

New book published on pioneering Native American philosopher

by Angela Yeager

CORVALLIS, Ore. — Oregon State University professors Kathleen Dean Moore and Kurt Peters, former OSU student Amber Lacy, along with a colleague at the University of New Mexico, have edited a book that pays tribute to the life of pioneering educator Viola Cordova — the first Native American woman to receive a Ph.D. in philosophy.

Cordova, of Jicarilla Apache and Hispanic descent, was a visiting professor in the Department of Philosophy at OSU in 1995. She taught courses in Native American philosophies, comparative ethics, and world views and environmental values. She also taught a special seminar at OSU on “The Concept of the Sacred/Land.”

The book, “How It Is: the Native American Philosophy of V.F. Cordova,” is a collection of Cordova’s essays that sets out a complete Native American philosophy in three parts. In the first part, Cordova explains her understanding of the nature of reality — the origins of the world, the nature of time, the relation of matter and spirit and how language and culture play a role in understanding all these elements.

In the second section, she looks at the role of humans in relation to the Earth, arguing that people become more “human” as they deepen their connection to the land.

In the final part of the book, Cordova calls for a new reverence in a world she views as having no distinction between the sacred and mundane.

Cordova died in November 2002. The book is a tribute to her life and her work.

“The Native American world view she paints is a lucid portrait of a way to live on Earth for all time,” Moore said. “Her critique of Western European thought is a bonfire — intense, angry, and transforming.”

The book was published in November by the University of Arizona Press.

There will be a public book launch party on the OSU campus on Feb. 8.

Moore is a distinguished professor of philosophy at OSU; Peters is the director of the Native Collaborative Institute and an associate professor of ethnic studies at OSU. Lacy is an OSU alumna, and Ted Jojola is a professor of community and regional planning at the University of New Mexico.

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