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REVIEW ESSAY

Ethnicity, Indian Identity, and Indian Literature

ALAN VELIE

Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism. By David Hollinger. New York: Basic Books, 1995, 1996. 224 pages. \$22.00 cloth; \$13.00 paper.

That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community. By Jace Weaver. New York: Oxford, 1997. 256 pages. \$49.95 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

When Nickels Were Indians: An Urban Mixed-Blood Story. By Patricia Penn Hilden. Washington: Smithsonian, 1995, 1997. 260 pages. \$29.95 cloth; \$17.95 paper.

Questions of ethnic identity have become so complex today, not to mention contentious, that one may yearn for a simpler time when blacks were blacks, whites were whites, Indians were Indians, and everyone knew who was who and what was what. The problem is that there was really no such time. Today whites may be simply white, but for many years Jews were not really white, Italians were not very white, and Slavs were off-white at best. As for blacks, there were mulattos, quadroons, and octoroons, categories which disappeared in favor of the "one drop rule," though perhaps *mulatto* is coming back as the designation for *biracial*. As for Indians, there were at least two categories, full-blood and the pejorative half-breed.

The arbitrary nature of racial distinctions in regard to Indians is best demonstrated by the 1869 decision of the Supreme Court of New Mexico

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Territory that Pueblos were “not actually Indians, since they were ‘honest, industrious, and law-abiding citizens’ . . . [who] exhibited ‘virtue, honesty, and industry to their more civilized neighbors.’”¹ That is hard to beat as a combination of liberal impulse and racist condescension, although there is no shortage of modern examples.

Today the questions about identity in the Indian community involve legal, genetic, and cultural issues, as well as matters of perception. Indian identity is not only differentiated on the basis of blood quantum, but also on the basis of tribal identity on the one hand and pan-Indian identity on the other. These are the matters that Jace Weaver and Patricia Hilden deal with in their books, but questions of Indian identity are also complicated by questions of race and ethnicity that fall under the general rubric of multiculturalism, the subject of David Hollinger’s book, and so I will begin with it.

POSTETHNIC AMERICA

Multiculturalism has evolved to the point at which the movement is riven with controversy and contradictory attitudes, and Hollinger’s *Postethnic America* does a masterful job of discussing these, making suggestions on how to “take a step beyond multiculturalism, toward a perspective [he] call[s] ‘postethnic’” (pp. 2–3).

Hollinger begins his book by pointing out the contradictions in multiculturalism. On the one hand, “mixed-race Americans demand recognition from the United States census,” while on the other, “black politicians defend a ‘one drop rule’ for identifying African Americans that was designed to serve slave holders and white supremacists.” In addition,

Women’s rights activists try to help victims of clitoridectomy, while cultural relativists warn that westerners have no standing to instruct Saudis and Sudanese on culturally specific rights and duties. Educational reformers add new cultures to school curricula, while guardians of civility demand the banning from campuses of speech that might offend certain groups. Illegal immigrants from Mexico complicate the public services of California, while prophets of “post-nationality” explain that the boundary between the United States and Mexico is an imperialist fiction. (pp. 1–2)

Multiculturalism being a large and amorphous movement, an uneasy coalition of constituencies with very different goals, it is of course easy to find contradictions like the ones Hollinger lists, not all of which involve valid comparisons. In one case he is referring to the material needs of one group, Mexican immigrants, and contrasting them with the theoretical views of a very different group, academic leftists. A better comparison would be to point out that those who advocate what they describe as postnationalism generally oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is actually bringing about a form of postnationalism in moving towards the sort of economic community which in Europe has brought considerable softening of nationalism.¹ What Hollinger’s postnationalists want is an *internationale*, and the weak-

ening of the particularities of nationhood that the European Union or NAFTA brings about makes little difference to them if democracy and capitalism continue to thrive.

Whatever minor errors in logic one might find in his argument, Hollinger is thoroughly persuasive when he observes that multiculturalism has "outgrown itself," and that it is time to preserve the good things it has brought about, particularly its broadening of what was the essentially Anglo-Saxon culture of the United States, while streamlining the movement and making it more consistent.

Hollinger's concept of postethnicity is based on the distinction between two competing philosophies within multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism and pluralism.

Multiculturalism is rent by an increasingly acute but rarely acknowledged tension between cosmopolitan and pluralist programs for the defense of cultural diversity. (p. 3)

Cosmopolitanism is opposed to essentialism; it favors voluntary affiliations as opposed to inherent identities. "Cosmopolitanism promotes multiple identities," Hollinger says; it "emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of many groups, and is responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations." Pluralism is essentialist: it "respects inherited boundaries and locates individuals within one or another of a series of ethno-racial groups to be protected and preserved" (p. 3). These groups constitute the "ethno-racial pentagon": whites, blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and Indians.³ Ironically, while Americans in general have ceased to believe in race as a biological concept, the groupings of the pluralists look suspiciously like the old race/color categories: white, black, yellow, brown, and red.

Pluralist categories often lump diverse peoples into one group. "Asian" currently covers people whose ancestors' place of origin may be India,⁴ Indonesia, the Philippines, China, or Japan—quite a disparate set. Four of the pluralist categories (all but white) are designated "minorities," giving them entitlements under affirmative action programs, or what is left of those programs. Because of historical oppression of these groups, there is a form of justice in this, but it is crude, particularly because it is based on the notion that justice serves groups, not individuals. The Japanese are at the top of the economic scale among American ethnic groups, well ahead of WASPs. Should the child of wealthy Nisei parents merit preference for college admissions and scholarships over the child of poor whites? Currently, feeling seems to be running towards giving preference to the disadvantaged regardless of ethnic group, but the issue is far from being settled.

What Hollinger means in arguing for a postethnic perspective is advancing the cosmopolitan viewpoint at the expense of the pluralist. Hollinger advances his position in opposition to bigots who lock Americans into rigid categories as well as the pluralists who also do so. To argue his point about affiliation as opposed to pigeonholing, Hollinger quotes Ishmael Reed on Alex Haley: "If Alex Haley had traced his father's bloodline, he would have

traveled twelve generations back to, not Gambia, but *Ireland*" (p. 19).

Haley doesn't have that choice in contemporary America; his appearance insures that he is classified as black. "Haley's choice is . . . Hobson's choice" is the way Hollinger puts it (p. 20). Until very recently one drop of black "blood" would have been enough to classify Haley as black, though recently there has been a move on the part of people with parents of different races to be classified as "biracial." That sort of choice will not fly with racists, of course, but it is also troubling to multiculturalists of pluralist leanings, for instance, black politicians who fear that a decrease in the number of blacks will mean a loss of political power and also Indian intellectuals like Jace Weaver who are concerned about the survival of their people.

In his chapter "From Species to Ethnos," Hollinger traces multiculturalism's role in the replacement of the old liberal ideal of universalism, as propounded by people like Alfred Kinsey in "The Kinsey Report," Edward Steichen in *The Family of Man*, and Eleanor Roosevelt in her campaigning for the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (pp. 51–55). These works reflect in one way or another the Enlightenment ideal that all men are not only created equal, but are also fundamentally alike. Steichen's photographs show that all over the planet people love, marry, eat, work, suffer, die; the underlying message of the book is that Asians, Africans, and Americans, like Shylock, all have the same sort of "hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions." People may come in different shades, but like the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady, they are sisters (or brothers) under the skin.

After the American academy absorbed a good dose of European structuralism and poststructuralism—Foucault, Derrida, and a lot of recycled Marx—the multiculturalist movement reassessed universalist works and ideals. Kinsey, Steichen, and even Freud were not for all time, but simply of an age. *Historicity* became the watchword. Seen in this light the Bill of Rights may be seen as "just another tribal code [rather] than as a manifestation in one polity of claims advanced on behalf of all humankind" (p. 62). Modernist liberals had made their claim on the basis of the species, but since "species is to the modern what ethnos is to the postmodern" (p. 64), multiculturalist radicals replaced the ideal of *unity* with that of *diversity*. As a corollary, they wanted the rights of groups to be substituted for the rights of individuals.

Hollinger recognizes the parochial nature of the old universalism, but he is unwilling to abandon its ideals and principles. He points out that the particularist program urges us to

beat the drums for "alterity"—a popular new word for "the other"—and wonder whether the defense of Salman Rushdie's freedom of speech is not another bourgeois conceit, the salient functions of which are to prevent Muslims from worshipping in peace and to enable Western intellectuals to feel superior to the still benighted east. (p. 59)

The Rushdie affair is a classic case of the rights of the individual against those of a group, and there is no doubt where Hollinger stands. Particularists

are torn, because while many of them have an instinctive hatred of censorship and the power of governments, their relativism gives them no theoretical position from which to oppose the *fatwa*, or for that matter cliterodectomy, apartheid, or ethnic cleansing.

Universalism and cosmopolitanism have much in common and in fact are often used synonymously (p. 84), but Hollinger makes a distinction between the two:

We can distinguish a universalist will to find common ground from a cosmopolitan will to engage human diversity. Cosmopolitanism shares with all varieties of universalism a profound suspicion of enclosures, but cosmopolitanism is defined by an additional element not essential to universalism itself: recognition, acceptance, and eager exploration of diversity. . . . For cosmopolitans, the diversity of humankind is a fact; for universalists, it is a potential problem. (p. 84)

Hollinger's postethnic perspective calls for a recognition that individuals "live in many circles simultaneously" (p. 106) and so should not be locked into a single identity.

How much weight at what particular moments is assigned to the fact that one is Pennsylvania Dutch or Navajo is relative to the weight assigned to the fact that one is also an American, a lawyer, a woman, a Republican, a Baptist, and a resident of Minneapolis. (p. 106)

The point is valid; the example seems a bit fanciful. A Baptist Navajo Republican woman lawyer from Minneapolis?⁵ The example would be a bit more realistic by putting the Navajo lawyer in Phoenix, but this should not obscure the main point, that Navajos are not simply Indian—they have a series of identities, just the way WASPs do. Hollinger invokes Angela Davis to support his contention that these roles, by which people locate themselves in communities, should not be permanent if people want to change them. As of now people can change their job, residence, and even religion relatively easily; the postethnic perspective would allow them to change ethnic identity as well.

This is difficult, but not impossible in the United States today, and if Hollinger knew as much about Indians as he did other ethnic groups he would probably mention that the population of Indians has grown almost 600 percent since 1950, primarily because people who had originally designated themselves as white for the census decided later to identify as Indians instead. However, that choice is not currently available to most people of color in the United States today, and making it possible is a goal of Hollinger's postethnic America.

There is a question, of course, about the limits of this. Whites have no gripe if a person of color wants to affiliate as white—after all, what harm does it do. But should white students be able to get some sort of minority scholarship because they identify as Indian or Hispanic? If they do, they will probably be taking money away from someone with a more legitimate claim to it.

Indians in particular are touchy about whites who pretend they are Indians. A number of frauds who posed as Indian writers have been unmasked, most notably Jamake Highwater and Hyemeyohsts Storm, and others like Hertha Dawn Wong and Ward Churchill have had their bona fides questioned by other Indians.⁶

Hollinger concludes with a plea for postethnic nationalism, which he sees as a mediating force between transnational capitalism and ethno-racial particularism. In particular he favors a civic nationalism, a nationalism based on “the principle of consent, and open to persons of a variety of ethno-racial affiliations” (p. 134), as opposed to the sort of nationalism based on ethnicity. Although he decries the calls for ethnic chauvinism voiced by pluralists in American ethnic groups, he believes the struggle between the ethnic enclave and civic nation far less serious in the United States than the struggles being fought in places like Bosnia.

Even the overwhelming majority of those African American and Latino intellectuals whose programs for cultural enclaving and group entitlements lead their most hostile critics to call them separatists do not advance movements for separate sovereignty remotely comparable to that found in the Canadian province of Quebec or the Tamil region of Sri Lanka. (p. 137)

That is certainly true, but once again Hollinger’s lack of knowledge about Indians causes him to overlook one of the most important things going on in Indian country today, the sovereignty movement.⁷

But since this is such an excellent book, I am loath to end on a negative note, however minor. Hollinger’s powers of analysis are very keen, and his goal is a worthy one. Best to let him state it:

A postethnic perspective invites critical engagement with the United States as a distinctive locus of social identity mediating between the human species and its varieties, and as a vital arena for political struggles the outcome of which determine the domestic and global use of a unique concentration of power. (p. 162)

THAT THE PEOPLE MIGHT LIVE

In *That the People Might Live* Jace Weaver takes a far narrower topic than Hollinger does—Indian identity and Indian literature—but he treats it at considerably more length and depth. In regard to the major issue that Hollinger raises, the comparative advantages of cosmopolitanism versus pluralism, Weaver is definitely a pluralist. He sees Indians as a discrete people, does not want them to assimilate into the American mainstream, and although to some extent he favors affiliation, he thinks that there should be definite limits to who can legitimately call himself/herself Indian.

But although Weaver asserts the essential distinctiveness of Indians as a group, he concedes that just who is in that group is a vexed question. After a detailed examination of whether identity is fundamentally a matter of blood,

history, worldview, and/or tribal membership, he decides that perhaps the answer is currently impossible to pin down, but that also for most Indians the question itself is irrelevant. Unconcerned with what Weaver calls the "delicate gymnastics of authenticity," the majority of Indians "live out their Indianness without a great deal of worry about such contestations over identity." (p. 4). However, with more than half of America's Indians married to whites today,⁸ the large mixed-blood population in the Indian community is steadily growing, and these people are increasingly faced with the choice of disappearing into the mainstream. For mixed-bloods with one-fourth or one-eighth blood quantum, Indian identity is often an existential choice. Weaver cites the example of Natachee Momaday who "reawakened her Native background" (she was one-eighth Cherokee, living in a family which identified as white) by "*imagining* herself Indian" (p. 5).

Natachee Momaday's choice may seem like a matter of affiliation, but Weaver, following Edward Said,⁹ avers that it is really *filiation*, a matter of descent: one must have some quantum of Indian blood in order to claim Indianness.

Joseph Conrad can become a part of English letters and Leopold Sedar Senghor a member of the French Academy, but Roger Welsch can never become an Indian author.¹⁰

However, to establish Indian identity, having Indian blood is not enough: Chicanos are genetically part Indian, but they are culturally and socially Spanish according to Weaver. Weaver also asserts that many southern blacks have Indian blood, but are not Indian. While most Hispanics would agree with Weaver,¹¹ a number of blacks do not. His own tribe, the Cherokees, as well as the other Civilized Tribes, have not recognized the rights of the Freedmen, black Indians often the descendants of slaves owned by Indians of those tribes. The Freedmen have brought legal actions to be recognized as tribal members.¹²

But Weaver's main point is sound, and very widely accepted by Indians: Indianness is as much a matter of culture as genetics. "Ultimately, racially based definitions are insufficient; what matters is one's social and cultural milieu" (p. 6).

What sets Indians off from other Americans, what makes them a distinctive people, is their history and legal status. Whereas whites, Asians, and Hispanics immigrated to this country voluntarily, or are descended from people who did, Indians were the indigenes who were swamped by waves of settlers. The tribes had a long tradition of nationhood before the Europeans arrived, and Chief Justice John Marshall's 1830 ruling that they are "sovereign dependent nations" within the United States preserves that tradition. Although Indians were prevented from exercising their sovereignty for years,¹³ today sovereignty gives them immunity from state laws governing taxation, gambling, and commercial ventures.¹⁴

Blacks for the most part (there have been immigrants from the Caribbean) were brought to the United States against their will. Even so,

despite some separatist efforts like the Back to Africa or Black Power movements, their primary struggle has been to assimilate into the mainstream. Vine Deloria has commented on the irony that blacks were systematically excluded from American social and economic institutions, while Indians were forced into them against their will (p. 172).

Deloria's ideas on Indian sovereignty have had an impact on Weaver, as have many other of Deloria's concerns. In fact, the two men have a great deal in common in terms of background and outlook. Both are lawyers and professors, graduates of a theological seminary, and sons of men who devoted a great deal of their life to their Protestant church, and both have advanced a sharp critique of Christianity, pointing out how it has been destructive of Indian culture in the past and how it is often unable or unwilling to provide adequate spiritual guidance to Indians today.

Furthermore, to know Deloria's work is to understand why Weaver, a man who has succeeded so well himself in what he calls the Amer-European culture—he graduated from Columbia, has an advanced degree from the Sorbonne, practiced law in New York, and currently teaches at Yale—would advocate a pluralism that urges Indians not to assimilate, but instead to hang on to their cultures and religions. Deloria's chief genre is the manifesto: *Custer Died for Your Sins*, *We Talk, You Listen*, and *God Is Red* are all in-your-face declarations telling Indians to keep the faith, and whites to back off.¹⁵

That the People Might Live is a manifesto as well. It urges the Indians not to abandon their religion and cultures, but to keep them alive (p. 38). It tells whites in general to face up to the unjust history of their country, and white scholars in particular to stop pontificating about Indian literature and learn how to read it correctly. Most importantly, Weaver insists that Indian literature be considered a separate Anglophone literature, not part of the general American canon. That the works of people who were born and raised in this country and who attended universities like Columbia, Stanford, Montana, and Minnesota are not American literature may seem perverse at first blush,¹⁶ but Weaver makes a good case:

On the other hand, to insist, as Krupat and others do, on a "genuinely heterodox national canon" inclusive of American Indian literature . . . has equally undesirable implications. It becomes equally an instrument of control as Eurocentric standards of judgement are employed to claim into the canon only those works of which the *metropole* approves, those which best legitimate the social order. (p. 23)

Although I take his point, I think it is stronger in theory than in fact, since many of the Indian writers who are included in the American canon, for instance, Silko, Vizenor, and Deloria, are highly critical of the existing social order.

Weaver's career indicates that although he is personally able to swim in the mainstream, he has chosen instead to assert his ethnic distinctiveness. While some have made that choice in order to derive some benefit—hiring or admission preference, a share of tribal resources—Weaver seems principally impelled by a desire to help his people who, despite a recent upturn in fortunes, are still in many ways oppressed and dispirited.

Weaver insists that Indians in the United States are not so much a post-

colonial people as a people who are still colonized (p. 10). As a result, they lag behind other minorities in the state of their health and the level of their income. Life expectancy is low (forty-seven years for males) and so is per capita income (half the poverty level) (p. 11).¹⁷ Indians are known for their loyalty to their community, and this as much as anything else impels Weaver. In fact, dedication to community, what Weaver calls “communitism” (a portfolio word squeezing together “community” and “activism”), is what Weaver isolates as the “single thing that most defines Indian literatures” (p. 43).

It is his interest in communitism that shapes Weaver’s reading of Indian literature. The chief value of his book is that it recuperates a number of authors who had been little more than curiosities of literary history: Samson Occom, William Apess, John Rollin Ridge, Alexander Posey. To be sure these writers had been discussed by other scholars, particularly LaVonne Ruoff, but Weaver succeeds better than any of his predecessors in establishing their importance and making them seem worth reading.

In treating these writers Weaver not only ignores genre—he discusses sermons and newspaper columns as well as plays and novels—but he finds quality irrelevant as well. He never quite admits that, but concedes as much when he says, “I have deliberately dealt with literatures primarily on the level of content and commitment” (p. 163). A few decades ago, in the heyday of formalism, this would be a damaging admission, but in the ascendancy of cultural studies he is pretty much in step with current practices.

Weaver begins his literary study with Samson Occom, a Mohegan who served as a missionary to Indians in New York and New England in the eighteenth century. Occom, the first Indian to publish in English, has been known principally as a powerful and thoroughly orthodox preacher, author of *Sermon Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul*, which Ruoff has characterized as the “first Indian bestseller” (p. 62). Weaver takes a far more sophisticated view of Occom and his work, finding that “the subtle critical nature of [Occom’s writings] reveals an underlying communitist theme” (p. 51). This subtlety allows Weaver to employ his masterful pun: Occom’s Razor

refers . . . neither to the straight-edged blade nor the rule of logic and theology but to the precise, careful, subtle, and razorlike manner in which he employed the only tools at his disposal, a shrewd intellect and a gift with words, in order to promote communitist values by critiquing White power structure of his day even while being a marginal figure in it. (p. 46)

Prior to Weaver’s apologia, Occom was seen (by the few who had heard of him at all) as a pathetic figure: an Indian carrying the white man’s religion to his fellows, afflicted by bouts of alcoholism no doubt brought about by guilt and self-doubt. Weaver reads him as a more complex and admirable man, one who used the trope of irony to advance a communitist agenda (p. 52).

Another figure whom scholars have generally slighted that Weaver takes seriously is the mixed-blood Creek poet and satirist Alexander Posey. Oklahoma school teachers love Posey’s verse, which is romantic, rhymed, and doggedly rhythmical, but professors who normally teach Auden and Eliot, if they know

Posey at all, put him in a class with poetasters like James Russell Lowell or John Greenleaf Whittier. Contemporary Creek poets of far greater talent, Louis Littlecoon Oliver and Joy Harjo, claim Posey influenced them, but if so, it is the sort of influence Thomas Kyd had on Shakespeare.

Although Weaver discusses Posey's verse—ignoring the question of quality, as usual—he concentrates on Posey's satires, the Fus Fixico letters. These letters, written in *Este Charte* (Red English), are in the tradition of dialect humorists like Petroleum V. Nasby, Artemus Ward, and Finley Peter Dunne. Weaver claims that the letters are “masterpieces of *Este Charte*, involving complicated wordplay and neologisms,” generally lost on white readers then and now. But Weaver's main interest is in Posey's message, which is strongly communitist.

If it is too strong to say that Weaver brings Lynn Riggs back into the Indian canon, it is certainly true that he greatly strengthens his position in it. Riggs, a mixed-blood Cherokee, is best known as the author of *Green Grow the Lilacs*, the play that Rogers and Hammerstein adapted into *Oklahoma!* The Broadway musical seems to be a far cry from anything Indian, but this is because it has been “ethnically cleansed,” as Weaver puts it. *Green Grow the Lilacs* was set in Indian Territory, which later became Oklahoma, in what was then the Cherokee Nation. Weaver reads the battle between the farmers and cattlemen to originally be a matter of whites and Indians, the Indians being the cowboys (p. 99).

On the American Indian Renaissance, Weaver seems oddly selective. He has sections on Vine Deloria, Leslie Silko, Gerald Vizenor, Tom King, and Betty Louise Bell, but mentions Scott Momaday, James Welch, Louise Erdrich, and Sherman Alexie only in passing. The reason is that Weaver is more interested in questions of religion, identity, and community than he is in literary quality. Weaver argues that the American Indian Renaissance is more than a literary phenomenon; it is a religious renewal and return to traditional ways as well. That being the case, the figure one must begin with would be Vine Deloria, a philosopher, legal scholar, and theologian rather than Momaday, for all his talent as a novelist, poet, dramatist, and painter.

Deloria is a controversial figure in American letters because he questions many things that American intellectuals take for granted: for instance, the theory of evolution, the idea that Indians came to America via the Bering Strait, the idea that governments should consist of elected officials. In place of these things he endorses the ideas of writers like Emmanuel Velikovsky and Erik Von Danniken, ideas about collisions with Mars and Venus and aliens coming to earth and breeding with humans. In place of the Bering Strait theory Deloria proposes that Indians used boats to come to North America, and in place of elected officials, he prefers a return to the old council form of government. Collisions and aliens strain credulity, but as for the boats and councils, he argues quite credibly.

But, as Weaver points out (following Robert Warrior, who wrote a book on the intellectual tradition, *Tribal Secrets*, featuring Deloria), to attack Deloria for “generalizations, distortions, or factual inaccuracies . . . [is] to miss the point” (p. 129). The important thing is to recognize that Deloria is raising provocative questions that lead to reexamining basic issues about Indian life.

Deloria may be suspect on scientific issues, but he is an incisive thinker when it comes to theological, historical, and legal questions.

As a seminary graduate himself, Weaver is able to assess Deloria's theology more accurately than many readers, who get no further than Deloria's inflammatory statements about the historical evils of Christianity in concluding that Deloria is anti-Christian. As Weaver puts it, Deloria does not "throw the baby Jesus out with the bathwater" (one of the many epigrammatic gems that makes the book such a pleasure to read); Deloria wants Indians to appropriate Christianity to their own uses in a pan-Indian church. Actually some Indians have done that in the Native American Church, a pan-Indian religion centered around a peyote ritual, utilizing Christian theology.

It may seem to some that Weaver has written an oddly narrow and unbalanced book on Indian literature, focusing on Alexander Posey and Vine Deloria and ignoring Scott Momaday and Louise Erdrich, but given his premise, that the survival of the people should be the highest priority for Indians, *That the People Might Live* is highly successful at what it sets out to do: illustrate the theme of communitism in Indian writing and encourage its continuance. And given who Weaver is, a professor of American studies and religious studies, not English literature, his choice of texts is logical. Samson Occom, William Apess, and Vine Deloria are major figures in Indian religious thought, and students of American Indian intellectual history would be better advised to study the works of Alexander Posey than those of Louise Erdrich, even though he is not nearly as talented a writer as she is.

WHEN NICKELS WERE INDIANS

Patricia Penn Hilden's *When Nickels Were Indians* touches many of the same questions about ethnicity and identity, essence and affiliation, that Hollinger and Weaver raise, but does it in a different genre. Hilden's book is a personal memoir mixed with a good deal of social and cultural criticism. Hilden's younger brother, W.S. Penn, also a professor (she's in the Ethnic Studies Department at Berkeley; he teaches Indian and comparative literature at Michigan State), published a very similar sort of book the same year, *All My Sins Are Relatives*.¹⁸ The works would make a good pair to teach together, since they have a different take on events and family relationships.

Patricia Hilden is mixed-blood Nez Perce. Penn had claimed to be Osage as well, but in an afterword to her book Hilden explains that the family had been misinformed on this point—they had only lived near the Osages. Hilden grew up in California, first in Los Angeles, then Palo Alto. Her mother, who was white, made sure that she and her sister were aware of their Indian heritage, taking them on "culture journeys" to museums, to visit Jay Silverheels (Tonto), and buying kits to make beaded belts and headbands. Her Indian relatives, her father and grandparents, did less in this respect, and the result is that Hilden is not very comfortable in her Indian identity.

One reason is that identity is for most Indians involved with the life of a particular tribe. Although Hilden was raised knowing the history of the Nez Perce, she never gets around to visiting them or taking part in any of their cer-

emonies. The result is a sort of pallid pan-Indianness which she fails to make convincing to the reader, and perhaps to herself. Although light-skinned blacks are locked into a black identity, light-skinned Indians often have a hard time convincing whites that they are truly Indian. Hilden's brother Bill complains: "One of my colleagues once said that being black was serious but being Indian was 'more like a hobby.'"

This remark shows an ignorance on the part of the colleague, of course; twentieth-century Indians, whether doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, or professors, shouldn't be expected to wear headdresses to the office. But the problem may not be totally with the colleague: neither Penn nor Hilden is very convincing about what they consider Indian culture to be. Hilden is quite astute in her examination of American conceptions of Indian stereotypes. She analyzes depictions of Indian life in books like *Little House on the Prairie* and television shows like *The Lone Ranger* very convincingly, but then ends up retailing stereotypes from popular culture as examples of authentic Indian identity.

Hilden's discussion of the "Injun-uity" cards featuring the comic book character Straight Arrow, which came in Nabisco Shredded Wheat boxes, is dumbfounding. These cards explained how Indians "walk silently," "could ride any horse," "always tell the truth," are "stoic in the face of pain," and "never discuss with outsiders 'what is in their hearts'" (pp. 77-80). Hilden claims that these walloping generalizations "found support from family cultural practices" (p. 77). That someone who is aware enough to quote Gerald Vizenor about the invention of Indianness would as an adult value lessons about Indian identity learned as a child from cards found in a cereal box boggles the mind. Furthermore, the attributes Hilden gives to Indians—they are stoic, they don't like to hug strangers, they are reticent in showing emotion—sound suspiciously like the qualities that many other ethnics accuse WASPs of displaying. Italians, Jews, blacks, and other people who like to show enthusiasm often make fun of white bread WASPs as the sort of stiff, bloodless introverts who won't hug or laugh out loud. Of course WASPs ride badly and walk loudly, so there are important differences from Indians.

The business about lying, which Hilden repeats time and again, is especially annoying. Most cultures have liars; few valorize the practice. While it is true that whites have been unfair and dishonest in many of their dealings with Indians in this country, that hardly constitutes evidence that all or even most whites believe in lying. Conversely, lying is hardly unknown in the Indian community. If Hollis Roberts, former chief of the Choctaws, is telling the truth, then the Indian women who accused him of sexual assault are lying. And if Principal Chief of the Cherokees Joe Byrd isn't lying about his use of tribal funds, then his accusers certainly are. It seems ridiculous to have to point this out, but Hilden is hardly the only person to make this sort of claim, and I haven't seen a rebuttal anywhere.

However, despite these objections, the book is well worth reading. It is a very honest and highly interesting memoir. Hilden may be ambivalent or confused about her identity, but she never pretends to be something she isn't. She is no Jamake Highwater or Hyemeyohsts Storm. She is a person of substantial Indian blood quantum raised by and large as a middle-class white, and

she struggles valiantly to make sense of who she is. Given her honesty and the quality of her prose, it makes for very interesting reading:

I was discovering that like the postmodern universe, I too, am an eternally, multiply divided subject, waking these writing mornings at the top of a city high-rise in the midst of more concrete, steel, and plastic than one can readily imagine, from a sleep filled with dreams of home, echoes of my [Indian] grandfather, chiding, calling. (p. 5)

This division of her identity into discrete selves—Hilden uses the metaphor of two mirrors, “one reflecting a white self . . . the other showing ‘Indianness’” (p. 7)—suggests that Hilden endorses, or at any rate lives out, Hollinger’s idea of cosmopolitanism with its voluntary assumption of roles. However, all too often Hilden’s rhetoric reflects a pluralist essentialism. In one case she asserts that the search for existential authenticity is a pan-Indian trait:

In the lexicon of postwar French existentialism this casual, unremarked assumption that each individual . . . is free meant terror to most Europeans because it implied total responsibility for each act. . . . Traditional Native Americans, however, grew up accepting this “unbearable” freedom. (p. 113)

Given the individualistic nature of the concept of authenticity, and the communal values of many tribes, this assertion strikes me as questionable, but not nearly as questionable as the conclusion she derives from it:

this abiding sense that every life carries a responsibility to find and then to walk its own path provides some of the explanation for a phenomenon that often baffles white—and black—observers. That is, Native people tend to avoid the confrontations that make demands through guilt-eliciting accusations about the past. (p. 114)

There are examples of that attitude—Momaday refers to the atrocities that ended Kiowa life as a separate nation as “idle recollections, the mean and ordinary agonies of history” (p. 1). Momaday’s novels aren’t intended to elicit white guilt, nor are those of Gerald Vizenor, Tom King, or Louise Erdrich. But Hilden’s statement demands substantial qualification, as she should be aware. She refers frequently to AIM in her book—and who could be more confrontational than they?—and surely she is aware of the works of Leslie Silko, Linda Hogan, and Vine Deloria, which make all sorts of accusations about the past, justifiably so in most cases.

Notwithstanding, the strong point of *When Nickels Were Indians* is that Hilden has a sense of perspective as well as a sense of humor—in fact, she lists herself as a member of the Socialist Humor Party—and this saves her from the sort of whininess and cant that her brother is given to in his memoir.

Furthermore, *When Nickels Were Indians* is valuable for its analysis of American history and popular culture. Hilden is a fine historian, and her discussions of American attitudes towards Indians are always trenchant and well

informed. Her discussion of feminism and the Indian world (Chapter 6, "De-Colonizing the [Women's] Mind") is particularly honest and astute. Hilden doesn't shrink from attacking people she has been allied with over the years, the academic left, for instance, or feminists, and here she admits that "middle-class feminists themselves [have] indulged in the most blatant Eurocentrism" (p. 160). She goes on to illustrate the effect of Euro-American influence on Indian thinking in the case of whites reducing the image of all Indians to that of the Plains warrior, an image which Indians have in many cases internalized themselves. All in all it is a highly sophisticated analysis, the best I have seen on the subject.

Another case of attacking her allies is her critique of cultural studies, her book being a pretty good example of that "discourse."

In recent years, a new academic discourse, loosely labeled "cultural studies," has undertaken to "rewrite" the story of relations between indigenous people and colonial "authorities." The origins of this new scholarly undertaking are political, born both from its practitioners' disillusion with what they—and certainly the U.S. media—see as failures of the practical political work of the 1960s and early '70s and from a comforting sense that "politics" in the '80s and '90s requires only an enthusiastic (and profitable) participation in abstruse and arcane exchanges of "discourse." So long as the ostensible subjects of such exchanges are clearly "the oppressed"—women, members of racial minorities, gays and lesbians, and so on—comments about them (and, increasingly, comments about the comments about them), particularly if couched in the jargon invented by the big guns of the genre and replete with "self-deconstructive," criticism-deflecting personal remarks pass as militant political action among the academically successful. (p. 41)

Although like everyone else in Native American studies I have benefited professionally from the cultural studies movement, with its insistence on "making the marginal central," when I read Hilden's description I feel like saying, "Amen."

On balance, despite its flaws, *When Nickels Were Indians* is a valuable book, and like *Postethnic America* and *That the People Might Live*, one well worth reading for the scholar of Indian and ethnic studies.

NOTES

1. See Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 189n.

2. *The Wall Street Journal* recently ran an article on the decline of Dutch nationalism under the headline "Holland Is Doing Its Best to Disappear into the New Europe," and the subhead "Dutch Doors Are Open Wide, With Dutch Nationalism Going the Way of Wooden Shoes" (March 6, 1998, p. 1). Strange days indeed when capitalists bring about the decline of nationalism and leftists oppose their efforts.

3. Sometimes designated as Euro-Americans, African Americans, Native

Americans, and Latinos. I have used the above terms because as far as I can tell, they are the ones most frequently used by the people themselves. *Native American*, for instance, is primarily used in universities. All throughout Indian country Indians use *Indian*.

4. It is worth noting that in the 1980 census people from India were classified as Caucasian.

5. The Republican part is not totally unlikely. Principal Chief of the Navajos Peter McDonald was a power in the Arizona Republican party and a friend of Barry Goldwater. Fifty years ago, because of the influence of the Spanish Navajo, Christians were most likely to have been Catholic, but today many have converted to Mormonism and various sects of Protestantism. The combination—woman, Minneapolis, lawyer, Baptist—sounds improbable.

6. For Wong, Highwater, and Storm, see Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1994), 61, 82. For Churchill see Hilden, 209.

7. Sovereignty will be covered in the section on Weaver.

8. Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*, 236.

9. Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983), 19-20.

10. Roger Welsch is the editor of *Touching the Fire*, a book of Indian tales.

11. There is a nascent New World movement in which some Chicanos claim brotherhood with Indians, but it is still quite small. See Rudolfo Anaya, "The New World Man," in *The Anaya Reader* (New York: Warner Books, 1995).

12. Two cases are *Nero v. The United States*, settled in favor of the Cherokees in 1989, and *Davis v. the BIA*, involving the Seminoles, which is still being contested.

13. Legend has it that Andrew Jackson said of Marshall's ruling, "John Marshall has made his ruling, now let him enforce it." William T. Hagan, *American Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85.

14. See the *New York Times*, March 8, 1998, pp. 1, 22, and March 9, 1998, pp. 1, 16.

15. See Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 172.

16. Certainly if the charge came from the right ("Momaday's not really American; he's an Indian"), it would probably be summarily rejected by most Indians.

17. Weaver doesn't mention it, but it is worth noting that while his statistics are basically correct, tribal wealth has greatly increased in recent years due to government settlements (the Sioux received \$105 million last year [*US v. Sioux Nation*, No. 79-639]) and gambling, both bingo and casino. This money is not generally distributed, so is not reflected in income figures, but is available to tribal members as health and education benefits. In many tribes a student's full educational costs are paid for, a benefit worth as much as \$25,000 or more a year.

18. W. S. Penn, *All My Sins Are Relatives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1995), 95. Reviewed by this journal in volume 20, number 1.