

The Politics of Recognition and the Power of Place in Lumbee Women's Poetry

BY JESSICA CORY

While much has been written about and by the Lumbee, especially histories, Lumbee contributions to North Carolina literature and Native American literature more broadly have historically been overlooked by scholars, with some scholars of the Native South

being a notable exception. Robert W. Reising, in the 1981 issue of *Pembroke Magazine* bemoans, "No studies of Lumbee literature exist. Doubtless, that absence is lamentable, for it precludes or, at best, limits comprehensive assessments of Lumbee values and artistry, as well as of the Lumbee as a people. Indeed, crucial to a full and valid evaluations of the Lumbee world is a critical awareness of the drama, essays, poetry, and prose fiction from and about that world."¹ Reising's observations are over forty years old, and while the number of Lumbee writers has grown significantly since the forty-five Lumbee-authored selections he includes in his bibliography, Lumbee literature is still not widely known, despite the fact that the Lumbee are the largest tribe east of the Mississippi (though its fifty-five thousand citizens have yet to be federally recognized). This issue recognition may play a role in why Lumbee literature has not gained more of a foothold, even among those who study Indigenous literatures. Unsurprisingly, the issue of recognition appears in several poems by Lumbee

writers, including works by Lumbee women. Notably, much of this writing recognizes the Lumbee as Indigenous regardless of federal policy primarily through their connections to one another *and their connection to the land*.



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Proud Women (oil on canvas, 24x30)
by Gene Locklear

GENE LOCKLEAR was born in Lumberton, NC, raised in nearby Pembroke, and is a citizen of the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina. After a career in the Major Leagues, he turned to painting full time. His work has been exhibited widely, and his numerous art commissions have come from the White House, the Pentagon, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the NFL, prominent sports figures, as well as Turner Broadcasting. Currently, he lives and works in California and maintains a studio and gallery in El Cajon, a suburb of San Diego. In 2004, he helped establish an art academy for young people at UNC Pembroke, where an endowed art scholarship has been established by friends in his name. See more of his work on the cover of *NCLR Online* Winter 2023.

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¹ Robert W. Reising, "The Literature of the Lumbee: An Introduction," *Pembroke Magazine* 13 (1981): 48; subsequently cited parenthetically.