

Providence College, Rhode Island
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Poet shares insight into Native American life

BY FELICIA GROSSO '03
NEWS STAFF

On Tuesday, students gathered on the fourth floor of Feinstein for a presentation sponsored by the Political Science Department and the Balfour Center on Native American culture given by Bobby Gonzalez, a Native American-Latino storyteller, poet, and lecturer.

Gonzalez is of Taino heritage. The Taino originated in Puerto Rico and are also known as the Arawaks. Gonzalez, who has spoken at places such as Carnegie Hall, Cornell University, and the National Museum of the American Indian, has recently published a book called "Song of the American Holocaust," which is a collection of his poetry.

The lecture consisted of a slideshow about various Native American tribes in North America. During the slideshow, Gonzalez supplied the audience with various tidbits of information, many of which were quite surprising. For instance, Gonzalez explained that over 90% of Native Americans live in Latin America. Gonzalez also talked about the Native American influence on white culture. For example, many modern highways were built over old Native American roads, and Americans consume Native American food everyday when they eat products such

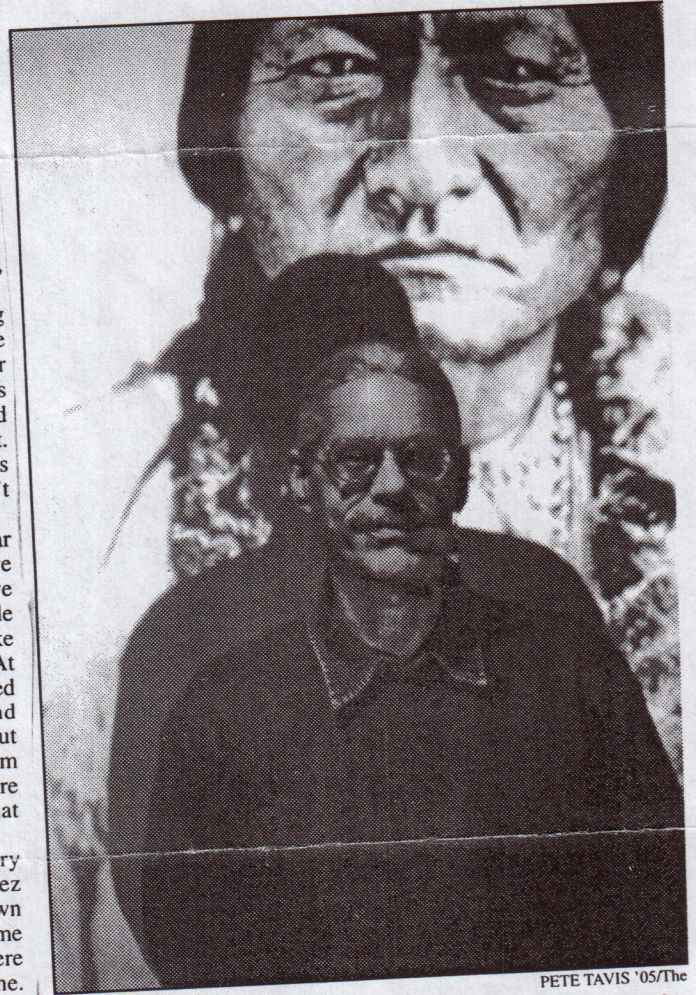
as corn, chocolate, potato chips, peanuts, and even burritos and tortillas.

Gonzalez spent some time talking about some of the hardships Native Americans have faced preserving their culture. One issue he touched on was how Native Americans are not allowed to practice their religion without a permit. "Most of you take for granted religious freedom, but religious freedom doesn't apply to Native Americans," he said.

Gonzalez also talked about the war on drugs and how it involves Native Americans. He explained that Native Americans are often caught in the middle because they use certain substances, like cacao leaves, for nutritional value. At the end of his lecture, Gonzalez stressed that the struggle between white and Native Americans was not a clear-cut line, but rather very complicated. "I'm not going to stand here and say that we're right and they're wrong. It's not that simple," he explained.

Clara Rodriguez, '03, was very pleased with the lecture. Rodriguez originally saw Gonzalez speak at Brown University, and then asked him to come to PC. She thought his presentation here was "more extensive" than the last one. "I thought it was important to get the visual material," she said.

Gonzalez encouraged students interested in learning more about his past and the Native American culture to visit his website, www.bobbygonzalez.com.



PETE TAVIS '05/The

Bobby Gonzalez tours the country discussing his unique herita