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## Who Stole Native American Studies?

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

**F**or four days in March 1970, American Indian scholars met at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, thousands of miles away from the homelands of the western Indians who dominated the meeting. This convocation brought together Native scholars, professional people, artists, and traditional historians and billed itself as the "first" convocation to proclaim that the academic intention of U.S. colleges and universities was to use education to affect the policy of this nation in Indian affairs. It called for the development by Indians of bodies of indigenous knowledge, and it called that development "Native American Studies as an Academic Discipline." Its major thrust was the defense of the land and indigenous rights. Several of the speakers at this convocation said, "we cannot defend our languages and cultures if we cannot defend our homelands."

This milestone event set the agenda for strategy discussions that would bring about a change in the way Native life in America was studied. The main aim of these discussions was to assert that Indians were not just the inheritors of trauma but were also the heirs to vast legacies of knowledge about this continent and the universe that had been ignored in the larger picture of European invasion and education. Dr. Alfonso Ortiz had just written and published in 1969 his classic work in anthropology, *Being and Becoming in a Pueblo Society*, and Dr. N. Scott Momaday, Kiowa, had just received the Pulitzer Prize for his novel

*House Made of Dawn*. Momaday and Ortiz joined Rupert Costo, Vine Deloria Jr., Jeannette Henry, Samuel Billison, W. Roger Buffalohead, Fritz Scholder, Lionel de Montigny, Robert Bennett, Beatrice Medicine, and many others at the gathering in calling for Indian intellectuals to come together and take the lead in formulating clear-cut stands on and goals for the paramount issues of Indian policy and in implementing those goals in the educational system.

The need to hold further symposia, to define disciplinary terms and concepts, to describe the canon, and to set up networking was primary. A set of core courses in undergraduate studies already initiated at dozens of colleges and universities around the country was of particular interest. For the most part, these courses included Introduction to Native American Studies (100 level), Federal Indian Policy (200 level), Contemporary Indian Issues (300 level), and Language and Literature(s) (400 level). Elective courses in history, anthropology, religion, sociology, art, and other related disciplines made up a 20- to 28-credit minor. Specialized knowledge courses were to be introduced. Bibliographies of existing works were to be developed, and research topics and designs were to be written in order to influence and direct the growth and structure of the proposed discipline. Graduate studies were envisioned. For Native knowledge to acquire power for its carriers, participants noted, it had to be systematically organized into a discipline. Its beneficiaries would be Indian Nations.

It was noted during these symposia that just offering a group of courses did not make a discipline, that the interdisciplinary examination of "cultural conflict" was not what this work was about, and that finding ways to understand the history of Indian education among indigenous peoples in the United States could not be done efficiently through the exogenous social-science disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Developing Native American professionals, designing courses, defending First Nation status—all of these were said to be important goals. Identifying constituencies, empowering people, being supportive of other, older, more organized disciplines were thought to be valuable but limited as mechanisms through which indigenous peoples and sovereign nation-states could be inscribed.

What many Native scholars of that era wanted understood was that an *academic discipline* requires that a body of intellectual information such as the Natives of this land possess about the world be internally organized, normatively regulated, and consensually communicated. The intellectual information, the knowledge itself, found in the oral traditions of the indigenes, is grounded in language and geography. It examines age-old cultures that have been religiously opposed to exploiting nature *for profit*. It is said that everything originates from what is called the oral traditions of the First Nations, the oral soci-

eties of indigenous peoples on this continent, and from Mother Earth and a specific geography, and that there is tacit theory in the mythologies of origin. In turn, principles, generalized concepts, and facts result in a system of implicit ideology that if defined in the appropriate way, unifies and motivates the people from whom the knowledge originates. Thus, a major reason for the development of Native American Studies as disciplinary work was to defend indigenous nationhood in America.

This approach has been seen as an immediate departure from the anthropological, ethnological approach that has focused from the outside on cultural materialism and "the other" and the so-called scientific method. This departure has been a major part of the struggle toward autonomy as a discipline.

Tribally specific, nation-to-nation, and Pan-Indian theories were the bases for the development of disciplinary principles such as sovereignty and indigeness. General knowledge, specialized knowledge, and applied knowledge were organized into specific course designs. The discipline was defined in general terms as the *endogenous* consideration of American Indians or, more specifically, the *endogenous* study of First Nation cultures and history. This meant that this discipline would differentiate itself from other disciplines in two important ways: it would emerge from *within* Native people's enclaves and geographies, languages and experiences, and it would refute the exogenous seeking of truth through isolation (i.e., the "ivory tower") that has been the general principle of the disciplines most recently in charge of indigenous study, that is, history, anthropology, and related disciplines all captivated by the scientific method of objectivity.

These goals of Native American Studies were articulated by modern Native scholars as the intentions of people whose recent social and political history was formed under colonial systems during the past four hundred years. The belief systems arising from specific geographies and the historical experiences of First Nations would be the bases for the discipline of Native American Studies. Tribal individuals would be the teachers, researchers, and writers, that is, the intellectuals of this newly founded educational model. The mentality that would pervade the discipline would center on two concepts: *indigeness* (culture, place, and philosophy) and *sovereignty* (history and law). The model would accommodate curricular development in either tribally specific or Pan-Indian modes.

In addition to these specific foci that came out of the first convocation, scholars expressed the idea that the key to the ongoing development of Native American Studies would be found in the research function of its primarily Native-based practitioners. Those who sought and achieved tenured teaching positions at U.S. colleges and universi-

ties would be expected to develop appropriate research designs, collect data, and publish.

## TOKENISM

A scattering of Indian professionals found themselves on college campuses in the early 1970s and 1980s. In general, they were isolated from others in the field, many of them having been involved in mainstream disciplines, mostly the social sciences, as undergraduate and graduate personnel. They were hired (much of the time in response to affirmative action policies that came out of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations) to run programs, develop college curricula, teach, and counsel and recruit students. They were hired to be liaisons to existing departments, contributors to the established disciplines, the "Indian Voice" in anthropology and history, advisors to on-campus political action, watchdogs, and authenticators of the university's frenzied search for grant monies; in other words, they were "all things to all people" in all-white school systems, usually working in isolation from Indian populations and colleagues, serving on every university committee that needed "minority input," advising everyone from freshman students to boards of trustees. In these varied capacities it was unrealistic to believe that they were ever meant to become scholars in Native American Studies, doing the intellectual work of the tribal nations. Many of them did not. They were, instead, tokens. Symbols. Of what? America's "minority" populations? Assimilation? America's "poverty"? America's race problems? America's historically disenfranchised? Who knew?

Because of the broad-based job descriptions of minority faculty in which Indians saw themselves as "symbols" with little authority, their condition was described even publicly as "tokenism," and such description quickly became the problem. Tokenism, then, was the first obstacle to the appropriate development of the discipline in terms of the introduction of new epistemologies, the development of courses and bibliographies, and the direction of research and writing. Following the rage and violence of the 1960s usually led by students, Native academics struck new and uneasy alliances and compromises with the defenders of long-standing intellectual theories of Euro-American dominance over colonized peoples and Native populations.

Instead of developing courses in the autonomous field of Native American Studies, many Native American academics taught courses in "ethnic" studies. They collaborated with their white, black, and feminist colleagues who were interested in "diversity," "multiculturalism," and "feminism" in the development of curricula. The frauds among them "told stories" in English, history, and anthropology departments for the sake of tenure, some wrote bad poetry as a survival technique,

and others entered the lit-crit wars of modernity and dialectics to prove they could.

The struggle for autonomous departmental status in Native American Studies was never taken seriously by university administrators nor by the collegiate professors in either the classic or emerging disciplines. Without autonomy, disciplinary strategies in Native American Studies were doomed, marginalized, dominated, and co-opted. Few of the "programs" that started by offering courses under the auspices of education departments or humanities and social work centers or in the colleges of letters and sciences ever achieved departmental status. Without that status, Native American Studies was destined to face the possibility that it would never become a discipline, and the vital research function inherent in disciplinary structures would fail.

### **MARGINALIZATION, DOMINATION, AND CO-OPTATION**

Serious barriers to Native American Studies emerged even before the canon could be articulated. Feminist theories of oppression, concepts of "the Other" arising out of black/white race conflicts based on color, historical transformations through immigration, political correctness, and fears of the balkanization of curriculum soon became the focus of academics, researchers, and writers to the detriment of the study of Native languages, First Nation sovereignty, indigenesness, and the great body of twentieth-century Indian law, treaties, and land reform. Identity issues left in the hands of sociologists and university hiring committees circumvented the sovereign rights of citizenship established by Indian tribal nations and the U.S. government in treaties. Few listened to the pleas of Native educators who said their tribal nations had never given up the right to say who their citizens were and that citizenship status was one of the several indispensable criteria of authenticity.

Postcolonial theories became the pronouncements of the day. Postcolonial study has always been defined by Euro-American scholars as the discourse that *begins from the moment of what is called "colonial contact,"* not from the moment that imperial nations rejected colonizing as an *illegal* activity, because that time has never come. In the past twenty or thirty years, postcolonial theories have been propounded by modern scholars as though Native populations in the United States were no longer trapped in the vise of twentieth-century colonialism but were freed of government hegemony and ready to become whatever they wanted, which, of course, they were not. Today colonizing, unlike slavery, is not a crime anywhere in the world. Even the use of the term *contact* in the definition of "postcolonial" studies disguises a history of invasion and genocide.

For American Indians, then, and for the indigenes everywhere in the world, postcolonial studies has little to do with independence, nor does it have much to do with the actual deconstruction of oppressive colonial systems. It is not like the end of slavery in 1865, for example, when owning other human beings for economic reasons became illegal and a new status for African Americans as free citizens could become the focus of the discourse. Postcolonial thought in indigenous history, as a result of the prevailing definition, has emerged as a subversion rather than a revolution. This fact has been a huge disappointment to those scholars whose interest has been in Native-nation status and independence.

Activist departments of English have had an enormous impact on curriculum development during the postcolonial era. They rightly deserve some critical analysis and not only for the reasons given by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon* (1994), who rails contemptuously about "the school of resentment," "countercanonical poetry," and Alice Walker. Oddly, Bloom argues for the universalism of Shakespeare on the basis that his work is "embedded in history and sociology" but would deny that to Walker and others whose histories and sociologies veer markedly from orthodoxies in those fields. His major fear is that as aesthetic choices "are masks for social and political overdeterminations," so are most contemporary writers, with the exception of Neruda, Joyce, and Pynchon, simply inferior.

In spite of whether or not one agrees with Bloom's assessment of the present dismal condition of literary study, any English department's postcolonial-driven interest in Native American Studies has resulted in, for example, the teaching of Native American Literature(s) in English as a way of subverting the Euro-American canon. Its disastrous effect has been that such interest has taken precedence over the study of Native languages and tribally specific Native literary theory and aesthetics. That is just one example of what has happened in the rush to develop curricula without regard to the need for the devising of new epistemologies.

There are dozens more such examples of courses and texts in which the universals of human rights and civil rights are taught as though they have no connection at all to three hundred years of federal Indian policy or primordial indigenous rights or the historical treaty status of tribal nations in America, all of which might have resulted in problem-solving models useful to living people and existing communities. Now, it is true that Bloom also argues against the study of literatures for reasons of social change or political activism. Many may understand the complaint that comes from Native American Studies centers about the lack of appropriate curriculum development in both English departments and in the schools of postcolonial studies only because the lack reveals an indifference to changing people's lives

and is, therefore, irrelevant. More appropriately, the complaints should be understood in terms of wanting to strive for the formation of a Native American literary canon, not for the reform of Western canon.

As the past decades are assessed, it is safe to say that nearly everyone has engaged in the subversion that is so prevalent in English departments. With few exceptions, Indian academics who wanted to examine their own personal identity crises and write poetry were encouraged to do so by getting on the fast track to writer's residencies and poetry retreats. They exploited the legacy of blood that wrought cries into the night of personal agonies and private hells. The grandmothers who they said raised them became the psychologists who answered their questions of "who am I?" and "what am I to do?" and the individual search for a *personal self-identity* was the topic for publication of numerous books and materials used in course development. Identity issues became the subjects for imaginative literatures and sociology but hardly ever the subject of tribal law or contemporary Indian law.

For whatever reasons, fewer and fewer Indian intellectuals who had managed to infiltrate the university systems kept to the origins of the disciplinary scheme concerning the defense of First-Nation status and indigenosity. Few were researching and writing about Supreme Court decisions that affected Indian lands and resources; there was little examination of the rise of jurisdictional powers of states over tribal nations, a movement that has gained much momentum in the past twenty years. Language study was nonexistent except in linguists' theorizing about phonemes and vocables. Studies in demographics, biography and autobiography, and nature and environmentalism were snatched up by university presses; anthologies of literature and criticism appeared; and stilted theories in diacritics and dialogics, mostly influenced by French and Russian theorists, were everywhere. Arguments about postcolonial versus postmodern seemed bold and insightful.

Even the rise in the 1970s of reservation-based Indian college systems throughout the country ended up with their being bureaucratized and colonized much like the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In spite of the publication of a few important special works that were developed at curriculum centers of such institutions as the Navajo Community College in Tsailé, Arizona, and Sinte Gleska University at Rosebud, South Dakota, the transformative function of research and writing in Native American Studies as an academic discipline at these homelands-based institutions has been neglected and deferred.

In spite of all that, exceptions have emerged. In 1978, a non-Indian history scholar, Robert F. Berkhofer, showed that he understood the dilemma when he researched and published *The White Man's Indian*, which was more than just an example of the New Historicism. It quickly became a useful text for the introductory course in the discipline. Although, admittedly, poorly prepared students had to be led through



the work paragraph by paragraph, it nonetheless laid the groundwork for an introduction to the discipline and provided a problem-solving model that could use a redefinition of Native society history. It was not just deconstruction, it was reconstruction. The model was based on the meticulous examination of an American history rarely taught in classic history departments, a text that not only outlined how the white man's Indian was created but presented arguments for moving beyond that condition.

Sioux political science professor Vine Deloria Jr. began to write almost single-handedly the texts for the introductory courses in the discipline, among them *American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century* (1985), *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1992), *The Aggressions of Civilization* (1984), *The Nations Within* (1984), and his latest, *Red Earth, White Lies* (1995). He became a major influence on young doctoral students such as Cherokee scholar Tom Holm in history, Osage intellectual Robert Warrior in humanities, and David Wilkins in political science, who are among the precious few who have begun to examine in the last decade of the century what it means in academic terms to possess an American Indian tribal future grounded in indigenism and sovereignty.

Deloria continues to study from a tribal point of view the consequences of the violation of sovereign lands. Although now based in Colorado, far away from his own tribal homelands, he continues to respond to requests by his tribally based contemporaries to give lectures on treaty histories, to discuss models of economic development on treaty-protected lands, and to act as advisor on purely political issues. The seeking of ways of recovering Native tribal lands and resources as well as the recovering of a significant body of American Indian intellectual traditions has been the result of Deloria's influence as a major figure in the discipline. Warrior's brilliant assessment of the importance of cultural critics like Deloria in his book *Tribal Secrets* (1995) speaks to the continuing presence of Native critical intelligence and moral action.

These valiant efforts have made a difference in tribal communities and even on college campuses in the past twenty years in that political and intellectual stances toward sovereign status have been taken seriously by tribal governments, and a handful of Native American Studies centers have managed to flourish. Still, academic curriculum models for Native American Studies at most American universities today can best be described as (1) existing at the margins of academic life, (2) suffering backlash from the bigotry and ignorance of conservative right-wing scholars and think tanks, (3) directed by inefficient intellectuals (some Indian, some white) who are content to simply occupy space or reiterate failed theories in the social sciences as the core of Native intellectualism, (4) serving as hotbeds for professional malcontents and student victims, (5) staffed mostly by non-tribal scholars and professors who, often, do not see as their major constituencies the

hundreds of First Nations and Peoples on this continent, and, worst of all, (6) irrelevant to modern, contemporary Indian life.

### **THE ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT NATIVE AMERICAN SCHOLARS**

Recently, status-quo scholars and beleaguered administrators have perfected the use of backlash strategies to defend orthodoxies long since abandoned by much of academia. In the 1990s, with university budgets linked to enrollments, hybrid departments with names such as "ethnic studies," "cultural studies," and "comparative cultures" emerged to the detriment of the departmental and disciplinary development of autonomous Native American Studies. Graduate students could be assigned to these hybrid departments, which then had sufficient enrollments; thus, budgets and hybridity drove curricula. The intellectual life of American Indians was ignored as it applied to sovereign nation-state status and indigenoussness. A contrived intellectual life of Indians as part of the ethnic flotsam and jetsam of developing America prevailed. Federal Indian Policy, a core course of the curriculum of Native American Studies, was no longer taught at a large percentage of the schools who offered the minor, and Multicultural America and Diversity took its place. Native sovereignty as a concept deeply embedded in America's legal origins was replaced by the concepts of ethnicity, immigration, slavery, feminism, and postmodern cultural studies.

Furthermore, several outright attempts at discrediting the work of Native scholars appeared. An example of the kind of scholarship that was at the center of this attempt was the work of Professor James A. Clifton, ethnohistorian and psychological anthropologist at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. He published a text titled *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (1990), a collection of essays in which he and other like-minded social scientists condemned as politicization of scholarship much of the work of Native American Studies. Not one Native scholar's work was included in the collection, confusion reigned as white scholars defended their turf, and the work of Native American Studies became suspect. This text was reprinted in paperback in 1994 and has enjoyed wide adoption in the social sciences.

In defense of Native American Studies, Deloria wrote in the summer 1992 issue of the *American Indian Quarterly* that the collection of essays put together by Clifton could best be described as the work of second-rate scholars in the social sciences "on a holy mission of stopping the barbarian hordes (Indians) at the gates before they overwhelm the old citadels of comfortable fiction." What Deloria did not mention but most scholars were aware of is that in March of the previous year the *Atlantic Monthly* had published the now famous essay "Illiberal Education" by Dinesh D'Souza in which it was asserted that race and

class issues were threatening to politically reform the American Canon, which could only result in "the end of meaning."

### THE NEW HISTORICISM

While specific attempts to discredit the work of Native American Studies and Third World studies in general were recognized by Native scholars as having a vicious intent, other ideas embedded in seemingly benign but vital movements emerged concomitantly. Whether you accept the argument that the idea of a "new historicism" is a conservative trend that serves to give ammunition to those who want to rid themselves of the facts of history (the Palestinian story is a fairy tale, the Holocaust never happened, Wounded Knee was a battle), or whether you describe it as a "leftist" idea purposefully "bashing" the American Canon in history and literature and telling us that there is no difference between the poet and the stand-up comedian, the so-called "New Historicism" is a movement in academia that has tried to legitimize the separation of the established disciplines. Its intent is the diminishment of the barriers put up between history and art and politics and literature. This movement, as much as the outright discrediting efforts, has had an arresting effect on the development of Native American Studies as an academic discipline because it fails to provide a framework for new epistemologies.

H. Aram Veesser, in his introduction to *The New Historicism* (1989), states that New Historicism "surfaced as an identifiable tendency in academic literary and cultural criticism a scant ten years ago, not as a doctrine but as a set of themes, preoccupations, and attitudes," and says that "New Historicists can make a valid claim to having established new ways of studying history and a new awareness of how history and culture define each other." While it is quite possible that Native American Studies, Black Studies, Women's Studies, and even Ethnic Studies may have assisted in this change, it seems to have done little to further the establishment of an autonomous Native American Studies.

Oddly enough, Native American scholars did not see the New Historicism as a movement that would assist in the development of new epistemologies so necessary to Native American Studies in their quest to describe it in disciplinary terms. They viewed it as useful only for critiquing the old, and there was plenty of that going on in Native American Studies. The New Historicism as described by white scholars accompanied Native American Studies in a parallel way, never meeting, never touching except as contact that could define America. It seems odd that a movement by modern academics that had as its intent the blurring of notable and historic disciplinary lines should seem to be so useless to the work that Native intellectuals thought they had to do in reconstruction. Why this effort has not assisted in organizing

vast bodies of indigenous thought, belief, and experience into their own autonomous disciplinary regime has remained unexamined, but much of its failure may have to do with something so simple as habit and custom.

As mainstream scholars, wanting to become unmainstream, advocated the idea that monologic historiography and privileged Western culture as hegemonies must be abandoned, Native American Studies could only embrace this idea. Yet, intellectuals interested in the disciplinary approach to Native American Studies found themselves suspicious of the New Historicism in that it was and is a movement grounded in the analysis of existing texts, embedded in empirical evidence that has functioned to excuse history rather than rewrite and deconstruct it, and it was, therefore, not much committed to devising new epistemologies.

The reality is that the New Historicism collaborated in a premature and hopeful scheme of democratization that has really never been acceptable to Indian Nations seeking freedom and autonomy in American life. It suggests postcolonial theories about the Third World and propounds principles and theories that are being applied to Native American topics as though Indian Nations were free of colonial domination, which, of course, they are not. Indian lands are still held in colonial trust, which works to devastate tribal economies; law and order in Indian Country is dominated by federal and state law; and, most important of all, economic and intellectual hegemony over lands and resources prevails at every level of Indian life. Although the intent of postcolonialist scholars may have been a pure and logical extension of the upheaval of college curricula demanded in the 1960s and 1970s, their efforts have become indistinguishable from the domination of historic colonialism.

What has happened is that non-Indians, intentionally or not, have found it easy to direct the discourse on Native American topics in the same way American money directs the course of Panama's place in the sun or money and power corrupts the court and political systems of the land. Budgets reign whether we like it or not. Non-Indian scholars still, at the close of the twentieth century, write most of the books about Indians. The college campus and the discipline of social science, and commercial and university publishing houses rather than the tribal institutions based within Native populations dominate the intellectual strategies that influence Native American Studies as an academic discipline.

What this means is that the interests of mostly non-Native social scientists in teaching and researching in the areas of identity, poverty, social ills, and economics leave little room for the voice of Native America except as "victim" or "other" or "informant." The so-called "themes, preoccupations, and attitudes" of non-Natives dominate, and

there are no new epistemologies brought into the discussion. Under these circumstances curriculum is developed as "ethno-whatever," Natives continue to be objectified, and colonialism is fostered instead of deconstructed. Little of the intellectual work being done today stresses the historical fact that the citizenry of tribal nations did not describe themselves in their own histories as American "ethnics" or even Native Americans or Indians.

Nor are they American feminists. They are Yakima, Hopi, Lakota nationalists and sovereigns. Although there is some evidence that "feminism" and "diversity" themes and preoccupations have had a concomitant thread that is sympathetic to Native American Studies, cultural conflicts and misunderstandings have been profound and damaging. Several years ago, as just one small example, when I attended a national conference on women's studies in the Midwest, I witnessed and heard "booing" and "hissing" from a three-thousand-member audience of white feminists directed toward a male Lakota singer who had accompanied and introduced Native women dancers and their performances. Dr. Beatrice Medicine, an internationally known Lakota Sioux anthropologist and author, who was in attendance rose to explain in no uncertain terms that Lakota culture reveres its male singers and its male relatives (in this case an uncle to one of the female dancers) as spokespersons and that the performance in all of its manifestations was exceedingly appropriate in defense of kinship legacies. White feminists at this conference were not convinced. They insisted that the Indian women should speak for themselves, that the male presence was oppressive. Before the performance could be concluded as it had been planned, the entire Lakota ensemble drifted offstage, isolated and uncertain.

In this context, Indian scholars have suggested that the term *essentialism* is, in fact, a defensible notion, that Indians must fight off domination by outsiders in order to make themselves heard within their own experiences. Contrarily, essentialism has often been used pejoratively to defuse the idea that the Indian voice should be the major voice in Native American Studies. Scholars complain that to suggest that only Indians can write and study about Indians, only women can write on feminism, only blacks can tell the black experience is divisive, unnecessary, unscholarly, and exclusionary. Sound scholarship cannot develop from such essentialism, mainstream opposers say. They dismiss the idea that the truths of the colonized must take precedence in the discipline that is called Native American Studies as the only way to resist colonialism in academia and in real life. Disciplines such as ethnohistory and psychological anthropology, therefore, still using Native scholars as "informants," have succeeded in isolating much of the scholarship done by independent Native scholars.

Preceding the study of ethnicity and psychological anthropol-

ogy, the concepts of sovereignty and indigenoussness taught in the context of American Indian historical and cultural experience would shed much light on the reality of culture and politics. Native societies and tribal governments, in particular, could begin to use sovereignty instead of just defining and defending it, and non-Native theorists seriously concerned with colonialism and its effects could escape being called imperialists.

No thoughtful Native scholar suggests that the primacy of the Native voice should exclude any other. Yet such fears are harbored throughout academia. Even cursory readings in the journals read by humanities and social sciences scholars charge that the Native American Studies interest in this primacy is both racist and anti-intellectual. While it is certain that sovereignty and indigenoussness are clearly matters for the Native populations (nations) themselves in collaboration with the U.S. court systems to address, they are, surely, questions for educators and intellectuals of all persuasions to explore.

Indeed, the appropriate inclusion of these concepts might have contributed to a more rational discussion of several recent confused and chaotic essays written by postcolonial theorists. I am thinking of Stephen E. Feraca, who wrote "Inside BIA: Or, We're Getting Rid of All These Honkies," and Leland Donald, who wrote "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: Was the Indian Really Egalitarian?" Or even Daniel F. Littlefield Jr. and Arnold Krupat, who exchanged views in the 1992 and 1993 issues of the *American Studies Association Journal* in two articles: "American Indians, American Scholars, and the American Literary Canon," a 1992 Mid-America American Studies Association presidential address by Littlefield, and the rejoinder by Krupat titled "Scholarship and Native American Studies: A Response."

In an influential and thoughtful essay, Littlefield argues that the Native Voice is present, persistent, forceful, helpful, and significant. Krupat seems rather more pretentious than investigative as he argues that the Native Voice in academia is resentful, abrasive, political (therefore, merely rhetorical), largely irresponsible and anti-intellectual, often racist, and "coercive to the interests of human freedom."

Since Native American Studies is so little understood as an academic discipline, since its interest is not mainstream, and its potential canon is underdeveloped, the dialogue concerning how to overcome barriers to disciplinary development is not occurring. Instead, scholars confront one another in a mean-spirited way, polemicists confuse the issues, Native Scholars are said to be quite wrong, and postcolonial theorists in many related disciplines are accused by Indians as well as other thoughtful participants in the discussion of inventing postcolonialism as a subversive tactic and creating a new kind of imperial domination.

Native American Studies as an academic discipline, if allowed or even encouraged to thrive in its original conception, could become

one of the useful mechanisms for the deconstruction of colonization not only in academia but in society as well. This deconstruction will take time and support and constant vigilance on the part of its practitioners, and it will require of postcolonial theorists that they come to grips with the realities of colonial domination in Indian/White relations in America.

Native scholars who began the development of the discipline over twenty years ago argued that being Indian was what mattered in the call for new epistemologies to be developed. But they were not arguing for the idea that there is a so-called privileged standpoint from which they as Indians could develop theories. They were not postulating that oppression and deprivation produce good science and rational discourse. Indian scholars know the falsity of those claims better than anyone. What they argued for was a seat at the table, not only a seat at the table from which they had been excluded for four hundred years nor a seat as "informant," but a primary seat as transformationists within the bounds of scholarship. They argued for that seat on the basis that white racism and cultural imperialism fostered in the major institutions of this country and in the orthodox disciplines as well as in the established canons and epistemologies have been responsible for disfiguring and deforming Native peoples, communities, and nations.

### **HOW DISCIPLINARY WORK IN NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES HAS FAILED, AND WHAT MUST BE DONE**

Much of what happens in the development of an emerging discipline can be accounted for through the action or inaction of its practitioners. In the early stages of the development of anthropology, for example, the names of specific practitioners such as Edward Sapir and Franz Boas are exemplars. They did the early research, developed the early principles, and are responsible in large part for the directives and influence of the discipline of anthropology. Another example is the model of Simone de Beauvoir in feminist studies, and so on.

In Native American Studies much of what has been addressed in terms of research and topics for writing and publishing has been directed over the past century by policy think tanks, politicians, and funding agencies rather than Native scholars or even Native populations. This is another of the ugly realities of historical and continuing colonization. Much as the Department of the Interior wields its influence from afar, so, too, does a research mechanism called the National Indian Policy Center at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. This center was established in the 1990s with an advisory panel of white professionals from television, foreign languages, engineering, education, public health, economics, and law to set the re-

search agenda. An elaborate system of "communicating with the Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Villages, and Indian Organizations" was said to be part of the authenticity of this center.

An interesting exchange occurred at the American Indian and Alaska Native Professoriate meeting in 1994, when one of its directors was asked the question:

"What is one of the first topics on your research agenda?"

She replied, "Indian Gaming."

"What tribe asked you to do research on Indian Gaming?"

"Well. I don't think any tribe asked us. It is probably a request that we got from the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs, in Washington."

The SSCIA is, as everyone knows, a committee made up of senators from states with large Indian populations, which is thought by many tribal leaders to represent state interests over their tribal interests. Whatever is believed about this committee, made up entirely of white male politicians, in Washington, D.C., this exchange shows clearly that tribes are probably not being left alone to set the research agenda even after all the years of struggling for "self-determination."

In addition, unscrupulous scholars in the discipline who had no stake in Native nationhood but who had achieved status in academia and held on to it through fraudulent claims to Indian Nation heritage and blood directed the discourse. This phenomenon took place following the "Indian Preference" regulations in new hiring practices at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the early 1970s. Sometimes unprepared for such outright aggression or suffering polarization from the conflicts in the system, Native scholars in the academy often seemed to be silent witnesses to such occurrences. Their silence has not meant complicity. It has meant, more than anything, a feeling of utter powerlessness within the structures of strong mainstream institutions.

The truth is that Native American Studies and its genuine practitioners can hardly be expected to fend off the interests of those systems and persons that represent better organized and long-standing disciplines. One of the reasons is that the success of American Indians in academia is still only a forlorn dream. Only four percent of Native American students who begin a college education actually complete their work. Today, although most of the data collecting has been done under the rubric of "minority" status populations rather than specific Indian populations, this statistic still stands: *American Indians and Alaskan Natives are less than half as likely as the general adult population to earn even a four-year degree. The outlook for their achieving advanced degrees is even more dismal.*

In response to these realities, several Native educational organizations have emerged. Most recently, an organization called the Ameri-



can Indian and Alaska Native Professoriate has met for the past five years at the University of Arizona at Tempe, Arizona, just outside of Phoenix and within a short distance of several major American Indian Nations. (This organization has now moved its base to Haskell, Kansas.) Its interests are several:

- Stimulate research in Indian issues in all disciplines
- Network with other American Indian/Alaska Native professors and Indian organizations, such as the National Indian Education Association and the National Indian Policy Center, and international indigenous people's organizations
- Develop a position statement on Native American Studies programs in terms of models, certification/ accreditation, and evaluation
- Promote American Indian/Alaska Native intellectualism

The Sixth Annual Conference of American Indian and Alaska Native Professors met in February 1996 in Tempe, Arizona. Over a hundred people from a membership of over three hundred attended, representing over a hundred colleges and universities and a variety of disciplines. Most of these scholars are not Native American Studies practitioners, but they do claim to be citizens of existing nations. A doctoral degree is not required to attend; thus, the conference is made up of an egalitarian collection of professors, potential professors, administrative or staff persons, adjunct professors, and graduate students. The Arizona State University administration in Native American Studies says that anyone can attend but that the group's strength comes from those "educators" or participants who are enrolled members (i.e., citizens) of existing First Nations in the United States.

Part of what draws intellectuals to conferences like the one in Arizona is the notion that historically powerless people can defend their cultures and nations through engaging in the analysis of what has gone wrong and what is needed to develop new epistemologies. The problem is that these kinds of gatherings often fail to give understanding to the reality that research topics must be decided upon, assignments must be given to scholars, research funds must be sought, and publications must follow. The potential for the development of the discipline of Native American Studies in American universities has not been nurtured in appropriate ways nor has it been actualized since its inception in the way that other epistemologies have been, feminism, for example, or Black Studies, which has produced major African American intellectuals speaking out on all manner of national issues.

The reason for this lack of nurturing is not that Native American Studies lacks disciplinary mechanisms, as has often been suggested by

social scientists in anthropology and psychology. Rather, the reason is that the quintessential question of Western culture, "how does it fit in?" is still the unanswered question that no one who is concerned about the crisis of the contemporary American academy wants to examine.

The truth is that Native American Studies does not "fit," nor can it, nor should it. Rather, its meaningfulness stems from the fact that it challenges almost everything that America has to offer in education and society. It rejects assimilation in favor of tribal nationhood. It rejects mainstream American conservatism in favor of a new history that acknowledges a horrific period of greed and empire building in America during which genocide and deicide was legalized. It marginalizes equal rights and civil rights in favor of treaty and indigenous rights. It rejects colonization as much as Black Americans rejected slavery. Its principles are indigenoussness and sovereignty rather than cultural contact (or colonialism), pluralism, diversity, and immigration. Yet, in terms of the present condition of the academy, indigenous study exists within colonial structures, and the people live with destructive land policies and restrictive economies based on historical racist practices.

Most of all, Native American Studies as an academic discipline rejects the idea that a national economy based on the theft of Native lands and exploitation of natural resources for profit can be sustained in the long range. It confronts head on the ideals and hopes of one of the most materialistic and technological nations on earth by insisting that a society based in capitalistic democracy and on the exploitation of natural resources *for profit* is immoral, and it calls for the building of reservation-based institutions of economics and education that fit the values of the Native peoples who live there. It would appear that at this moment in postmodernism, this is the exclusive domain of Native American Studies. While the antagonism toward "exclusivism" is thought by conservative thinkers to undermine the American majority, it really does nothing of the kind. The very presence of treaty-established indigenous Native American nations at the close of the twentieth century is a shining testimony to the potential for freedom of a true democracy.

That nagging issue of comparativism, then, or the question of "how does it all fit in?" must be understood by academicians as inappropriate if the major concepts of the discipline, sovereignty and indigenoussness, are to be analyzed appropriately. Because mainstream faculty do not easily rally to the support of controversial ideas, however, the likelihood of such an analysis is fairly remote. No one understands more than contemporary scholars without tenure that during this period of conservative backlash, such rallying is dangerous to their futures. The question, then, will not be asked, nor will it be answered by those who have career choices to make and have no stake in indigenous liberation from Western colonialism. Those include the majority

of scholars in the academy. It may be a dismal fact at this moment in history that the foremost academic question and answer concerning epistemology in Native American Studies will not become the focus of the educational systems of one of the most powerful nations in the world committed to universal assimilation because the anticipated answer is not acceptable.

The silence, then, on this crucial matter becomes a wonderfully strategic tool: if the question is not asked, no answer is required. Silence is often the strategy employed in any confrontation with fear. Fear of what? A new history? An exposure of a failed history? Fear of the loss of the Myth of America? Fear of truth or the unknown? Is it the old colonial fear of Indians themselves?

While the disciplinary principles of Native American Studies may not be considered mainstream, they are not dangerous. They do not pose a threat to anyone, least of all to a strong and diverse America that has for four hundred years told its nationalistic stories and built the most compelling and seductive economy, the strongest military ever known to mankind, and a destiny manifest in Western civilization and Christian ideals. After all, no one expects that Native American Studies scholars will promote themselves like foreign powers seizing the Vatican. They are, instead, merely scholars who wish to examine this continent from the experience of Natives who exist and persist as nations of people.

The hope for the intellectual future of Native American Studies as an autonomous academic discipline remains one of the challenges to the learning institutions of America. What gives one hope is the certainty that intellectual fashions in these relatively new institutions come and go. John Milton may have been declared dead in life as well as on most American college campuses today (and we join Professor Bloom in his mourning of the great man's passing), but Philosophy 101 and Poetry live on, which means that as nations of people we are still interested in what the creative imagination can offer civilizations. Freudian theories are attacked by scholars as misogynist and inadequate, but widespread interest in such intellectual bodies of thought as psychology, feminism, and sexuality flourish. So, too, with the interest in justice for the natives to this continent.

Because of the compelling origins of native and indigenous peoples throughout the ancient world, the talk of the study of indigeneness as an intellectual fashion in academia that rose in the 1960s and died in the 1990s constitutes an oxymoron, a figure of speech that is merely foolish. Indigeneness is hardly a characteristic of humanity that will disappear as we go to the moon or even cyberspace. Thus, the danger that the past thirty years' articulation of Native American Studies as an academic discipline will go the way of moribund languages or bad fiction is probably minimal. Powerful empires that have defended

colonization and kleptocracy have tried for two hundred years to rid themselves of native populations around the world and have failed. There are many examples of the truth of that failure. The Kurds, for example, denied statehood after World War II, still maintain their independence as a people in Iran and Turkey and many other places in the world. The Palestinians ousted from their homelands only recently achieved a peace settlement. Because of recent developments in the former USSR, Europe, and South Africa, a new look at nationalism and tribalism, both of which are still promoted by colonizing nations as fearsome and dangerous phenomena, must be undertaken and defended by Third World scholars.

If one accounts for inevitable change, then, the hope remains that an understanding of indigenoussness and Native nation sovereignty in American Indian Country is possible if colonialism is studied and analyzed as a monstrous crime against humanity and if indigenoussness is accepted as a moral idea. Nevertheless, the future of Indian Nations in America cannot be left to the devices of such orthodox disciplines as anthropology, sociology, and psychology, for their analyses of Native populations as *nations* has never been the focus of those collaborative and exogenous disciplines. Nor will it be in the future since the sovereignty sought by Native Nations can be described as the supreme inherent power that originates from *an agreement among a people, in this case, a tribal people*, who believe that their histories have shown them a truth; that is, it is not a global international empire that will bring peace and harmony to mankind.

The disagreements, then, the arguments about sovereignty that face Native Nations not only in law but in society will not be resolved in the broadly defined epistemologies now being theorized in the social sciences and humanities. New epistle writers who understand that the defense of the land and indigenous nationhood is what is at stake must do the work.

Another consideration is that in Native American Studies, the *endogenous* consideration of time and place on this continent cannot forever be based on the defensive ideology that now makes up its major struggle. To move on from that position, Native American Studies must continue to seek autonomy from other opportunistic epistemologies with which it has major differences so that it can focus on the protection and preservation of specific social systems, languages, land, and resources. No thinking scholar can expect that this defense will be the focus of Western intellectualized disciplines that are based solely on scientific methodology and objectivity.

A reference to the 1970 Convocation of Native Scholars suggests that the crisis in Native American Studies twenty-plus years after the fact is directly related to the failure of structural transformation in the learning institutions of America. The call for departmental status

and disciplinary transformation is as necessary today for educational services to indigenous populations to be meaningful as it was then. As long as the colleges and universities hire Native intellectuals (which, admittedly, they are not doing now as often as they did because of the recently waning policies of affirmative action) and then fail to reward them for doing the intellectual, moral, religious, and aesthetic work of their own tribal legacies and languages, Native American Studies will not find its center. Autonomy is a necessary condition to the development of the discipline. Those visionaries at Princeton twenty years ago and at thousands of Native American Studies conferences since that time enjoined the academic community and their contemporaries in an effort to pass on a vibrant tradition of indigenous resistance to colonization and oppression. It is through their example that a modern-day intellectual quest for tribal-nation autonomy will be invested with power and insight.