Second, every individual thing, of every “grade” — rock, plant, animal, human, angel — has, necessarily and essentially, a relationship to God who created it. Nothing can be created by any agent without a prior idea, a “blueprint,” of the creation in the mind of its creator. So God has an idea of each thing. God does not know only what is universal in each thing — i.e., its species — God knows singular things, in their singularity.58

St. Thomas asks whether it is lawful to curse any creature. To curse is to desire another’s evil. He concludes that it would be pointless to curse an animal. As I showed above, we cannot share friendship with animals because we cannot wish good for them, since they do not choose their good, but seek it naturally. Likewise, we cannot wish evil to them. “But to curse irrational beings, considered as creatures of God, is a sin of blasphemy.”59 To commit the sin of blasphemy is to disparage God’s goodness.60 It indicates that the things that God has made are due a certain respect because of their maker. Whatever means we take to the conclusion that all being is good; to harm any thing beyond the order of nature — to kill an animal or plant except to satisfy vital needs, for instance — is to blaspheme, to offer an insult to God, the fountain of being.

To say that nature can reflect God, and thus serve as a means to knowledge of God, is to say more than that nature has instrumental value as a teacher of humans. “God is in all things, and innermost.”61 This view is not pantheism: God is not all things. However, because all things are beings, of one kind or another, and because God is Being itself, all things resemble God — distantly, analogically, but nevertheless truly.

It goes without saying that Thomism is not the only basis for a holistic ecophilosophy. I would not make the claim that it is the best basis. Nevertheless, it is a basis. For the sake of accuracy, St. Thomas’s position must be more realistically evaluated. Moreover, as Richard Sylvan and David Bennett point out, the Church is a transnational organization,62 with the ability to transmit an ecologically sound doctrine widely. Such a doctrine could be based on the following Thomistic principles. First, being is good in all its manifestations. Natural things have intrinsic value. (We might say that for St. Thomas, is and ought are two different ways of looking at being.) Second, the world is an organic unity, in which each part plays a role. Third, diversity is itself good, both as an expression of being, and because diversity enables the functioning of the whole. The upshot is a requirement of respect — for being, for life, and for the world order.

58 Ibid., 14 11
59 Ibid., II-II 76 2
60 Ibid., II-II 13 1
61 Ibid., 1 8 1

Beyond the Ecologically Noble Savage: Deconstructing the White Man’s Indian

Sandy Marie Anglás Grande*

I examine the implications of stereotyping and its intersections with the political realities facing American Indian communities. Specifically, I examine the typification of Indian as ecologically noble savage, as both employed and refuted by environmentalists, through the lenses of cognitive and social psychological perspectives and then bring it within the context of a broader cultural critique. I argue that the noble savage stereotype, often used to promote the environmentalist agenda is nonetheless immersed in the political and ideological parameters of the modern project. Finally, I reassert the right and, more importantly, the authority of Native American peoples to ultimately define for themselves their respective identities and destinies.

It was the strangeness of Indians that made them visible, not their humanity.

—VINE DELORIA

Since the original inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere neither called themselves by a single term nor understood themselves as a collectivity, the idea and the image of the Indian must be a White conception.

—ROBERT F. BERKHOFER JR.

INTRODUCTION

After five hundred years of colonization, American Indians remain virtually invisible and relatively absent from the collective consciousness of most Americans. In this way, we remain distinct from other subjugated groups whose images have become more integrated in “mainstream” depiction of America’s history and who have had more success in complicating and re-humanizing their subjectivities. In contrast, American Indians remain locked in the confines and time warps of American iconography so that, even in this time of multicultural

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America, we are typically accepted and recognized only in our crudest forms—as generic, buckskin-clad warriors and exotic maidens. This relative invisibility and inaccessibility undoubtedly contributes to the fact that Indians remain among the most studied peoples in the world; or as Vine Deloria Jr. contends, that we continue to be objectified and constructed as “the primitive unknown quantity.”

Robert F. Berkhof er Jr., author of The White Man’s Indian, argues that maintenance of the image of the American Indian as “a primitive unknown quantity” has been a largely unconscionable and deliberate project to control and exert power over Native American peoples. It is a project with deep historical roots and enduring contemporary ramifications through which the white world has dominated in part, by constructing the image of American Indians to be whatever they needed it to be. For instance, Berkhof er contends that long before European imperialism reached the shores of Jamestown, stereotypes of Indians had already been formed from accounts of earlier explorers, and he questions whether and, to what degree, these early images predetermined the actions of the colonists, pitting the civilized against savage, the Christian against the godless. To illustrate how such images were contrived to serve the interests of power, namely that of the “settlers,” Berkhof er offers the following excerpt from Goode News From Virginia (1613) in which a Virginian minister, Alexander Whitaker, first capitalizes upon the image of the “bad Indian” to advocate the case for Christian conversion, and later in the same document, employs the image of the “good Indian” to prove them capable of conversion:

...Their priests ... are no other but such as our English witches are. They live naked in bodie, as if their shame of their sinne deserved no covering: Their names are as naked as their bodie: They esteem it a virtue to lie, deceive and steal as their master the devill teacheth to them.

But if any of us should misdoubt that this barbarous people is incapable of such heavenly mysteries, let such men know that they are farre mistaken in the nature of these men ... for they are of bodie lustie strong and very nimble: They are a very understanding generation, quick of apprehension, sudden in their dispatches, subtle in their dealings, exquisite in their inventions, and industrious in their labor.4

While this passage is clearly just one excerpt from one minister, it is a microcosm of the history of genocide and colonization in which “success” was largely dependent upon white control of the frames by which Indian people were defined. Essentially, Berkhof er argues that when the rush to secure subsidies for continued “exploration” was at hand, it was important for whites to paint

a picture of the “New World” as inhabited by subhuman entities in need of eradication. Thus, at the height of the invasion, the image of Indian as primitive, bloodthirsty warrior was widely employed as fuel for the escalation of war. As fears mounted and the futility of the genocidal campaign became apparent, however, there arose a greater need for Indians to be viewed as savages in search of salvation, making way for the new and improved “save the man kill the Indian” campaigns.

Berkhof er’s central thesis is that the image of American Indians has historically coincided with the concurrent state of Indian-white relations; in other words, the image has and continues to serve the “polemical and creative needs of Whites.”5 He argues that the depictions have vacillated between noble and ignoble depending on the prevailing “acceptance or critique of White civilization,”6 so that when white civilization is in favor, Indians are deemed ignoble, and when white civilization is in disfavor, “Indian-ness” becomes the elixir. For instance, the sustainability of a white-dominated society is currently being deeply questioned by scholars and activists from various corners (i.e., feminists, environmentalists, multiculturalists) all of whom have helped to set in motion a pervasive critique of the dominant culture. True to Berkhof er’s thesis, in this time of relative discontent, images of the good Indian have been resurrected and imported into consumer culture writ large. Noble, Dances-With-Wolves, and Earth-loving, Pocahontas-like subjectivities have flooded the market as commodified indicators of the growing ambivalence toward the modern project.7 Such images appear to interject into the modern-technological world an illusion of the uncomplicated primitive utopia, an image that has now become as dear to the modern zeitgeist as the American Dream.

In this article, I explore the implications of the most recent resurrection of the image of the “good Indian” and the ways in which it serves the current “polemical and creative needs of whites.” In an effort to understand why such “needs” have remained a constant element of the American psyche and consciousness, I turn to the insights of cognitive and social psychology, established Western disciplines. These disciplines’ differing views of the social and psychological function of stereotypic images provides a foundation by which to examine the ways in which the image of Indian as ecologically noble savage has been employed by environmentalists to serve the various needs of that community. Finally, I reassert the right and more importantly the authority of Native American peoples to ultimately define for ourselves our respective identities and destiny’s.

3 Deloria, We Talk You Listen, p. 37.
5 Ibid., p. 71.
6 Ibid.
7 The term modern project here refers to that particular ideological social construction of modernity that arose in Western industrialized nations, specifically the United States, around the turn of the century, where all of reality was divided into inner experience and outer world and where objectivity and science became the new faith.
IDEALIZATION AS DEHUMANIZATION:
FUNCTIONS OF STEREOTYPE

Cognitive Psychology

According to the cognitive psychological viewpoint, stereotyping suggests a perceptual typification or "information processing bias" motivated by "the human need to simplify any given "complex stimulus environment." They argue that since "an organism whose mental load is lightened is better able to cope with [the] environment" the cognitive function of stereotyping is an adaptive strategy for the individual, assuming one accepts that "a bit of bias or error is a small price to pay for general efficiency." At the core of the cognitive view is a sense that stereotypes emerge as "inevitable features of social perception and judgment" and not necessarily as perverse manifestations of prejudice and racism.

In employing this logic in the discussion at hand, it follows that the stereotypical depiction of Indians as ecologically noble savages stems from the inability of Whites to process, absorb, and synthesize the complexities of the Indian diaspora. Or, perhaps the "need to simplify" Indians is motivated by the "multifaceted" condition of modern life and subsequent drive to seek "simpler" alternatives. Deloria, for one, suspects the latter motivation as he writes, "it is the nobility and authenticity of nature which they [whites] see in Indians and want—they want to be pure and natural." Douglas J. Buege suggests yet a third motivation emergent among environmentalists. He writes:

To many in the environmental movement, a way of life such as that lived by the allegedly ecologically noble savage sounds ideal. When we compare our way of life with the images associated with the (ecologically noble savage) we do not find ourselves to be . . . responsible people. . . . We persevere by dreaming that there are people out there living the lives that we believe we should live, possible leaders for us to follow. We cling to the hope that our way of life is not inevitable.

In this instance, preserving the image of Indian as noble savage seems to help relieve the dissonance and anxiety experienced by environmentalists and other members of the dominant culture dissatisfied with the environmental impact of modern society and offers "hope" against its "inevitability." I would also argue that such environmentalists are complicit in the domination of Indian peoples, no: only to allay their fears and anxieties about the overdeveloped world, but also to secure their place within it. In other words, as long as there remains "primitive" communities to study and research, there remains opportunities for environmentalists to advance their careers. While most researchers conduct their work with the best of intentions—to call attention to issues facing indigenous communities—it should be acknowledged or understood that such work often does more to serve their own needs (academic notoriety, promotion, and tenure) than it does the needs of those communities.

While the cognitive view of the functions and motivations of stereotyping offers some insight to the endurance of the "noble savage" image, it does little to critically examine the sociopolitical context within which the stereotype emerges and lacks any critical discussion of the existing power relations between Indian and white society. To suggest that sheer human instinct drives our need to simplify the world discounts the deeply rooted structures of power within which such "needs" emerge. Typically, it is only the powerful within a given society who can afford to proceed in the mode of "general efficiency" and those without who must know and understand the complexities of their environment in order to survive. As such, the social psychological perspective, more concerned with social context, offers a very different view on the function of stereotypes and reductionist typifications.

Social Psychology

Social psychologists argue that since "perception is socially structured," stereotyping is a "deliberate and purposeful activity aimed at capturing the relevant aspects of social reality for certain perceivers in certain contexts." Thus, in addition to being "functional" and "adaptive," stereotyping is viewed as a self-serving phenomena, with a decidedly opportunistic and political dynamic. In short, social psychologists recognize that stereotypes function to "rationalize the current social arrangement."

The current social arrangement between Indians and whites continues to be one of domination, resistance, and subjugation. In order to rationalize the maintenance of this arrangement, it serves "civlized" or white society to maintain the image of Indians as "primitive" peoples living at one with nature. The continued subjugation of Indian peoples also ensures the retention of a living reminder, an example of the physical and metaphysical distance between "civlized" and "uncivlized" peoples. Buege, who contends that Native American peoples serve as "a yardstick with which we can measure our own progress," refers to Sura P. Rath's description of how whites employ Native American peoples to conform to their notion of the superiority of "civlized" society:

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9 Ibid., p. 4.
13 Deloria, Red Earth White Lies, p. 20.
15 Buege, "The Ecologically Noble Savage Revisited," p. 76.
The tribe not only acts as a foil to our culture, but also sustains its very being and gauges the degree of progress and change in the civilization we uphold. This interdependence has a vital force: insofar as civilized societies define themselves by the distance they have built up between themselves and their respective primitive societies, a civilized culture without its indigenous tribal past risks the authenticity of its process of change to challenge and doubt.\(^{16}\)

According to social psychologists, maintaining and perpetuating the image of Indians as primitive peoples immersed in the world of “nature” is, thus, an exertion of the power and cultural capital of white society to be the determinant of what constitutes progress, civilization, and human society. Within this context, living close to nature becomes code for living subhumanly. “Savages” like animals are perceived as being governed by instinct and drive (as opposed to rational thinking) and subject to the fits and whims of nature. This depiction, in turn, allows for the “proper distance” between Indians and whites as the necessary prerequisite to the establishment of white superiority.

The social psychological perspective, in essence, broadens the discussion of stereotyping to include issues of culture, race, and power. I argue that inclusion of these constructs within any discussion of Indian-white relations is critical. Perhaps the time of overt domination and genocidal policies has passed, but modern racist agendas,\(^{17}\) by which subjugation is more subtly achieved, continues to flourish. Here the illusion is achieved through the control of the language, metaphors, and epistemic frames by which Indians are defined. The implications of these agendas, in particular, those exacted by the environmental movement, are damaging to Indian communities and to the formation of positive Indian identities. Following is a discussion of how the stereotype of Indian as ecologically noble savage has been complicit in the current domination of Native American peoples.

**INDIAN AS ECOLOGICALLY NOBLE SAVAGE**

More recently, the age-old typification of the “ecologically noble savage” is being resurrected and employed by certain factions of environmentalists, ecophiles, and ecofeminists alike. According to Berkhofer, criticism of existing social institutions through the employment of the noble savage imagery historically reached its pinnacle during the Enlightenment where discussion of the nature v. society dichotomy first became central.\(^{18}\) Within this discussion, things “natural” were constructed as inherently good, and products of society were perceived as tainted, artificial, and indicative of imminent decline. Since Indians were viewed as “primitive” peoples or beings of nature, they were viewed as “less corrupted by the practices and prejudices of civilization,” possessing great insights to nature’s wisdom.\(^{19}\) As with earlier noble savage proponents, modern environmentalists enact their version as part of a greater cultural critique of the overconsumptive and oppressive frameworks of Western society. More specifically, they contend that modern existence rests upon environmentally unsustainable assumptions and argue for a redefinition of the human-nature relationship, preferably one that mirrors their interpretation of this relationship as it appears in American Indian cultures.

Essentially, these environmentalists simply add an academic riff to the pop construction of American Indian as primitive savior. In both academic and lay circles the American Indian is employed as Eco-Guru, keeper of mystical wisdom and romantic vision. In Red Earth, White Lies, Vine Deloria critiques this phenomenon:

They [whites] are discontented with their society, their government, their religion, and everything around them and nothing is more appealing than to cast aside all inhibitions and stride back into the wilderness, or at least a wilderness theme park, seeking the nobility of the wily savage who once physically fought civilization and now, symbolically at least, is prepared to do it again.\(^{20}\)

Here Deloria’s reference to a “wilderness theme park” situates the white construction of Indian as eco-savior in the realm of fantasy, of oversimplified, and, thus, dehumanized identity. Since those involved in the environmental movement are overwhelmingly white, I argue that they too have been vulnerable to the same unconscious desire for an uncomplicated, Disney-fied existence, and have ultimately denied the intricate existence’s and complicated subjectivities of Native American peoples. Even though the current typification of American Indians can be viewed more positively—Indian as nature-loving prophet—insofar as any stereotype serves to objectify otherwise dynamic entities, and conscript otherwise complicated voices, it remains a pernicious phenomena.

**DEBUNKING THE MYTH: THE SOLUTION AS PART OF THE PROBLEM**

The notion that the “myth” of the ecologically noble savage is problematic has not been completely disregarded by environmentalists rather, there has been a great deal of analysis of this very question. Such rhetoric, however, has


\(^{17}\) The term modern racism is a term that applies specifically to racism by American whites that surfaces in indirect ways when it is safe, socially acceptable, and easy to rationalize. This type of racism has also been called ”symbolic racism“ and averse racism.

\(^{18}\) Berkhofer, *White Man’s Indian*, p. 76.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.


often taken the form of a virulent "debunking" of the myth that assumes a corrective tone in which the scholar asserts his or her obligation to dismantle the supposed Indian conspiracy to claim ecological superiority. In other words, the "analysis" has emerged not so much as a scholarly critique as it has a polemical backlash. In describing the backlash, environmentalist Richard White contends:

... proponents of this view [Indian as ignoble savage] ... gather anecdotes about beer cans along reservation roads or else cull full frontier reminiscences of buffalo slaughtered and left to rot. On either side of the controversy Native American attitudes and behavior become significant only in the reflected light of modern environmentalism; their beliefs are valid only insofar as they conform to modern attitudes.21

It should also be noted that the voices of Native American peoples are just as absent in the backlash rhetoric as they are in the myth producing rhetoric; a rather conspicuous oversight that begs the question: why, if the motivation behind a study was to get at the "truth" of a people's culture, would those peoples not be viewed as valid sources?

In examining this question more closely, I have looked at the different schools of backlash rhetoric and have categorized them according to their essential arguments. First, there are those discussions that seek to dismantle the myth by arguing the existence of a common human nature inclined toward selfishness, asserting that the only reason some peoples have been less abusive of the environment is because of low populations and lack of access to destructive technologies.22 Second, there are those that are framed in terms of "objective" inquiry, seeking to reveal the unbiased "truth" behind claims of nobility.23 Lastly, there are neo-liberal critiques in which the "myth" is attacked as an impediment to emancipation by scholars determined to "free" the Indian from the bonds of oppression. I discuss each of these arguments in the following paragraphs paying particular attention to the possible motivating factors behind each. It should also be noted that while versions of each argument can be found in the literature today, the order of discussion is roughly chronological with respect to each argument's time of relative popularity.


The "we are all the same" argument, most prevalent in the early 1970s, contends that had American Indians "developed" to the same degree of technological proficiency (as white culture), they too would have ventured down the inevitable path of modernization and overconsumption. In "Primitive Man's Relationship to Nature," Guthrie argues that "man's attitude toward the environment has not changed in the millennia since his evolution from lower animals. Only his population size and sophistication of his technology are different."24 To argue that the overconsumption of modern culture is, in essence, the same as "primitive man's" categorically denies the vastness of the "pre-Columbian" population as well as the power of their cultures to shape attitudes and fetter behaviors. It is, in a sense, a deterministic argument that rejects the influence of culture, if not deny it altogether. In addition, the assertion that we as humans are all the same provides a convenient rationalization for the mass destruction exacted by modern culture, absolving the perpetrators of any responsibility and/or obligation toward its reparation. After all, we "modern humans" are simply enacting the destiny of the race, it isn't our fault that we have simply arrived at this moment first. The argument also ignores the fact that many so-called "primitive peoples" continue to persist in maintaining traditional ways, even in the face of incessant encroachment and onslaught of available technologies. In short, it denies that Indians are not only historical but contemporary peoples. Native American communities continue to demonstrate their rejection of certain modern trappings and commitments to forging unique approaches to modern life, ones that work to retain traditional cultural and spiritual foundations. The drive to "prove" that we are all the same, that we have all been equally virulent in our attitudes toward and treatment of the natural world, begins to look suspiciously like an opportunistic justification or, in Freudian terms, a mass projection to relieve the anxiety of knowing that the excesses of the modern world have exacted unprecedented destruction of the planet and its indigenous inhabitants. If nothing else, it is a thinly veiled attempt at rationalizing the genocidal and ecocidal practices that characterize Indian-white relations in the Americas.

The second tactic used in working to dismantle the myth is framed as a scholarly quest to reveal the "truth" behind the myth of the ecologically noble savage. Notable among such studies and historical analyses are Calvin Martin's Keepers of the Game, J. Baird Callicott's "American Indian Land Wisdom?" and Sam Gill's Mother Earth: An American Story.26 Such studies seek to establish, through "objective" historical analysis, the "true" nature of the Indian-nature relationship or in effect seek to measure the accuracy of the stereotypic image.

25 Guthrie, in fact, states that "the Indian's actions toward nature were, and are, identical to those of modern man."
In “Asking the Accuracy Question,” Penelope J. Oakes and Katherine J. Reynolds examine the notion of testing for accuracy in stereotypes. They contend that the practice peaked in the 1950s, at which time the prevailing belief was that stereotypes endured because they possessed a “kernel” of truth.27 Competing views of the time rejected this thinking on the grounds that substantive group differences (biological, or cultural) did not exist and/or that questioned the utility of objective surveys and accuracy research altogether.28 While vestiges of both schools of thought exist today, Oaks and Reynolds conclude after their rather exhaustive review of the literature

...that social values, which serve as premises for the perceived accuracy (and therefore acceptance and use) of stereotypes, cannot be deemed ‘objectively’ true or untrue, but rather can be either validated or challenged through processes of social influence and political action. Modern versions of the kernel of truth hypothesis attempt to maintain the plausibility of the measurement approach and to evade the political dimension of stereotyping by divorcing content from evaluation, actual accuracy from belief in accuracy and so forth.29

Similarly, scholars devoted to revealing the accuracy behind the ecologically noble savage myth cloak themselves in the plausibility of their approaches, placing too much validity in their “objective” designs and ignoring the political dimensions of their work. Instead, they look at specific incidents of past environmental responsibility and irresponsibility among Native American peoples and through the magic of inductive reasoning appear able to piece together the whole of Native American cosmology. Although the studies arrive at differing conclusions, they are the same in one respect: they all exclude the voices of contemporary Indian people. While the intent of such studies may have been to set the record straight, the end result was the creation of yet another venue in which white scholars presume authority in speaking for, and determining the definitive character of, American Indians.

The final tactic used in dismantling the myth is most commonly seen among liberal and multicultural scholars who organize their work around the principle of universal human rights. Such scholars are intent on working to right the wrongs of the past; in this instance, freeing the savage from the oppressive realities of the primitive margins while carving a location for Indians in the mainstream. At times the rhetoric takes on an evanglistic quality in which scholars appear more concerned with the establishment of a new social order than with the particular concerns of American Indians. Native American peoples are swept up in a rhetoric enveloped in the language of crisis and predictions of apocalypse—that, without intervention, we will soon be lost people, with lost cultures, lost

wiseoms, and lost languages. While Native American peoples certainly do struggle with the pressing issues of encroachment and cultural appropriation, the language of crisis tends to conscript such experiences into desperate cries for salvation rather than as organized political movements. It similarly erases the perseverance and collective survival of Indian nations as testimonies of strength, resiliency and self-determination and in turn constructs us as exotic mutants, aberrant anarchonisms ready to either be “saved” or consumed by First World powers. The commitment is first and foremost to the ideology of liberation so that regardless of ones group membership or individual identity the strategy is the same—to empower, give voice, and extend rights. While such sentiments appear laudable, they also exude a certain arrogance in the assumption that unless Native American communities participate in the “mainstream” (often code for the overconsumptive culture of industrialized nations) that they lack power and furthermore that “voice” and “power,” as defined by non-Indian scholars, are universal aspirations. Little thought is given to the cultural impasse that exists between the metaphors of Western liberalism and those guiding the lifeworlds of Indian peoples. For instance, the failure to understand the important differences between individual human rights and tribal rights has greatly contributed to the existing tensions between environmentalists and Indian communities.20

Even though it might be the most humanistic of tactics, the “can’t we all just get along” message of liberal multiculturalists fails in its fundamental misapprehension of the issue at hand (Indians are not fighting for equal rights, but rather, for their sovereignty).

NATIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

Efforts to both construct and dismantle the myth of the ecologically noble savage, if nothing else, have brought attention to the connection between the environment and Native America. The virtual flood of rhetoric has undoubtedly contributed to the reinstatement of Indian people in the collective consciousness of the modern world. There has also been some responsible scholarship offered by white scholars such as O. Douglas Schwarz and Douglas J. Buege, as well as some effective collaborations between natives and non-natives.


28 Ibid., p. 53.
29 Ibid., p. 71.
such as Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb or Donald A. Grinde, Jr. and Bruce E. Johansen. More importantly, however, Native American scholars themselves have finally been allowed to enter the conversation. Works such as Jace Weaver’s *Defending Mother Earth*, Pablo Picentini’s *Story Earth*, and Donald Fixico’s *The Invasion of Indian Country in the Twentieth Century* are all important contributions to the ongoing struggles of Indians to meet the ecological challenges confronting them.

While the work of non-Indian scholars undoubtedly serves a purpose, I argue that it is time for the primary responsibility of defining the relationships between Indians and the environment be relinquished to Native American peoples. By primary responsibility I mean that while Indian scholars acknowledge the value of responsible non-native contributions, the time has come for American Indians to speak for and define ourselves. As more and more American Indians pursue scholarly endeavors, past biases are becoming increasingly evident and communities increasingly aware of the danger of academic exploitation. If valuable work is going to continue to be conducted in Indian communities, it is imperative for academics of all stripes to recognize that what we need is more partners in solidarity and fewer colonizers of our minds, bodies, and spirits.

**ENVIRONMENTALISM, ECOLOGICAL NOBILITY, AND MODERN RACISM**

Perhaps the most important message of this article is that environmentalists working to define the Indian-nature relationship need to understand that their work is neither innocent nor objective and that their “findings” are never apolitical or merely academic. Put simply, the U.S. government retains all plenary power over Indian nations, including the right to bestow federal recognition. In short, the government retains the right to determine who is Indian and who is not.

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33 I contend that “responsible” white scholars are those who (1) recognize that American Indians are a contemporary peoples; (2) actively seek to have their own expertise informed by local Indian scholars, elders, and other community members of whom they study; (3) take the time to become significantly involved with a community before they write about its peoples; and (4) learn to respect their location as “outsiders” and the insights and blind-spots that this location engenders. This list is by no means offered as an exhaustive list of criteria but one I believe provides a rudimentary framework.

insofar as any stereotype informs the criteria for American Indian “authenticity” it remains a duplicitous accomplice in the continued domination of Native American peoples. It is, thus, important to consider the political implications of the “ecologically noble savage” stereotype and the ways in which it informs perceptions of “authenticity.”

According to Buege, environmentalists who embrace the stereotype tend to operate within the crisis mentality of environmentalism where the path of global development is viewed as inevitably leading to planetary destruction. As a result, such environmentalists seek actual and psychological control over global development, in part, by requiring ecological nobility from Native American peoples. Schwarz, similarly contends that

... we [environmentalists] admire Indians so long as they appear to remain what we imagine them and desire them to be: ecologically noble savages symbolizing a better way of life than we ourselves find it practical to live. We respect their traditions so long as they fit our preconceived notions of what those traditions should be. ...[so] if a white hunter shoots an eagle we are angry. But if an Indian shoots an eagle we are outraged; an Indian should know better.

The impact of this ideology manifests itself in questions surrounding the issue of “authentic” Indian identity. The problem of forging an effective contemporary Indian identity is complicated by the expectations of the dominant culture that “real” Indians live up to the stereotypical images that whites have constructed for them. Buege argues that “we Euro-Americans claim to know what a ‘real’ native person is and [authenticity depends on] part, upon whether or not natives live according to the values dictated by [our] stereotypes. ...”

The presumed power of whites to define “Indian-ness” is integral component of modern racist attitudes toward Native American peoples. Instances of this control are readily seen in the common battlegrounds of contemporary Indian-white relations (i.e., land claims, hunting and fishing rights, sovereignty, gambling, taxation) in which white dominated courts attempt to exert power over Native American peoples. Among the more ironic examples of the ensuing legal maze are those cases involving tribal recognition. Federally “unrecognized” tribes are forced to document their authenticity so as to be recognized as real Indians in the eyes of the courts, while “recognized” tribes are put in the position of either having to defend themselves against charges of un-authenticity when seeking logging, gaming, or fishing rights or against accusations of hyper-authenticity when seeking ceremonial rights (i.e., to perform the Sun Dance or ceremonial use of peyote).

In summary, the current typification of Indian as ecologically noble savage serves several functions and the following “creative and polemical needs” of

34 Buege, “The Ecologically Noble Savage,” p. 86.


36 Buege, “The Ecologically Noble Savage,” p. 84.
white society first, to legitimate and reify the status of whites and their claims to a progressive, civilized society; second, to provide whites actual power to authenticate and, thus, control who counts as real Indians; third, to fragment the Indian community by introducing the quandary of identity politics and inciting internal divisions between full-bloods, half-bloods, and mestizos; and fourth, to obfuscate the ongoing struggle for tribal rights and sovereignty by effectively employing the above strategies.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The current search for an "environmental ethic" suffers from homogeneity in which "both the diagnosis and the search for solutions have been defined within the same framework that gave rise to the problem..." Thus, I argue that in a time when the dominant patterns of belief and practice are being recognized as integrally related to both the cultural and ecological crises, the need for understanding other cultural patterns as legitimate and competing sources of knowledge, is critical. As long as the long-term health and vitality of the Earth and its inhabitants continues to be threatened by the development model of the West, the voices of Indian and other non-Western peoples are vital. The reason, however, is not because we categorically possess any kind of magical, mystical power to fix the devastating effects of generations of abuse and neglect, but because we as non-Western, and predominantly non-modern, non-technological nations stand as living critiques of the dominant culture.

Precisely how the peoples of each nation contribute to this critique is a matter for each nation to consider. Some may favor political action, others to embrace their own traditions as a powerful form of passive resistance, and still others to simply be, to place their strength and faith in the courage of their convictions and in the silences that resonate in the sacred spaces of their homelands. More importantly, it is incumbent upon all those inextricably tethered to the compulsions of modernity— including mainstream environmentalists—to examine and reexamine their own (Western) cultural foundations and the ways in which they inform the various ideological systems of modern culture, and once they have been defined, to work to fundamentally change mental commitments, fill spiritual voids, and redirect destructive behaviors. I believe that it will be the insights derived from external and internal critiques of modernity that we, as a human collectivity, will be able to engender the political solidarity required to arrest the project of genocide and ecocide mounted over 500 years ago.

37 Piacentini, Story Earth, p. ix.

BOOK REVIEWS


This book, beautifully illustrated with a painting and a photograph, proposes to provide "Learning from Wilderness to Weigh Technology," as its subtitle says. It is about two contrasting visions of our world: one guided by the goal of consumption and the ideology of technology; the other oriented by the role in human life that natural things can have if not subjected to technological domination. In the first part, David Strong argues against the sufficiency of either prudence or ethics if our concern is the preservation of substantial portions of wild nature, such as, e.g., the Crazy Mountains of Montana, and for a deeper analysis of our modern, consumption-oriented condition in "technological culture." In the second part, Strong shows various ways to talk of things and their intrinsic value, insofar as they are not modified into devices or commodities.

The two-pronged argument in the first part begins by showing that, as long as we are focused on "progress," and progress is measured in terms of increasing amounts of commodities, efforts to protect wild nature are bound to fail because, ultimately, from this viewpoint nature is conceived as nothing more than "resources." This point is quite well put, although the philosophically trained reader may be taken aback by Strong's acceptance of the common misconception that a utilitarian point of view need only take into account the benefits and costs accruing to human beings (contrary to the views promoted by Bertham and J. S. Mill, for whom a utilitarian point of view requires that one take into consideration all those affected, human and nonhuman).

The other prong of the argument concerns what Strong calls "The Environmentalist's Reply," by which he primarily means the response given by environmental philosophers (notwithstanding the fact that there often is a deep gulf between the analyses developed by the former and those usually identified as "environmentalists," the on-the-ground activists who stick their necks out for us all). In this section, Strong develops three distinct critiques of mainstream environmental ethics. First, he notes that in its reliance on the givenness of science, much contemporary environmental ethics is led into considering all nature equally worthy of protection, thereby neglecting to take into account that the impulse to seek protection for wilderness arises from specific forms of "orienting beauty" (p. 48). Attention to "orienting beauty," Strong argues, is of importance for the continuing dedication to wilderness that it may engender.

Second, he points out that the land ethic and aesthetics developed by Leopold, Rolston, and Callicott heavily relies on the "is" of ecology to settle on the "ought" of respect for the land, while the findings of ecology, in fact, may be used to