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Use of Dialogue in the Reinterpretation of American Indian Religious Traditions: A Case Study

INÉS M. TALAMANTEZ

Native American religious traditions are rich in aesthetics and symbolism. Each tribal group has its own cultural pattern, language, and way of life, which generate the cosmological core of its unique belief system. The development of these elaborate traditions can only be examined properly within their own social, religious, and historical contexts. Several obstacles interfere with the objective study of American Indian religions, however. The major factor is the persistent lack of understanding between the majority of the American nation and Native Americans.

Because of their long history of oppression and forced assimilation, Native Americans are protective of their sacred traditions and spiritual knowledge. Most non-Indians have as yet failed to comprehend the full impact of conquest on Native Americans, whose lives were forcibly transformed by systematic efforts to replace their cultures and religious beliefs with various forms of Christianity and Euro-American political structures. Today, however, many non-Indians are interested in learning about Native Americans in the hope of better understanding their own history, environment, and spirituality. Since the mid-1960s, in many universities Native American students have demanded courses in Native American studies that would help them comprehend the historical, political, environmental, and religious issues which confront them in the modern world. Students today

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face the metaphysical and epistemological questions relative to American Indians with a sense of wonder that is coupled with frustration. Both Indian and non-Indian students alike are often confounded by their own feelings about the historical injustices rendered to native populations.

In this essay, I propose a method to deal with these obstacles, especially as they relate to the contemporary study of Native American religions. It is based on a dialogue that leads to a profound level of respect and appreciation of these traditions and how they relate to the realities which students face today about themselves and their world. The university setting and the classroom provide the milieu for such a dialogue. A case study of a teaching experience will illustrate how this method can be implemented.

This approach allows for the diversity of beliefs, practices, and cultural presuppositions which act as independent variables in the understanding and study of the people who adhere to a Native American world view. The motivation for this method comes from two directions: the necessity of constructing a new basis for understanding these traditions, and a sense of the intrinsic importance and significance of these religious beliefs and practices, many of which are now historical rather than contemporary phenomena.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

My own interest in Native American religious traditions dates back to my early childhood. At the age of six, I remember quietly following my grandfather out the kitchen door and around the side of our old adobe to the rows of corn neatly planted near the peach trees. I watched him as he stood tall between the green corn stalks topped with golden-brown tassels. He looked at each one carefully and some he touched very gently. When he finally reached the end of the rows, he took out his pollen pouch, blessed himself, put pollen in his mouth, looked up to the eastern sky, and with his arms stretching out and up to the sun he began his daily thanksgiving.

This image of my grandfather stayed with me and took on special significance when I was in graduate school, almost forty years later. I arrived with already formed ideas and perspectives on Na-

tive American world views, and encountered other students who knew very little about Native Americans. In comparative literature seminars most of the related epistemological issues remained unresolved after in-depth discussions because everyone seemed to know just as little about Native Americans and their diverse cultures.

Today, I bring many years of archival research and fieldwork experience on Native Americans into my classroom, where I attempt to engage students in a dialogue. The discussions which result often awaken in my students ideas about their own perceptions of the world in which they live, their own spirituality, and a respect for the profound spirituality which permeates the belief systems of Native Americans. These dialogues point out that in order to understand religious experiences other than our own, we must first penetrate deeper into the nature of our own religious realities and behaviors. In order for such dialogues to be effective, they must be placed in the historical perspective of how belief systems are studied in the United States and what this implies for the study of Native American religions.

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

The study of Native American religious traditions need not and must not entail a violation of that which is sacred to their practitioners. Students must be reminded to treat the material on these traditions with as much respect as they treat their own religious beliefs. Some exceptional, fine scholarly texts¹ (e.g., those by Ortiz, Hultkrantz, Gill) are available, but much of the current literature on Native American religions has been descriptive, superficial, and subject to premature generalizations, further adding to the confusion of students. The religious expression and belief systems of Native Americans are much more profound than their depiction "preserved" in the ethnographic record usually reflects.

Although North American Indian belief systems have been observed and studied since the seventeenth century, it is only recently that they have finally come into their own; they are now gaining long overdue and justly deserved recognition in the study of religion in the United States (see Hultkrantz, 1979, 1983; Beck and Walters, 1977; Brown, 1953; Deloria, 1973; Gill, 1983).²

As early as 1887, Washington Matthews, a medical officer in the United States Army, published the first major work on a Navajo ceremony.³ Yet, almost sixty years later, Newcomb and Reichard⁴ expressed their surprise that Matthews's work did not spur investigators on to exerting greater efforts to obtain more complete information on Navajo ritual.⁵ Reichard's excellent study of the symbolism of Navajo religion is an exception (1950). She lived with the Navajo, or Dine as they call themselves, for thirty years, spoke their language, and thus was able to make the frame of meaning of Navajo religious traditions intelligible to non-Navajos. More recently, Witherspoon⁶ has provided us with an important linguistic analysis of the Navajo language and world view.

Too many of the earlier introductions to Native American religious traditions, however, provide only descriptive detail and leave the interpretation to the reader. When not provided by "the native point of view," the exegesis is left to future researchers. In view of such impossibly diverse amounts of material, today we question the intellectual fabric which binds studies of Native American belief systems into a variety of disparate disciplines (anthropology, art history, folklore), yet rarely allocates them to scholars of religion.

Another conceptual dilemma confronts us when we ask why there exists such a romantic view about Native American religious traditions both in America and Europe. In order to understand religious experiences other than ours, we must penetrate deeper into the nature of our own religious realities. Although scholars of religion have attempted to do so, we have until now understood only some aspects of the larger religious cultures in America, and much less about Native American belief systems.

The Protestantism of the English colonists and the Catholicism of later European immigrants have been the most influential religious forces in most American communities. Many other diverse groups who settled in this country have also affirmed their distinct religious traditions. It is appropriate that the peoples who are native to this land, the Native Americans, must also be recognized as having diverse religious traditions that have served as the core and substance of Native American identity and survival.

The collisions of cultures and the concomitant misunderstandings between the different groups of immigrants and the many

diverse groups of Native Americans form a politico-historical continuity that has been clearly defined by Albanese (1981).⁷ She notes that one of the strongest points of cultural collision between Indians and whites was in their understanding of religion. Indians thought that every people had its sacred stories and rituals on which their world was based. Euro-American Christians argued that their religion was the universal truth for all. Although in practice their missions spread the values of European culture along with Christianity, in theory at least, Christianity was thought to transcend culture.

Fortunately, the future holds more promise. An awareness seems to be developing that recognizes Native American religious belief systems as distinct. We identify the diversity of such traditions rather than seeing them as a single one. All groups have their own religious characteristics that emerge from and respond to their individual historical experiences and their specific social, mythological, and physical environment as they relate to the past as well as to the present.

Since the historical colonial experience for most Native Americans was one of military and political oppression combined with pacification strategies ranging from religious conversion to assimilation, it is critical to recognize that what is happening to these religious traditions today is as important as what happened to them in the past. Continuity and change should be seen as equally valid elements of preservation, adaptation, and renewal.

These assertions clearly imply that Native American religious traditions do indeed have their own histories. To my knowledge, however, no Native American religious history has as yet been written. When taken together, their spiritual and aesthetic dimensions help explain both the wholeness and the interconnectedness of the cultural, mythological, and religious aspects of these individual belief systems across time.

HISTORICAL BASIS FOR MISUNDERSTANDING

Any study of the intricate relationship and misunderstandings between Indians and non-Indians must seriously consider the succinct thesis of Roy Harvey Pearce.⁸ A scholar ahead of his time, he presents perceptions and analyses of the dominant Euro-American attitudes and ideas toward American Indians from 1609

to 1851. In his analysis of the immigrant American mind, Pearce develops the history of the idea of savagism, along with the idea of the progress of civilization over savagism, as a seminal American belief. This belief came to life as the immigrants simultaneously confronted the Native Americans and the American wilderness.

Since they were convinced that their own destiny involved civilizing "the Indian," the ideas of savagery and civilization were easily accepted and symbolically connected in their minds. Images and ideas about Indians formed by European philosophers, explorers, travelers, missionaries, and later, Indian agents coalesced with everyday frontier experiences. These created the historical complex of ideas which shaped the thinking and perceptions of Euro-Americans in the New World. The concepts of savagism, civilization, manifest destiny, and Christianity provided the basis for most Americans' notions about what they referred to as "the Indian."

This period of hostilities and tension produced a variety of racist suppositions, some of which are still manifested today. James Fenimore Cooper idealized "the Indian" as a noble and virtuous hunter, a brave warrior, possessed of the freedom to roam unhindered, simple and childlike, the predecessor of civilized America. Yet, as a savage and a pagan, "the Indian" was to be feared for his cunning and cruelty, disdained for resisting civilization and Christianity, pitied for the inevitable loss of his land and culture, and his probable extinction.

Sayre describes these attitudes toward "the Indian" as follows: "He was, according to these stereotypes, solitary and ancient, simple and heroic, and doomed by a fate he could rarely see." This prophesied extinction went hand in hand with what was considered the pilgrims' progress: the God-given idea of taming the land through conquest and saving souls through conversion. Another important aspect taken up in the literature and pertinent to the attitudes of non-Indians to Indians has been the opposition between their cultures regarding the relationship of man and nature.

Through his reinterpretation of American history and its empire building thrust, as well as the metaphysics of Indian hating, Drinnon¹⁰ argues that in the twentieth century the Western presumption that one may expropriate land and natural resources has been carried out even beyond the boundaries of

this country. Counterposed to the issue of alienable land and property in our highly technological society is the prevalent interest expressed by many students of Native American religions and others with regard to the ecological and spiritual dimensions of our symbiotic relationship with the cosmos.

Anthropologists, historians, and other researchers have for many years asserted that with few exceptions the Euro-American colonists did not understand "the Indian." The tense situation generated by most of the colonizers' ambitions, fears, and eagerness for land, coupled with their lack of respect for Native American cultural, ecological, and sacred boundaries still provokes distrust and anger among many Native Americans today. For evidence of these concerns, we have only to look at the recent examples of the struggle to maintain the Oglala Sioux Black Hills, Point Conception in California, and the Black Mesa of the Hopi people in Arizona. These are only a few among many contemporary examples of the continual struggle for survival.

Government policy and Christian missionary strategies continue to create the atmosphere in which attitudes toward Native Americans are defined and plans for control, assimilation, or cultural extinction are still carried out. Native American responses to these policies are manifested in the current efforts by many tribes to stop the destruction and exploitation of the land and natural resources. They also seek to correct insensitive attitudes and ensure religious freedom for Native American religious traditions rooted in tribal histories, mythologies, and a reverence for nature and the land.

Native American cosmologies include many examples of lands that are considered sacred. These spiritual homelands are believed to have been given to specific peoples, and major historical events associated with their religious beliefs are said to have occurred there. In many of these traditions, land alienation is still seen as a violation of the sacred. Native Americans are often taught at a young age to be caretakers of this land. For them, wealth is measured by the way one's life has been lived, by one's generosity, by one's knowledge, and by how one treats others, not by how much land one owns. But the informing objective is maintenance of the ecological balances in nature. Native American attempts at survival over the past two centuries have been, and continue to be, a struggle to preserve these traditional sacred values and sacred geographies.

A CASE STUDY/A TEACHING EXPERIENCE

During the academic year 1981-1982, I was invited to teach a course at Harvard University that I entitled "Introduction to Native American Religious Traditions: Myths, Symbols and Transitions." The course was designed as a multi-disciplinary thematic exploration of the nature, structure, and meaning of ritual and language in the religious life of Native American cultures of the southwestern United States. The eighty students in the class included graduate students from the Harvard Divinity School and undergraduates from a variety of other disciplines, a Harvard faculty member, and a Jesuit scholar of "American Indian religions" trained in Sweden.

Since this was the first time the course had been offered at Harvard, I polled the students at the beginning of the semester to discover their reasons for taking a course of this nature and to ask what they expected to gain from such an experience. Their responses fell into three major categories, each representing broader cultural responses to Native Americans in the nation's history and development: 1) a search for knowledge and truth about Native Americans; 2) personal interest in learning about spirituality as the key to developing a philosophy of life; and 3) concern about the destruction of the natural world and its ecosystems.

A major theme that emerged from the students' responses was a search for meaning in their own lives as they tried to understand the lives of other Americans. Of course, it is not unusual to hear this need expressed by university students. What was most revealing, however, was that so many students identified serious voids—something definitely was missing in their lives. One student described this dilemma as follows:

I want to know the truth about Native American cultures and peoples because I'm interested in comparative psychological healing systems and Native American religious art forms. My interests in studying Native American spirituality are concerned with how it might improve my ways of thinking, and how it may provide an opportunity for me to know more about myself. I also want to know more about how other people express their religious beliefs in their day to day

lives and how this might help me on a personal level. I am taking this course to gain an understanding of the value of mystical experiences and forms of meditation and I feel there is a lack of ritual in my own life, and that there is not much that I respect in my own culture; this makes me feel alienated. I need to learn more about comparing Native American values as a way to achieve a better understanding between us.

Other students were more concerned about the destruction and pollution of the natural world. One wrote:

Learning to interpret is the main reason I am here. I want to learn to live in harmony with people and nature. I am interested in learning more about the relationship between religion, nature, pilgrimage to sacred places and rites of passage. My love for the earth and my curiosity about the real Native American traditional ways of understanding the world brought me to this course. I am essentially ignorant of Indian culture both past and present. I don't know if the knowledge I already have is correct or not. For the most part I am taking this course to enhance my own knowledge and to clear up misconceptions. It strikes me as very odd that here in America we give so little attention to the religions of our country as well as to the struggles of Native Americans. We need to break the chain of arrogance in our culture and to stop the oppression of Native Americans.

These two examples are typical of the responses from the class in general. The primary concern seemed to be a desire to understand and interpret human nature, the ecosystem, and the ceremonies practiced today by Native Americans. Students who seek answers to questions raised by their technological society seem to be attracted to the rituals which bring order into the lives of others. The rituals practiced by Native Americans are especially important and appealing to them as models for survival. Ritual forms are often elusive, difficult to understand, highly organized, and based on a complex system of symbols, yet I found that the students worked diligently in their effort to understand others.

These students also hoped to learn how dreams, visions, and ritual transformation could become tools for personal spiritual growth and understanding as well as guides for proper behavior. The rites of passage as practiced today by some tribes offered a form for discussing these requests. These rites provide behavioral guidelines for young men and women as they enter into adulthood. They highlight the history of Native American ritual transformation and explain to young people their duties to self, family, and community on a day to day basis. Traditionally, young Native Americans are told what to expect at different periods of their lives. This approach to socialization proves beneficial to students seeking sources of personal growth and spirituality.

While students were quite willing to admit their lack of knowledge about Indian cultures, they also expressed their sympathy toward the struggle of Native Americans. They made clear their disdain for the violations by the federal government of land claims, treaties, and civil rights. They realized that for Native Americans survival depends on the conscience of the American people and mutual willingness to understand each other and to work together to resolve conflicts.

The Harvard students, of course, did not all know specifically what they were looking for in the course. They did know that they were searching for a more clear and applicable truth. I presumed the sincerity of their statements and the desire of some to work toward changes within the culture.

Some expressed interest in understanding Native Americans as a diverse multifaceted population with different perceptions of American history, primarily because they are peoples with whom they share this land and the identity of this country. These students seemed to understand the value of dialogue for understanding the values and religious traditions of other cultures. They were given to understand that they do not necessarily have to pray to the sun, but that it was important for them to begin to realize that the power of solar energy was more than technically important and that to some people, indeed, it has sacred significance.

Those students who had majored in American history had studied Native American cultures in other courses from a variety of different perspectives. One student described his concept of Native Americans as a "monolith of struggling conquered peoples." That Native Americans have a land based cultural identity was new to most of these students. In many of the texts on

American history, the rich diversity of Native American cultures has been overshadowed by the events of their subjugation and subsequent efforts to control and assimilate them.

The course content covered Native American religious traditions as manifestations of Native American societies, past and present. In addition, I offered a set of theoretical concepts and methods for understanding these cultures. By focusing on ritual, we examined together the languages, metaphysical ideas, and symbols of a variety of Native American societies. This approach placed serious methodological requirements on the students as well as on myself. The satisfaction, however, came from learning to respect how people organize their world in an orderly whole. This is most effectively learned through the study of ritual.

Ritual, for humans, contains religious acts that deal with changes, stress, and continuity in the society. Rituals restore harmony and balance; they are concrete, close to everyday life; they require contact with primary physical and spiritual realities. Many Native Americans still sing and venerate "mother earth" and nature and have reverence for the sources of life. Some will not move from their spiritual homeland, even after others have ravaged the land and polluted the water and air.

Several guest lecturers brought additional insight into the classroom and expanded the dialogue to include other perspectives. A colleague and professor of comparative religion and the philosophy of religion concluded his talk by stating that "what we need to do ultimately in the study of religion is to break down that simplified opposition between learning about religion and feeling that living power of religion." I was able to provide an opportunity for this to occur when I invited a traditional Lakota healer and instructor at a college on an Indian reservation to speak to the students. As she talked about preservation of Lakota culture and religion, the students became aware that traditional moral and ethical behavior is learned as a necessity for spiritual and physical survival in the Lakota world. She focused her talk on the responsibility of the individual to self as well as to community. She emphasized the importance of knowing one's own language and culture as well as that of maintaining one's own spirituality through ritual and discipline.

In her discussion of the presence of Christian churches on the reservation and their influence on Lakota people, this traditional healer described how some Catholic priests on the reservation

have used the Sacred Pipe at Catholic funeral rites and how these non-Lakota ideas deeply affect Lakota religious tradition. Her presentation made a formidable impression on those present, including a Jesuit priest who had spent many years on the Lakota reservation and who later also spoke to the class about how he had been given the Pipe and how he used it at Catholic funerals. This rare opportunity allowed the students to observe two different approaches by two ritual specialists, both responsible for specialized sacred knowledge and practice. One was Lakota and the other non-Lakota, but both were or are users of the Sacred Pipe at the Pine Ridge Reservation.

This dialogue continued even after the traditional healer had returned to her home and college classes on the reservation. She wrote a long letter to the students in which she included written statements from her own Lakota students about their feelings and concerns. The statements represent a completely different set of ideas from those expressed by the Harvard students, and these contrasting attitudes verify the need for continued dialogue in order to improve understanding between Native Americans and non-Indians.

The Lakota students were concerned primarily with one overall plea: respect the Lakota way of life, Lakota culture and religious traditions, and the freedom of self-determination. They criticized research and publications about Lakota culture as often being derogatory and wrong. They felt that some scholars impose their own personal vision on the evidence and thereby distort the truth. Young Lakotas seeking to understand their own humanity have read the analyses and perceptions of these researchers. For the Lakota, these images do not always conform with their reality.

An issue of central importance to these Lakota students was their desire for the return of the the Sacred Black Hills. For them Lakota culture reveals an aesthetic that has a vibrancy and meaning discernible from oral traditions still remaining today, as well as those from the earliest historical records. Clearly their sacred hills are vital to the maintenance of their traditions. One of the Lakota students summarized this view as follows:

We have a deep respect for our religious traditions and for nature, yet you do not recognize that we are all the same and you fail to respect us as human beings. You must see us as a people and not as a minority group.

Our values are as good as yours and so is our religion. We have a strong cultural heritage, language and religion. Our children have difficulty with English, yet they end up learning more than one language. If asked about water, the Indian child thinks of lakes, ponds, rivers; the non-Indian thinks of the faucet. Our children are being taught the Lakota way. They have many teachers: grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and their parents. What we need from you is support in our fight to gain sovereignty as an Independent Lakota Nation. Support us in our fight for freedom from persecution and oppression by the Federal Government.

Another student expressed this about his people:

We have always been a generous people; generosity is the most esteemed value in Lakota culture. Success in your world means accumulating wealth and possessions. Now you want our water and mineral rights. By putting us on reservations you have made us dependent on you. I hope you (the majority culture) understand and realize your predicament.

THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE

We clearly see from the students' comments and from the lessons of history that the lack of understanding between the majority population and Native American societies is both political and religious. The Lakota students as well as the Harvard students identified the crucial significance which political and religious issues have in this misunderstanding. Both groups seemed to realize that the only way we will survive and coexist is through spiritual awareness and respect for self, each other, community, and environment.

How did this collision of cultures and peoples come to assume its present form? Indians and non-Indians have taken from nature what they needed and converted it with their specific creativities into cultural manifestations that fulfilled their material and spiritual needs (Martin, 1978).¹¹ The consequences have been both tragic and disturbing to many Americans.

Indian societies, long before the coming of Europeans to America, were in the process of significant and dynamic develop-

ment in the areas of religious practices, economic production, and artistic and material achievements. These were hardly simple or primitive peoples. Ortiz remarks that in New Mexico

long ago, when first informing their world with meaning, the San Juan people took their three-tiered social order and projected it outward and upward to encompass the whole of their physical world as well by imbuing that world with a three-tiered spiritual meaning, one both reflecting and reinforcing their social order. How they fit their ideas of order in society, in the physical world, and in the spiritual realm is ingenious, for these three orders interlock and render order into everything within the Tewa world (1979: 283).

Oral traditions as well as archaeological records attest to the development of new ideas and their diffusion to other geographical areas where they were often exchanged with or elaborated and adapted by a new group of people in a different environment. Ceremonial exchange, such as burial practices, rites of passages, ritual transformations, concepts of healing and the diagnosis of illness, and the order and structure of ecological relationships were already a part of the life experiences of these societies. The ordering of spatio-temporal relationships was powerful enough to persist to the present time. All tribal belief systems included designations for both their geographic and spiritual or sacred boundaries. Most still have a strong sense of belonging to a specific land that was given to them by the creator. On these lands the sacred histories of their religious lives still take place. The people consider it their obligation to protect the ecological balance of the plant and animal life of these areas. Destroying these delicate balances means destroying what is held to be sacred.

This intense respect for the environment has permeated all aspects of Indian life. Heizer and Elsasser¹² describe the native peoples of California as representing "the true ecological man—people who were truly a part of the land and the water and the mountains and valleys in which they lived." They add that "the environmentalists and conservationists of today feel a kinship with the Indians in their respect for nature, a feeling which at times rises to that of the sanctity of the natural world."

In contrast, the settlers who later came to this land felt the need to exploit it for its material resources in the name of what they

believed to be civilization. The settlers' attitudes were very different from those of the diverse tribal societies they encountered, and is the sharp contrast in ideals and values affected the way the newcomers viewed the religious practices of these societies. The settlers feared nature and the wilderness; they were, after all, from another land and ecosystem. Some argue that they were haunted by memories of former times and the fear of going back to the earlier uncivilized states which had existed in Europe if they were not successful in mastering this new, strange land and its peoples.

The way these colonists acted toward this land had less to do with the natural world than with their ideals of individualism and independence, and their desperate need for a new beginning in the New World. In shaping their own adjustment to this new environment, they inherited much from the Native American societies they encountered but were more concerned with conquering than understanding. Their belief that God had given them this natural world to exploit allowed them to rationalize their behavior in the name of European manifest destiny, civilization, and Christianity. Everywhere, in every direction, the consequence was the laying to waste of souls and natural resources.

As I write these last few lines, the sky is just before dawn when the silvery light spreads quickly across the landscape. I realize that we cannot expect or allow anyone to give shape to our thoughts or to find the path for us, to uncover the natural world for us or to give power to our words. The need, however, to encourage students to ask the questions which open the dialogue that will lead to more inter-cultural communication is of primary importance. I ask myself, what have I learned from the way these students impacted my research and teaching? What have we gained by exploring this material together? Is it possible for us to step out of the world view we inherited, both to see some of our own strengths and deficiencies and to understand the beliefs of others? What is needed is more dialogue, the kind that leads to understanding and provides us with a personal perspective that allows for respect of the other.

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Review Essay

Excursions in Siouan Sociology

David Reed Miller

Two Crows Denies It: A History of Controversy in Omaha Sociology. By R. H. Barnes. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. 272 pp. \$24.95 Cloth.

The categorization of the social organization of unilineal societies is often indicated by tribal typifications representing "Omaha" for patrilineal descent, or "Crow" for the opposite principle in societies with matrilineal descent. R. H. Barnes offers his historical interpretations of the scholarship about Omaha-like peoples and contrasts the extant descriptions with theoretical insights generated from the ethnological studies of the Omaha people. Because there has been so much discussion throughout the rise of the discipline of anthropology about unilineal societies, the debate about the functions and nature of patrilineal descent has resulted in many subsequent interpretations of Omaha ethnography.

Barnes attempts to write a history of specifically Omaha sociology and the developing sociologies of knowledge. Trained as a social anthropologist, Barnes takes a particularly critical stance, advocating an almost Boasian historical particularist view of Omaha society. He suggests throughout this work that the generally accepted ethnological representation of "Omaha" as a term for societies encompassing patrilineal descent groups is more atypical than typical, and simply no longer warranted in anthropological parlance.

Barnes comes to this discussion with a background in the analysis of unilineal societies in other cultural areas. In the opening paragraphs to an article that he wrote in 1976, Barnes notes Claude Lévi-Strauss's call in *The Savage Mind* (1966) for an understanding of the regulatory prohibitions operating in Crow-Omaha kinship and his suggestion that, once these elementary