



Indigeneity in the Contemporary World:
Performance, Politics, Belonging

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Professor Helen Gilbert

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Olympic Games ceremonies provide unique if controversial platforms for indigenous peoples to express their cultural traditions in spectacular pageants prepared for a vast media audience. This lecture charts Aboriginal and Native people's participation in opening and closing ceremonies in Canada, Australia and the United States since the civil rights movements of the 1960s–70s. The overall aim is to identify the chief pleasures and contradictions embedded in the circulation of such performances as global commodities made available for 'reading' across cultures.

While the signal events analysed here are the Sydney, Salt Lake City and Vancouver Olympics, all in the first decade of the twenty-first century, a longer historical view will help to weigh the exoticising effects of spectacle against the argued benefits of national and international visibility. Specific pageants (and protests) are discussed as constituent parts of performance clusters intricately connected to each other across individual host cities and nations. The lecture also probes some of the tensions built into global spectacles constructed out of emphatically local material. Conceptually, this work draws from recent thinking in performance studies and cultural geography to show ways in which political issues are writ large by Olympic pageants, and how they map into narratives of cultural belonging.

Helen Gilbert is Professor of Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London and Director of the Centre for International Theatre and Performance Research. She has published several books and numerous essays in the broad field of postcolonial theatre and recently completed a co-authored study on the cultural history of the orangutan.



Let the Games Begin:

Indigenous Performance and Global Spectacle, 1976-2010

Royal Holloway, University of London, Windsor Building Auditorium, 7 February 2012, 18:15

