation to generation by storytellers, becoming what is today known as the American Indian literary tradition, stories that incorporate ceremony and myth and legend with traditional Anglo/Euro American story elements.² These stories, according to the Muskogee/Cherokee scholar and novelist Craig Womack, serve not only as artistic and folkloric elements but as political as well, building nations in the face of genocidal practices of the dominant non-native American society. These early storytellers, indigenous border dwellers, wove elements of Western Euro-American literary traditions with tribal or collective concerns based within their tribal groups. In continuing storytelling and performance traditions, politics, world view, spirit essences, or, as Allen refers to it in *The Sacred Hoop*, “spirit based understanding,”³ builds nations within ancestral communities and urban dwellings as American Indians migrate away from the physical tribal center and into new, non-native worlds. In this interactive presentation, Cindi Alvitre and Carolyn Dunn discuss elements of American Indian literary tradition and its relation to American literary tradition, introduce a theory of the interstitial as it applies to the archetypal American Indian trickster narratives, and discuss the role of the storyteller as trickster within traditional and modern tribal narrative.

¹ Allen, *Studies in American Indian Literature*, Modern Language Association, 1983.

² Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*, Beacon Press, 1986.

³ *ibid*, p. 83