

1992 MAASA Presidential Address

American Indians, American Scholars and the American Literary Canon

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As a member of the editorial board whose work culminated in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, I have watched with interest during the last two years the debate on the American literary canon and the related issue of political correctness. Heretofore, I have not publicly addressed the issues of the debate. My intention is not to rehash them here, for one additional statement more or less will not matter much. What I wish to address, instead, is a matter related to the debate on the literary canon: the growing controversy between American Indians and American scholars. Presented first are the broad outlines of the controversy and some of its causes, followed by an analysis of what implications the debate might have for American studies that deal with Indian matters, particularly for the American literary canon and those whose scholarship concerns it.

During the past twenty years, American Indians have been critical of American scholars, especially the anthropologists, for whom their criticism has been relentless. In recent years, with ever increasing intensity, their criticism has spilled over to other American scholars as well. Depending on the political stand of the person making the statement, we have been naive, ignorant, racist, colonialist, or two or more of these in combination.¹ In some instances, there is outright repudiation of our efforts. Oren Lyons, for example, “a runner for the Six Nations” and a member of the Onondaga council, has said to us, “We will determine what our culture is. . . . we are not going to be put in a museum or accept your interpretations of our culture.”² Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, the Sioux scholar and

writer, has asked, "Why should the university systems of this country and Indian studies units and publishing houses define who an Indian is?"³ And Philip Deloria, the Sioux legal scholar, has put it more broadly: "We exist in a distinct status in this society simply because we have a right to exist. Our rich cultural heritage is our own business and not the business of the federal government or the scholarly community. We do not owe an obligation—other than to ourselves—to preserve or not to preserve Indian culture."⁴ Finally, "It may be," as Roger Buffalohead has said regarding anthropologists, "that the scholarly differences that we need to explore have more to do with our ways of thinking, our intellectual traditions, and our ways of perceiving than with deliberate exploitation of one group by another."⁵ Whatever the cause of our differences, real or perceived, Indian intellectuals have a bone to pick with the American scholar, and not with just the anthropologists among us.

Despite our protestations against, and denial of our complicity in, romanticizing the Indians, we have done so, they say, and simply replaced the old stereotypes with new ones, thus perpetuating paternalism. Deloria presents a good outline of the case against us. Much of what we have written, he says, is "a simplistic good guys versus bad guys analysis resting on fundamental ideological criticisms of American culture and society. . . . These philosophical criticisms no doubt play an important role as scholarly commentary and for a larger social and ideological agenda, but they are of limited use as Indian tribes try to deal with their immediate problems."⁶

Because of our simplistic view, Deloria tells us that we missed the point of the Indian cultural awareness movement of the 1960s and 1970s. In the wake of that movement, our tendency has been to idealize the Indians. Our analyses of the failure of resource development policies of that era tended to place the blame on the federal government because we are "wedded to a method of historical analysis in which tribes are never responsible for their mistakes and the government never makes an honest mistake." In reality, though, he says, "There must have been at one point in history at least one Indian who did not know what he was talking about. There must have been at least one person who worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs who had a good idea." Promoting the idea that policy failures rest solely with the government leads Indians to self-deception regarding their role in that failure. Promoting "the view that Washington is a monolith hostile to tribal interests" undermines tribal willingness or ability "to learn how to understand and manipulate" the political process. Thus we let the Indians down by not helping them clearly understand their position vis-a-vis the government. The result is "that tribal interests are not adequately articulated at key points in a federal process that is largely oblivious to Indians."⁷

Because of our tendency to idealize, thus stereotype Indians, we became sidetracked from what Deloria calls "the real issues of Indian cultural survival" and became intellectual peeping Toms and Tomasinias, prying into areas where we have no business. Though there are many issues of concern to Indians, what constitutes Indianness is a prime one. It is impossible to estimate how many pages

of published academic prose and papers at professional meetings have been given to that debate.⁸ Indians maintain that determining who is or is not one of them is their province, not ours, and that it is basic to tribal or Indian national sovereignty that they be free to do so. And they have done fairly well at policing their ranks. They have taken care, for instance, of books such as Ruth Beebe Hill's *Hanta Yo* and people such as Jamake Highwater, Princess Pale Moon and Harley "Swift Deer" Reagan.⁹ And they are presently engaged in a debate among themselves that will profoundly affect our definition of what constitutes *Indian art*.¹⁰

Yet scholars are captivated by the question of Indianness and continue to intrude into what should be Indian business. In historical and Indian literary studies, we have been extremely concerned with the matter of authenticity. Rodney Simard has recently argued that we have been *overly* concerned with authenticity regarding texts, translations and authors.¹¹ While Simard challenges us to change our ways, his concern is with the directions of academic scholarship and not how that scholarship has affected the Indians. We have managed to make some scholars and Indian writers self-conscious, making them feel compelled to explain their subjects' or their own qualifications to speak as Indians. For example, the issue pervades recent collections of interviews with Indian writers, such as those put together by Joseph Bruchac and Laura Coltelli and autobiographical essays such as those collected by Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat.¹² If a writer is accepted by the community of Indian writers, who are we to question? I was honestly astounded when, in the manuscript stage of my recent biography of Alexander Posey (1873-1908), two of three reviewers complained that I had not addressed the issue of Posey's Indianness. Here was a man who was a member of the wind clan and of Tuskegee tribal town, who did not speak English until age fourteen, who was fluent in not only dialects of the Muscogee people but Choctaw as well, who spent very few days of his life outside the Creek Nation and fewer still outside a fifty-mile radius of where he was born. No one in his day would have thought to question whether Posey was a Creek. The Creeks certainly did not. To do so today can be nothing more than academic exercise.

Yet we have persisted, and some of us have built careers around this exercise. As a result, say the Indians, we have contributed, unwittingly in some cases and intentionally in others, to racism and polarization in American society. An example is James Clifton and his school of thought.¹³ If we can believe Clifton and his followers, there is really no such thing as an Indian any more, and anyone who claims to be one has a political agenda or is looking for a way to feed at the public trough. They would have us believe that European diseases did not have the impact on native populations that we have been led to think they did, that the U. S. military did not engage in wars of extermination, that termination of tribal status was an enlightened federal policy, and that affirmative action for Indians is reverse discrimination. Any scholar who says differently either has a political agenda or is seeking a pay raise or tenure. It is no wonder that Indians consider Clifton a racist.¹⁴ At bottom, Clifton's work gives scholarly sanction to the actions and rhetoric of Protect America's Rights and Resources and other anti-

treaty and racist organizations in Wisconsin, the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance in Montana, the American Farm Bureau, and other groups whose goal is to dissolve tribal and Indian national status. Clifton's work contributes to the same type of polarization inherent in the politics of David Duke and the agenda of *The Journal of Historical Review*, which would have us believe that the holocaust did not occur.¹⁵

Despite Clifton's belief that Indians are stuff of the imagination, with the opening of the American canon and the ongoing debate on that issue and on political correctness, we can expect an increase of interest in American Indians in the context of American studies in general and, in specific, American Indian literature, one of the most rapidly growing areas of interest in literary studies. As that happens, we must consider how the growing controversy between the Indians and us will affect not only our scholarship but our teaching and the counsel we give our students who wish to pursue Indian subjects in their studies. We can expect Indians more and more, as they have been doing in recent years, not only to demand accountability from us but to attempt to shape the direction of scholarly research and writing.

In the long run, we can expect some important limitations on not only the amounts but kinds of information that will be available to us from the Indian community. Indians are beginning to say to us, "Since you have got it wrong all these years, we will develop strategies to squeeze you out." An example is an interesting direction now being proposed for American Indian studies as an academic discipline. In the mid-1980s American Indian studies faculties went through serious evaluation of their programs. They concluded basically that they were "intellectually subordinate" to university administrations, that their curriculum was in the Anglo-American mode, that it appealed more to non-Indian students than to Indians, and that it constituted little more than "white studies." There was in addition an "ideologically motivated suppression of divergent Native American" thought on the part of scholarly journals, and the products of university presses, "even those with strong orientation toward Indian studies—the University of Oklahoma and the University of Nebraska—" were "actually non-Indian historical/anthropological undertakings rather than American Indian Studies efforts per se." As a result of this assessment, American Indian studies "practitioners" set out to make American Indian studies "an autonomous *Indian* tradition of intellectualism" and to develop alternatives to "white studies" by the end of the century.¹⁶

Some of those alternatives are now becoming clear. Some Indian scholars are calling for a shift in curriculum "from generic American Indian topics to the study of specific regions and cultural communities" that have a commonality based on "a shared history, a cultural unity, language, kinships and social organization."¹⁷ Others call for "tribally described" models, "presuming to serve particular societies, nations, cultures within the state's borders, or within the university's regional perspective." These are "the most impervious to outside interests such as the popular culture" because "their faculties are generally made

up of tribal intelligencia, native language speakers, reservation based scholars, native poets and singers and dancers and writers.” American Indian studies, then, would become the defender of the cultural and historical “parameters” of the discipline: the “spiritual and philosophical notions imbedded in language and literature and religion and mythology” and the “legal status of Indian nationhood and Indian citizenship, the mechanisms upon which all indigenous legal rights and political conditions are dependent.” In the long run, these tribally specific disciplines would defend the Indians “from nefarious and dangerous pretenders who have become as numerous as flies in this modern valueless world, writing books and conducting workshops on everything from moon ceremonies for the middle-aged woman to religious freak pipe ceremonies to how to save the earth, Indian-style.”¹⁸ The idea is obviously aimed at restricting certain areas of research and writing to Indians or to non-Indians who have gone to the effort to learn a particular native language and at the same time train articulate Indian scholars equipped to challenge outsiders who happen to venture onto their tribal or cultural turf.

There are other, more immediate, evidences that information sources are becoming more restricted. Some tribes, for example, are moving toward control of what is written about them. A good example is the Hopi suppression of Ekkehart Malotki’s book *The Hopi Salt Journey*, which had been scheduled for publication by the University of Nebraska Press in 1991. The Hopis argued that it struck at “the roots of Hopi religion” by “revealing what should remain closely guarded knowledge transmitted only to a few privileged religious initiates.” In addition, Malotki, who had published other books with Hopi collaborators, was declared *persona non grata* on the Hopi Reservation. A Hopi spokesperson said, “Basically, we no longer recognize him as an expert. If he was an expert on our culture, he would have known where to draw the line.”¹⁹ The Hopi leadership considers unsanctioned research “exploitative intrusions” which they will no longer tolerate. They deny that they want a moratorium on research in other aspects of Hopi culture, but the tribe is developing guidelines to govern whatever research is done.²⁰

On a larger scale, political, economic and other forces are also conspiring to restrict the flow of information. Indian religious freedom is under attack. Recent Supreme Court decisions such as *Lyng vs Northwest Indian Cemetery Association* (1988) and *Employment Division of Oregon vs Smith* (1990) have begun to dismantle the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978.²¹ Coincidental with the erosion of religious freedoms has been an increase in the number of the New Age followers, those “spiritual orphans” philosophically suspended somewhere between the Bagwhan and Black Elk. Groups like the Great Round, the Deer Tribe, and the Bear Tribe and writers like Lynn Andrews, the Indians charge, have become “spiritual hucksters,” appropriating and selling Indian spiritualism for profit.²² There is already evidence from sources as divergent as actor and entertainer Floyd Red Crow Westerman and Tim Johnson, editor of *Turtle Quarterly*, that Indians are becoming more careful regarding what they tell the

public about their spirituality. Westerman says, for example, "We are being more careful nowadays with our spirituality and how much we divulge because more and more persons are practicing sacred ceremonies and we are trying to pull back and expose these 'shaman showmen' who charge for those ceremonies without sanctions. . . ." And in response to a new-age inquiry about dreams, Johnson responded that the *Quarterly's* intent was to provide information that would help readers "seek out wisdom, expand their understandings of life or elevate their acceptance and appreciation of cultural diversity. . . without infringing upon the intimacy of Native American spiritual beliefs or by making profitable use of trends in popular culture."²³ As Indian communities become more assailed by legal challenges regarding such matters as sacred sites and trust status of Indian land, I foresee a reluctance to be forthcoming in other areas, too.

In addition, we have not yet seen the full effects of the decentralization of the Bureau of Indian Affairs that began in the late 1960s. As Indians have assumed more control over the delivery of many services formerly supplied by the Bureau, the flow of records back to Washington has decreased. Today, most records concerning such matters as health, housing, education and economics remain with the tribes and are unavailable to outsiders. The old days of going to the National Archives and ordering all we needed sent down from the Natural Resources Branch to the main reading room are gone. Meanwhile, the printing presses are at work in practically every community—urban or reservation—in Indian Country, publishing newsletters, newspapers and magazines on a weekly, biweekly, monthly or quarterly basis. Tribal historians are at work generating tribal histories. Much of what the outsider knows of Indian communities of the late-twentieth century will have to be drawn from such sources. Slowly but certainly, the Indians are taking care of one of their basic complaints about us: that our thinking is calcified regarding what constitutes legitimate resources for scholarly research. While we are making our adjustments, we can expect their criticism to be more open, more common, and more strident.

Those who believe that our Indian critics can be dismissed as a few outspoken ex-AIM militant types do not read what I read on a daily basis: the nuts and bolts news from Indian communities and analysis of the issues that concern them. Indian editors and columnists hammer away at our misrepresentations of the Indians, condemnatory reviews of our books are reprinted, and full-scale attacks on establishment scholarship are mounted through reviews and articles in Indian controlled scholarly journals like *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, *American Indian Quarterly*, *Wicazo Sa Review*, and *Northeast Indian Quarterly*.²⁴ The leading Indian national weekly, to mark the Columbian quincentenary, is publishing reviews of books that present American Indians in a way the editors perceive is "calculated to retrieve the world" Columbus helped to destroy.²⁵ Indian broadcasters are buying in more frequently to public and commercial radio stations and increasingly view them as a means of empowerment.²⁶ Indian librarians are influencing collections development policies, and

journalism organizations are developing guidelines for non-Indian journalists who write about Indians.²⁷

In the face of such trends, what are our possible modes of action? On the one hand, we can do nothing, try to ignore what the Indians say, and go on about our business as usual. However, unlike the past, when Indian opinion could be ignored effectively, it will not be so easy to do so in the future because of Indian information networks. We who like to be taken seriously but persist in our ways will have to adjust to being the object of ridicule in Indian cartoons and satire and in public debate.²⁸ Worse still, the Indians might simply ignore us. In the 1980s, when they realized that our promises to them in the 1970s were not being fulfilled, they began to avoid our professional meetings and until recently were rarely seen at them. Though the anthropologists still seem to be bearing the brunt of the criticism, the historians are next in line ahead of the literary scholars, and if we are standing in a crowd when someone delivers a broadside barrage of "editorial grapeshot," we would have to have the hide of a rhinoceros not to feel the effects.²⁹ As the criticism mounts, its delivery system becomes steadily more sophisticated. Attacks on American scholarship in Indian publications get to grassroots Indian country on a weekly, biweekly, monthly or quarterly basis. By the mid-1980s many Indian publishers were associated with the world-wide indigenous peoples' movement and since then have linked into information networks on national, international, hemispheric and global scales, hence creating a much larger forum for the expression of Indian opinion than ever before.³⁰ Everywhere, from reservation and urban ghetto to university campuses, Indians are being told to distrust us, our methods, and our findings. Everywhere, Indians are demanding that studies of the Indians' participation in American society be written or rewritten to account for the Indians' perspectives. A key to how effectively these demands are met is the native press. Like never before, it has the power to help force change, and, as I recently suggested to fellow members of the Native American Journalists Association, one important use of that power would be to turn critical attention to us scholars and our work.³¹

Whether we want to admit it or not, Indian opinion is being heard. It has forced the Smithsonian Institution and other museums closely allied with scholarly research to develop policies for the repatriation of human remains and sacred objects and has forced scholars and college administrators to confront the implications attached to holding in perpetuity the bones of Indians. Indian opinion has also had much to do with reshaping our thinking, however reluctantly we did it, about the American Constitution, just as it is presently helping to reshape how we think about the significance of the arrival of Columbus.³² There are other hopeful signs. According to Frederick Hoxie, director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian at the Newberry Library, public sentiment favors setting the historical record straight, but he believes educators and politicians are lagging behind that sentiment. However, Hoxie cites as promising developments, among others, the Newberry Library's work in recent years with high school and college teachers and a new series of which he

is general editor called *New Directions in American Indian History* to be published by the University of Oklahoma Press. Educators may be catching up, leaving only the politicians lagging behind, for in early July, the National Education Association adopted a policy to require textbooks to detail “the contributions and major roles of Native Americans.”³³ If Hoxie’s hope is well placed and if we can believe a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, we are on the verge of a revolution in how our scholarship “characterizes” Indians. As evidence of change the writer of the article cites “new scholarship” on the American Indian, mainly by ethnohistorians, who are providing what he calls “fresh insights into broader questions with which social-science and humanities scholars have been grappling—including such questions as the nature of resistance to colonialism, the biases in traditional ethnographies, the use of oral histories, and the character of America’s colonial period.”³⁴ I am afraid, however, that something in the writer’s language or the comments of some scholars who were interviewed will cause Indians to ask, “What do you mean by the American colonial period?”

How we respond to this question will determine in large measure how receptive Indian intellectuals are to these “new directions” in American Indian scholarship. We have steadily refused, they argue, to recognize Indians as colonized peoples. They see the strain on our relations as “a part of a worldwide phenomenon where tribal and other colonial people have challenged academic experts’ role as interpreters of non-western culture” and they accuse us of “lowering an ivory tower curtain around the exploitation and injustice suffered by subject or colonial peoples.”³⁵ Thus what we write has little to say about the realities of America as American Indians experience or have experienced them.

While there is reason to hope—and I believe it is genuine reason—that the American ethnohistorians are on the right track, I can not say as much for scholarship in American Indian literatures. Unfortunately, since the Modern Language Association [MLA] and the Association of Departments of English gave their sanction to the study of Indian literatures a few years ago, writers like Momaday, Silko, Welch, Erdrich and a few others have not been able to write fast enough to keep us busy with contemporary literature. Thus generally ignoring other contemporary Indian writers as well as writers before 1968, we turned to “the oral tradition,” as we call it, and worked it hard as a subject, “to the detriment,” says Robert Allen Warrior, “of serious engagement with more theoretical work by Native intellectuals.”³⁶

While there has been some excellent scholarship, especially concerning the forms of oral literatures and the influence of oral traditions in contemporary writing, some of us have gone some strange ways. The academy, for example, particularly the “ethnopoets” among us, still gives legitimacy to the activities of Gary Snyder and his white shamanist descendants. Leslie Marmon Silko and Geary Hobson have described their work as “cultural imperialism,” while John Bierhorst, on the other hand, claims that Snyder and others contributed to the formation of “a permanent channel of influence from the Native literatures to the

Euroamerican” and “were among the first to rescue” Indian narrative “from balladry.”³⁷ At MLA in 1986 in a session called “Native Oral Texts: Interpretations and Transcriptions,” I heard one presenter say that he did not need to know a native language to “translate” a text. At MLA in 1988 in a session on our responsibilities as scholars in dealing with sacred matters (whatever that means), I listened to a speaker for twenty minutes and heard no mention of a literary text, oral or written. If she had a prepared paper, she got sidetracked in a digression on her study of sand paintings and the weird experiences she began to have. I have to admit that I did not hear the end of the presentation, for I left when she got to the point where lightning struck her car. Such activities give credence to the charge by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn that “too many scholars seem to be intellectualizing their own personal traumas in search of recognition or integrity or, perhaps, a tenured faculty position.”³⁸

Another example is a project underway called “Contemporary Translations of Native American Literatures of North America,” designed to produce an anthology to be published by Random House next year. The purpose of the book, we are told, is “to give a sense of variety, scope, excellence, and excitement of Native American literatures, scattering stereotypes, opening minds, expanding the meaning of ‘literature.’”³⁹ It would be difficult, I think, to convince Indians that it will do all of those things and that it might not, in fact, do the opposite of some. The editor has called for submissions of translations or “re-translations.” In many instances, this last term is a code word for a non-Indian’s “proper” English rendering of a native translator’s literal translation of an oral text dictated to a nineteenth- or twentieth-century non-Indian ethnologist by an Indian who may or may not have had the authority to divulge the text and who may or may not have known all parts of it. Of late, it has also come to refer to a “re-translation,” as poetry, of an earlier non-Indian’s prose rendering of a native translator’s literal translation, etc.⁴⁰ One certainly does not need to know the native language to do that sort of “translating.” As Leslie Marmon Silko has written, “White poets use the term ‘translation’ very loosely when applied to Asian or Native American material; few, if any of them, are conversant in the Asian or Native American languages they pretend to ‘translate.’ What they do is sit down and rearrange English transcriptions done by ethnologists and then call this a ‘translation.’” Silko would have “songs and stories which were taken by ethnographers” considered in the same light as “religious objects and other property” that rightly belong to native peoples.⁴¹ Brian Swann, editor of the newly released *On the Translation of Native American Literatures*, acknowledges the “moral and political dimensions” of “translation” as well as the implications of cultural appropriation. He also acknowledges scholarly criticism of the “translators’” activities. Then he writes, “On a related issue, I regret not having any Native American scholars represented here. I contacted all I knew, but no one had any work appropriate for this volume.”⁴² That statement has probably caused no surprise in American Indian circles.

Unfortunately, with the opening of the American literary canon, we can expect more “translating.” No wonder American Indians say that what we do has little or no relation to them, the texts in many cases being removed at least two, and sometimes three or more times, from contextual reality. They would probably say that much of it would be silly if it were not so dangerous. The danger in anthologies of such “translations” is that they can not account sufficiently for cultural and linguistic differences. Anthologies, by their nature, provide limited explanations of contexts because of limited space. A quick survey reveals a chilling sameness about the pieces commonly reprinted in anthologies of American Indian literatures. Readers with little experience in such literatures may read a “translation” or “re-translation,” thinking they have a genuine work, not realizing it may be several steps removed from the native teller. Thus we become guilty of the Indians’ charge of contributing to stereotyping. Indeed, Swann writes of his collection, “I set out to include essays from and on all the Americas, for there is only one native America, one thought, one spirit, from Tahuantisuyo and points south, to Hochelaga and points north, and all points in between. And there is a unity to the literatures, from the ‘literary’ tradition of the Aztec Brotherhood’s great court poetry and other Central and South American ‘high art’ to the four-line chants of the Midewiwin or the complex Navajo Chantways.”⁴³ So much for cultural, social and historical differences in peoples.

Relieving readers of the burden of accounting for the literature in a cultural context makes it easier to discuss it in what the Indians call the “lit-crit speak tropes” of Western literary criticism.⁴⁴ We also relieve the reader of the burden of tribal or Indian national history. Thus it is easy to force the literature into traditional Western historical constructs so that it becomes what we want it to be or think it should be. For Indians, the spectre of appropriation remains. Simon Ortiz has said in relation to ethnopoetics, “There are a number of people who are utilizing indigenous cultures, not just Native American cultures but African cultures. They use themes or characters, Coyote, or Native American images which have particular reference to philosophical and religious ceremonies which are very visual and so easily used, and oftentimes wrongly. And if it’s wrong, it’s probably exploitative. . . . And there has to be waged a struggle, and a very serious concern about misinformation and exploitation; exploitation means discrimination, racism, and domination over subject people, subject culture, and language.”⁴⁵

Indian writers are confronted by a dilemma: should they seek admission to the American canon or not? Our efforts to bring American Indian literatures into the canon are viewed by some Indian intellectuals as an ultimate act of colonialism because those efforts smack of appropriation. However, opinion varies widely among Indian writers on the matter. Louise Erdrich and N. Scott Momaday, for instance, have no difficulties viewing American Indian literatures as a part of American literature. Others are not willing to go that far. Most readily acknowledge a debt of literary influence to American, European, Asian and Third World writers, yet they believe that their literature is distinct in the use of language

and the themes it portrays. Most believe that those themes, which make publishers uncomfortable because of guilt or a lack of understanding, have made it difficult for them to find outlets for their work. They acknowledge that critical reviews and literary scholarship are a vital gear in the machine that drives the publishing industry. And, as Andrew Wiget has pointed out, they must deal with the realities of Anglo publishers and audiences, whether they admit it or not. They want their works debated and analyzed, yet most feel that we have in large measure misread and misinterpreted their works because of our ignorance of American Indian cultures.⁴⁶

Now that we are debating the issue of canon, they grow wary because it appears that if we are finally to admit American Indian literatures, we will insist that it be done on our own terms. In early July, the University of Oklahoma was host to "Returning the Gift," the largest gathering ever of indigenous writers from Canada, the United States and Middle America. In a plenary session titled "Entering the Canons—Our Place in World Literature," certain allegations recurred: American scholars are engaged in "intellectual elitism"; *canon* as we refer to it in current scholarship is the "official line," a gauge used to exclude Indian writers because we do not like the message they deliver; and words like *center* and *margin* are earmarks of colonialist criticism. Robert Allen Warrior has responded to Arnold Krupat's *The Voice in the Margin*, one of the best-known arguments for opening the canon to American Indian literatures, this way: "We need scholars to respect the integrity and continuity of American Indian literature, both historical and contemporary, as a literature of resistance to colonialism, and to compare it to other literatures of resistances, whether African-American, African, or Arab. We would learn a tremendous amount about our own literature by doing so, but not as long as Native American literature 'belongs' to the national literature of the United States."⁴⁷ When some of my writer friends told me a few years ago that they did not want American Indian literatures considered a part of American literature, I did not fully understand why. I do now. As long as we can appropriate Indians as subjects and deal with them on our own terms, we can effectively avoid explaining the extreme unemployment and poverty at Pine Ridge or the Indian bars on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis. One of the demands that Indian intellectuals are making not only of us but of each other is that scholarly work not be divorced from, but rather relevant to, the writers' contemporary conditions and address issues concerning them.⁴⁸ As Warrior says, "In spite of a general acceptance among American Indian scholars and non-Native Americanists that various research enterprises involving American Indians make little sense outside a wide interdisciplinary purview, few critics have connected the written creative output of their subjects with those subjects' concomitant specific relationships to Native political, cultural, and social history."⁴⁹

"Returning the Gift" reiterated this demand through its consensus that the work of indigenous writers of America must contribute to the ongoing worldwide struggle against racism and economic, political, educational and literary colonialism. The literature they produce does not "belong" to America. It

belongs to them and has its rightful place among other literatures of the world, including American. What M. Annette Jaimes wrote in 1985 is being reasserted today in louder, more insistent voices. What American Indians insist upon, she said, is “the articulation of native American perspectives *vis-a-vis* the content of various disciplines and without adherence to the academic structures specific to those disciplines (e.g., Native American philosophy is philosophy in its own right, and not by virtue of a juxtaposition to the philosophy of Plato or Hegel).”⁵⁰ Thus American Indian literature is literature in its own right, not by virtue of its juxtaposition to American literature. Persistence in this direction, however, has its dangers. As Kenneth Roemer has said, “A consistent emphasis in the separateness—the different-ness—of Indian literatures can lead to equally serious academic and ethical problems: forms of literary ghettoization and tokenism, or, to borrow Peter Carafiol’s phrase, transformations of tokens into totems.”⁵¹

The future for scholarship concerning American Indians promises to be interesting. Those of us involved in American Indian literary studies can not expect our paths to be as smooth as they have been. Indian critics no longer hesitate to write devastating reviews of our work as Ward Churchill has done of Clifton’s and Gill’s works, calling them, respectively, “pseudo-scholarship in the guise of legitimate academic exposition” and “one of the shoddier historiographical exercises in living memory.”⁵² The Hopis have demonstrated that they can do considerable damage to a scholar’s reputation by simply declaring that he is no longer an authority on their culture. How many of us could withstand this kind of devastating criticism or that which has been turned on the anthropologists and historians? It appears that our turn has come, and we shall find out. Churchill, for example, has asked about Michael Castro’s *Interpreting the Indian* whether Castro “was in fact even conversant enough with the topic to presume the writing of a book on it.”⁵³ The only good thing William Willard could find about Andrea Lerner’s *Dancing on the Rim of the World* was its title. To his review the editor of the journal added this note: “This anthology comes from the highly touted ‘Sun Tracks’ series, University of Arizona, Tucson, which gives rise to further speculation concerning the responsibilities of university publishing houses.”⁵⁴ *Wicazo Sa Review*, in commentary on Hertha Wong’s *Sending My Heart Back Across the Years*, charged that Wong’s claim to Indian heritage was “wannabee sentiment which clutters an otherwise tolerable piece of redundant scholarship.”⁵⁵ We can expect not only continued but increased monitoring and response to our scholarly efforts. One of the missions of the American Indian Professoriate, established in February 1992, is to “serve as a resource, clearing house, evaluative body for scholarly work, text books, trade books, and other media that relates [*sic*] to American Indians.”⁵⁶ Other Indian watchdog groups as well have been established recently to monitor what is written and said about Indians.⁵⁷

We can also expect to be engaged in debate on issues relating to American Indian literatures. American Indians are experiencing a sense of empowerment through their scholarly journals, popular print and other media, and literature. Robert Allen Warrior has called on American Indian intellectuals to commit

themselves to a struggle for “intellectual sovereignty.” That sovereignty will be achieved in part, he says, through the study of Indian writers: “Though the production of critical literature about these writers remains overwhelmingly the domain of non-Native critics, a growing number of American Indian intellectuals are realizing that American Indians must produce criticism as well as literature if the work of Native poets and novelists is not to become merely one more part of American Indian existence to be dissected and divvied up between white ‘experts.’”⁵⁸ The “good ol’ girl” and “good ol’ boy” system has prevailed too long in academic scholarship regarding American Indian literatures. Too often, we look for complementing, not conflicting, ideas in formation of panels at conferences, thus reducing debate. Too often, we let jargon-filled, poorly reasoned presentations go unquestioned. This system may change if Indian intellectuals take up Warrior’s challenge and return to our meetings. As Warrior has said elsewhere, “Anyone who has been part of an academic society that includes study of American Indian cultures is acquainted with the tensions and sometimes outright hostility that the growing number of American Indian scholars in such societies has produced.”⁵⁹

Warrior’s statement might be seen as further evidence of what others have called “the growing movement among American Indians to wrest control of their cultural identity and history from non-Indians.”⁶⁰ In a review essay on books by and about American Indians, James R. Kincaid recently raised an important question, “Who gets to tell their stories?”⁶¹ But to reduce the controversy between Indian intellectuals and American scholars to a question of race is unfair to Indian intellectuals. They simply appear more willing than in times past to engage in scholarly debate. The question is not *who* tells the stories but *how* the stories are told. The latter, at least, has been the crux of complaints that Indian intellectuals have had against us. We must respond.

The focus on our points of difference will be more defined, I believe, as the debate on the American literary canon and political correctness continues. Therefore, I welcome the debate. It will force each of us, as it has in the past, to take stock and reconsider what we do. For one thing, each of us must decide if we care what opinions Indians have of what we write or say about them. I do. As one involved in creating the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*, I must ask myself if, despite our best intentions in creating the anthology, we were not guilty of some of the charges the Indians have made against us. I must wrestle with myself on this issue as I work with the other editors on a second edition. I wonder, for instance, if we should not change the first two sections, which we have designated as the colonial period to 1700 and to 1800, to *European* colonial period to 1800. Then, if we must keep such historical organization, perhaps we should add somewhere in the anthology two more sections, *American* colonial period to 1900 and *American* colonial period since 1900 and put American Indian and, possibly, Chicano/Chicana literatures in those sections. While we may be uncertain about the directions the debate on the canon may take, we can be certain of one point. We will never return to where we were in American Indian

scholarship before the debate began. Those of us who remain in the field of Indian studies and those who consider entering it should understand that the game we are now playing is a new one with rules that are constantly changing, that the Indians expect to be players, and that they know as much about the rules as we do.

Notes

1. By *we*, here and below, I mean American scholars, American Indian as well as non-Indian, who are products of Western educational philosophies and whose scholarly research and writing and teaching relate to American Indians.
2. Oren Lyons, et al., "Traditionalism and the Reassertion of Indianness," in Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City, 1986), 244.
3. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "The Radical Conscience in Native American Studies," *Wicazo Sa Review* 7 (Fall 1991), 12.
4. Phillip S. Deloria, "The Era of Indian Self-Determination: An Overview," in Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule*, 206-207.
5. R. Roger Buffalohead, "Self-Rule in the Past and the Future: An Overview," in Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule*, 276.
6. Deloria, "The Era of Indian Self-Determination," 203.
7. Deloria, "The Era of Indian Self-Determination," 195-196, 202-203, 205.
8. Some good examples, however, are W. David Baird, "Are There 'Real' Indians in Oklahoma? Historical Perceptions of the Five Civilized Tribes," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 68 (Spring 1990), 4-23; William T. Hagan, "Full Blood, Mixed Blood, Generic, and Ersatz: The Problem of Indian Identity," *Arizona and the West* 27 (Winter 1985), 309-26; Terry P. Wilson, "Osage Oxonian: The Heritage of John Joseph Mathews," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 59 (Fall 1981), 264-293; James A. Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian: Biographical Studies of North American Frontiers* (Chicago, 1989); Clifton, ed., *The Invented Indian: Cultural Fictions and Government Policies* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1990).
9. See, e. g., Bea Medicine, "Hanta Yo: A New Phenomenon," *Indian Historian* 12 (Summer 1979), 2-5; "Hanta Yo: A Gross Insult Is Offered to Indian People," *Wassaja/The Indian Historian* 13 (Fourth Quarter 1980), 15-23; "Pale Moon Gets the Boot, Can't Prove She's Indian," *Lakota Times*, March 11, 1992; "Time to Clip Wings of False Shamans," *Lakota Times*, April 15, 1992.
10. See, e. g., Ward Churchill, "American Indian Art and Artists in Search of a Definition," *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, (December/January 1992); Churchill, "Nobody's Pet Poodle. Jimmie Durham: An Artist for Native North America," *Indigenous Thought* 1 (October 1991): 9-11; Lee C. Woodward, "Who's Protecting Who from Artist Imposters?" *Muscogee Nation News* 20 (April 1991), 2.
11. Rodney Simard, "American Indian Literatures, Authenticity, and the Canon," *World Literature Today* 66 (Spring 1992), 243-248.
12. Joseph Bruchac, ed., *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets* (Tucson, 1987); Laura Coltelli, ed., *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1990); Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds., *I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1987). See also Terry Wilson, "Osage Oxonian," 267-268; Geary Hobson, "Remembering the Earth," in Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature* (Albuquerque, 1979), 8-10; Matthias Shubnell, N. Scott Momaday: *The Cultural and Literary Background* (Norman, Oklahoma, 1985), 3-11.
13. See Clifton, "Alternate Identities and Cultural Frontiers," in Clifton, ed., *Being and Becoming Indian*, 1-37; Clifton, ed., *The Invented Indian*.
14. Ward Churchill, "The New Racism: A Critique of James A. Clifton's *The Invented Indian*," *Wicazo Sa Review* 7 (Spring 1991), 51-59.
15. "Remarks Made by Doug Olson, P.A.R. R. Convention, March 28-29, 1987," and "Comments from the PARR Conference, March 28-29," in PARR File, American Native Press Archives, University of Arkansas at Little Rock; "Congress Dragging on Treaty Decisions" and "Treaty Supporters Picket PARR," *Wausau Daily Herald*, March 29, 1987; "Anti-treaty Group to Fight 'Discrimination,'" (Ashland, Wisconsin) *Daily Press*, March 30, 1987; James H. Schlender, "Treaty Rights in Wisconsin: A Review," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 8 (Spring 1991), 4-16; "American Farm Bureau Votes to Eliminate Native American Rights," *News from Indian Country* 6 (Late June 1992), 7; Ellen K. Coughlin, "Historical Association Issues Statement Deploing Efforts to Deny Holocaust," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 30 (January 8, 1992), A6.
16. M. Annette Jaimes, "American Indian Studies: An Overview and Prospectus," *Wicazo Sa Review* 2 (Fall 1985), 15-18.

17. William Willard and Mary Kay Downing, "American Indian Studies and Inter-Cultural Education," *Wicazo Sa Review* 7 (Fall 1991), 6.
18. Cook-Lynn, "The Radical Conscience in Native American Studies," 11-12.
19. Chris Raymond, "Dispute Between Scholar, Tribe Leaders over Book on Hopi Ritual Raises Concern about Censorship of Studies of Americans," *Chronicles of Higher Education* 37 (October 17, 1990), A6, A8; the Hopi spokesperson is quoted from A8.
20. Raymond, "Dispute Between Scholar, Tribe Leaders over Book," A8, A9.
21. See, e. g., David Wilkins, "Who's in Charge of U. S. Indian Policy? Congress and the Supreme Court at Loggerheads Over American Indian Religious Freedom," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8 (Spring 1992), 40-64; Mark A. Michaels and Tonya Gonella Fricher, "War Declared on Religious Freedoms," *Native Nations* 1 (February 1991), 30-31; Vine Deloria, "Sacred Lands and Religious Freedom," *NARF Legal Review* 16 (Summer 1991), 1-16; Walter Echo-Hawk, "Loopholes in Religious Liberty: The Need for a Federal Law to Protect Freedom of Worship for Native People," *NARF Legal Review* 16 (Summer 1991), 7-12; Henrietta Mann, "Indian Religious Freedom Under Attack," *Indian Affairs* 124 (Summer/Fall 1991), 1-3; Dean Chavers, "Protecting Indian Religions," *Coeur d'Alene Council Fires*, November 27, 1991; Patricia Locke, "A Human Rights Crisis," *News from Indian Country* 6 (Late January 1992), 18.
22. See, e. g., Avis Little Eagle, "Lakota Rituals Being Sold," *Lakota Times*, July 2, 1991; Little Eagle, "Medicine Men for Rent," *Lakota Times*, July 9, 1991; Little Eagle, "Sacred Pipe Keeper Fears Feds Will Step In," *Lakota Times*, July 17, 1991; Little Eagle, "After the Sweat: Caviar, Wine & Cheese," *Lakota Times*, July 24, 1991; Little Eagle, "False Prophets Will Suffer," *Lakota Times*, July 31, 1991; Little Eagle, "Oh Shinnah; Prophet for Profit," *Lakota Times*, August 7, 1991; Little Eagle, "Paid Ads Call Her 'Medicine Woman,'" *Lakota Times*, August 14, 1991; Little Eagle, "Sun Dances Take Place on Artificial Turf," *Lakota Times*, August 21, 1991; Little Eagle, "Is Lame Deer Society of Europe Real?" *Lakota Times*, August 28, 1991; Little Eagle, "Spiritual Orphans' Peddle Religion in Great Round," *Lakota Times*, January 21, 1992; Larry Cesspooch, "It's Popular to Be 'Indian' Nowadays," *Bah-Koh-Je Journal* 3 (December 1991), 5; Ward Churchill, "Spiritual Hucksterism: The Rise of the Plastic Medicine Men," in *Anthology of HONOR* (Milwaukee, 1992), 27-31.
23. Edward M. Savilla, "An Interview with Floyd Red Crow Westerman," *News from Indian Country* 5 (Mid-December 1991), 8; "Letters to the Editor," *Turtle Quarterly* 4 (Spring/Summer 1991), 56.
24. See, e. g., Tim Giago, "Ignorance Follows Indians Everywhere" and "Columnists Should 'Dance with Facts!'" *Char-Koosta News*, January 18 and April 12, 1991, respectively; Tanis Thome's review of Calvin Martin, *The American Indian and the Problem of History in American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 11 (1987), 131-135; Thomas Biolsi, "Review Article: The American Indian and the Problem of Culture" on the same work in *American Indian Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1989), 261-269; Ward Churchill, "Sam Gill's *Mother Earth*: Colonialism, Genocide and the Expropriation of Indigenous Spiritual Tradition in Contemporary Academia," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 12 (1988), 49-84; Churchill, "Interpreting the American Indian: A Critique of Michael Castro's Apologia," *Wicazo Sa Review* 1 (Fall 1985), 24-31.
25. *Lakota Times*, February 26, 1992.
26. See, e. g., "15 New Native American PTV Projects Funded by NAPBC," *Winds of Change* 6 (Fall 1991), 10; Avis Little Eagle, "KILI Celebrates 9 Years," *Lakota Times*, March 4, 1992; "New TV Network Broadcasts in 11 Languages," "WOJO Radio Hires New Manager," "Indigenous Media Center Set Up in Rio," and "Native Radio Station Planned in Anchorage," *Medium Rare*, (Spring/Summer 1992); "Plans Laid for Native Radio Network," *News from Indian Country* 6 (Mid-July 1992) 8.
27. See, e. g., Beverly Slapin and Doris Seale, eds., *Books Without Bias: Through Indian Eyes* (Berkeley, 1988); Slapin, ed., *Through Indian Eyes: The Native Experience in Books for Children* (Santa Cruz, California, 1991); Slapin, et al., *How to Tell the Difference: A Checklist for Evaluating Children's Books for Anti-Indian Bias* (Berkeley, 1988); Doug Ferguson, "Harjo: 'Stereotypes Must End,'" *News from Indian Country* 6 (Mid-July 1992), 3; Cynthia-Lou Coleman, "National Conference Focuses on Stereotypes & Media," *News from Indian Country* 6 (Late July 1992), 4.
28. For examples of cartooning, see *Akwesasne Notes* 21 (Spring 1989), 18, 25, and "John Kahionhes Guilty of Stereotyping Eurocentric Scholars," *Indigenous Thought* 1 (October 1991), 27. A recent example of sophisticated satire is Beverly Slapin's *Basic Skills Caucasian Americans Workbook* (Berkeley, 1990). An example of what might be in store for American scholars in a public forum occurred on the Oneida Reservation in Wisconsin on April 30, 1992, when Wilcomb Washburn defended Columbus as a national hero before members of Native American Journalists Association. He was given a blistering response by Suzan Shown Harjo, whose best line perhaps was "Older white males are afraid of the 'browning' of America." She could well have substituted "American scholars" for "older white males."
29. I am indebted to Creek writer Alexander Posey (1873-1908) for the grapeshot-rhinoceros image.

30. Jaimes, "American Indian Studies," 19.
31. Daniel F. Littlefield, Jr., "The Native Press as History," Native American Journalists Association, Green Bay, Wisconsin, April 30, 1992.
32. See e. g., "Stanford Anthropologist Claims Possession of Indian Remains," *Akwesasne Notes* 21 (Summer 1989), 22; "Repatriation Act Protects Native Burial Remains and Artifacts," *NARF Legal Review* 16 (Winter 1990), 1-4; Madeleine Jacobs, "NMAI's New Repatriation Policy," *Smithsonian Runner* 91 (May/June 1991), 1, 4, 6; Robert McC. Adams, "Cultural Patrimony," in *Anthology of HONOR*, 14-15; "Repatriation = Protection of Our Ancestors: Interview with Michael Haney, United Indian Nations of Oklahoma," *Spirit of Crazy Horse*, (December/January 1992); Jose Barreiro, ed., *Indian Roots of American Democracy* (Ithaca, New York 1988); "Williamsburg Conference Anthropologists Challenge Confederacy," *Akwesasne Notes* 21 (Spring 1989), 18; Donald A. Grinde, Jr., "Iroquoian Political Concept and the Genesis of American Government: Further Research and Contentions," *Northeast Indian Quarterly* 6 (Winter 1989), 10-21.
33. Robert Chadbourne, "Native Americans Revisited," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 65 (June 1991), 22-23; Pamela Stillman, "Educators Demand History Be Rewritten," *Lakota Times*, August 12, 1992.
34. Chris Raymond, "Growth of Scholarship on American Indians Brings New Insights about Native Cultures," *Chronicles of Higher Education* 38 (January 15, 1992), A8, A10; the quote is from A8.
35. Buffalohead, "Self-Rule in the Past and the Future," 276.
36. Robert Allen Warrior, "Reading American Indian Intellectual Traditions," *World Literature Today* 66 (Spring 1992), 239.
37. Leslie Marmon Silko, "An Old-Time Indian Attack Conducted in Two Parts. Part One: Imitation 'Indian' Poems; Part two: Gary Snyder's Turtle Island," in Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth*, 211-216; Hobson, "The Rise of the White Shaman as a New Version of Cultural Imperialism," in Hobson, ed., *The Remembered Earth*, 100-108; John Bierhorst, "Incorporating the Native Voice: A Look Back from 1990," in Brian Swann, ed., *On the Translation of Native American Literatures* (Washington, D. C., 1992), 53, 54.
38. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Commentary," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8 (Spring 1992), 104.
39. See "Calls," *ASAIL Notes* 9 (November 1991), 10.
40. Brian Swann, "Introduction," in Swann, ed., *On the Translation of Native American Literatures* (Washington, D. C., 1992), xix, n.3.
41. Silko, "An Old-Time Indian Attack Conducted in Two Parts," 212.
42. Swann, "Introduction," xiv-xvii, xix.
43. Swann, "Introduction," xviii.
44. Willard and Downing, "American Indian Studies and Inter-Cultural Education," 6.
45. Coltelli, ed., *Winged Words*, 111-112.
46. For comments on one or all of these issues, see e. g., Coltelli's interviews with Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, Wendy Rose, Gerald Vizenor and James Welch in Coltelli, ed., *Winged Words*, especially 28-29, 47-48, 63-64, 82, 95-96, 98, 114-116, 130-132, 177-178, 196; Andrew Wiget, "Identity, Voice, and Authority: Artist-Audience Relations in Native American Literature," *World Literature Today* 66 (Spring 1992), 260.
47. Warrior, "A Marginal Voice," *Native Nations* (1991), 30, quoted from Willard and Downing, "American Indian Studies and Inter-Cultural Education," 2.
48. See, e. g., Philip Deloria, "The Era of Indian Self-Determination," 207; Willard and Downing, "American Indian Studies and Inter-Cultural Education," 5; Owanah Anderson, "Squanto. . . Tonto. . . and Geronimo," in *Anthology of HONOR*, 9-13; Tim Giago, "The Hard Poetry of Reservation Living," *Lakota Times*, July 29, 1992.
49. Warrior, "Reading American Indian Intellectual Traditions," 236.
50. Jaimes, "American Indian Studies," 18.
51. Kenneth M. Roemer, "The Heuristic Powers of Indian Literatures: What Native Authorship Does to Mainstream Texts," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 3 (Summer 1991), 8.
52. Churchill, "The New Racism," 53; Churchill, "Sam Gill's *Mother Earth*," 58.
53. Churchill, "Interpreting the American Indian," 31.
54. William Willard, "Review: *Dancing on the Rim of the World: An Anthology of Contemporary Northwest Native American Writing*," *Wicazo Sa Review* 7 (Spring 1991): 63-64, 65.
55. Cook-Lynn, "Commentary," 104.
56. "Mission Statement of the American Indian Professoriate," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8 (Spring 1992), 103.
57. "Accuracy in Textbooks Demanded by Natives," *News from Indian Country*, 6 (Late July 1992), 3; "Indian Anti-Defamation Council Formed," *Notes From Indian Country*, 5 (Mid-December 1991), 1.
58. Warrior, "Intellectual Sovereignty and the Struggle for an American Indian Future," *Wicazo Sa Review* 8 (Spring 1992), 9.
59. Warrior, "Reading American Indian Intellectual Traditions," 239.

60. Raymond, "Dispute Between Scholar, Tribe Leaders Over Book," A6.
61. James R. Kincaid, "Who Gets to Tell Their Stories?" *New York Times Book Review*, May 3, 1992.