

UHM Disability Studies Speaker Series:

Committed:

Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions

Susan Burch, Middlebury College

Between 1902 and 1934, the United States confined hundreds of adults and children from dozens of Native nations at the Canton Asylum for Insane Indians, a federal psychiatric hospital in South Dakota. But detention at the Indian Asylum, as families experienced it, was not the beginning or end of the story. For them, Canton Asylum was one of many places of imposed removal and confinement, including reservations, boarding schools, orphanages, and prison-hospitals. Despite the long reach of institutionalization for those forcibly held at the Asylum, the tenacity of relationships extended within and beyond institutional walls. Drawing on oral history interviews, correspondence, material objects, and archival sources, Burch reframes the histories of institutionalized people and the places that held them.



Date:
March 12, 2025

Time:
11:00 a.m. HST

[Join on Zoom!](#)

<https://hawaii.zoom.us/j/85821876992>



Jensen Family Quilt: The quilt's twelve squares hold blue plates within larger circles of bright calico fabrics. Handstitched names of family members surround each circle and are slightly bumpy to the touch. The quilt is wide and long enough to wrap around two people. Prairie Band Potawatomi healer O-Zoush-Quah, and her daughter, Pah-Kish-Ko-Quah, made this piecework during the mother's incarceration at Canton Asylum, ca. 1910-30. Used with permission from Jack Jensen.

Susan Burch

*Susan Burch is a Professor of American Studies and a former director of the Center for the Comparative Study of Race and Ethnicity at Middlebury College. Her research and teaching focus on the overlaps of deaf, disability, race, Indigeneity, and gender and sexuality in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. history. She is the author of *Signs of Resistance: American Deaf Cultural History, 1900 to 1942* (2002) and a coauthor, with Hannah Joyner, of *Unspeakable: The Story of Junius Wilson* (2007). She has coedited anthologies including *Women and Deafness: Double Visions* (2006), *Deaf and Disability Studies: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2010), and *Disability Histories* (2014). Her most recent work, *Committed: Remembering Native Kinship in and beyond Institutions* (2021) centers on peoples' experiences inside and outside the Canton Asylum, a federal psychiatric institution created specifically to detain American Indians.*