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The Importance of Native American Authors

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Kenneth Hale (1972a, 1972b) has stated that the potential future of anthropological linguistics will depend very much upon the involvement of Native American scholars, a statement which is basically applicable to the entire field of Native American Studies. Despite the fact that Native Americans have contributed a substantial amount of publications to this field since at least as early as the 18th century—the poet, artist, and scholar Wendy Rose (1980) has compiled a bibliography containing over two-thousand titles—very little reference has been made to them (Notable exceptions are Liberty 1978 and Larson 1978). Nevertheless, literary productivity in the English language, progressively intensifying throughout the 19th century up until the present, has been an important aspect of Native American political evolution. The steady growth of political awareness, the manifestation of activism and, subsequently, the stepped-up production of scholarly or creative literature are in turn interrelated movements within the general struggle for the preservation of Native American culture and identity.

When two distinct cultures come into contact, a system for cross-cultural communication is quickly developed. According to one study on acculturation (Barnett, Broom, Siegel, Vogt, and Watson 1954), as long as autonomous groups are motivated to retain their cultural differences, communication between them will involve either bi- or multilingualism on the part of both; the development of a marginal, mixed, or simplified language; the adoption

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of a lingua franca; or, at worst, the use of some sort of sign language. In North America, specifically in the present day United States where a neocolonial situation has developed with Euro-American society vastly outnumbering and dominating Native American societies, the English language has become the lingua franca for cross-cultural communication. Bilingualism is still practiced among several Native American groups in relatively isolated areas where they still form a substantial part of the population, such as the Arctic and Subarctic; or where a larger group speaking the same language has been forced to live within the confines of a reservation, such as the Navajo; or when smaller groups have managed to maintain a high level of cultural cohesiveness, such as the Pueblo Indians. It is still obvious that a steady language shift towards English has been taking place among all of the groups.

A similar shift is also evident in the flow of cross-cultural communication. Dell Hymes (1967) has pointed out that the learning process between cultures in contact can assume four directions: no learning in either direction; learning in one direction; learning in the other direction; and learning in both directions. With the exception of a very early stage of contact when learning involved both cultures, the flow of communication in terms of ideas, ethics, religion, and cultural values has been almost entirely from the dominant to the dominated society. The former, operating from the outset under the conviction of superiority, limited its efforts at cross-cultural communication to a highly repressive policy of assimilation. The flow of communication has been controlled and directed by the dominant society to such an extent that even that information which has gone the other way, from dominated to dominant, has been recorded, interpreted and passed on by the latter. Most of this information, of course, is recorded in written form, a system of communication which was lacking among the dominated groups prior to European contact. In some cases, this situation has actually led to a process of anthropological feedback, with works written down by outsiders becoming reference points for the self-understanding of a dominated group and thereby manipulating its identity (Medicine 1972). On the other hand, while most of the members of the dominated groups took care to keep the flow of information to the dominant society at an absolute minimum due to the repressive measures under a policy of forced assimilation, the few individuals able to communicate in written English were usually forced into a marginal position between both

groups by virtue of their education and, in most cases, their mixed racial backgrounds. By far the greater part of the information that has reached the general population of the dominant society, however, has been purposely adulterated in order to validate further the conviction of superiority. This has been especially evident in popular literature and the mass-media (Pearce 1953, Berkhofer 1978, Friar and Friar 1978).

Given such a neocolonial situation, a steady shift towards the language of the dominant group will easily speed up the process of assimilation among the dominated group, especially if one takes into consideration that language learning and usage has a direct effect upon an individual's thought system. And yet, though it is certain that language shift along with the tremendous pressures towards assimilation exerted by Euro-American society since contact have resulted in major changes among the various Native American cultures, it is doubtful whether former systems of logic, perception, and values have been replaced entirely. To quote Linton (1936:360, cited in Voget 1975:746): "Any one who has worked with non-Europeans in process of acculturation can testify how few of the European values win genuine emotional acceptance. Even when the members of such a group have assumed all the trappings of white civilization, some unexpected happening will reveal that the core of the old culture is still alive and vigorous." Among the Native American groups in the U.S. this perseverance has manifested itself in the development of cultural resistance movements and in political evolution.

The phenomenon of cultural resistance has been alternately labeled nativism (Linton 1943), revivalism (Nash 1955) and revitalization (Wallace 1956). In general all of these terms are used to describe the conscious effort made by a dominated group in danger of being assimilated into a more populous dominant one, to preserve or revive its own traditions (Kroeber 1948:437). Examples usually given for cultural resistance movements are the Ghost Dance, the Peyote Cult (Native American Church), the contemporary Sun Dance, or the inter-tribal powwows. Closely related and usually parallel to the development of cultural resistance movements is the evolution of political consciousness. While the concerted military efforts by leaders like King Philip, Pontiac, Tecumseh and many others were political by nature and the organization behind the Iroquois League of Nations or the so-called Five Civilized Tribes showed a great degree of political sophistication

(Council on Interracial Books for Children 1971), true political consciousness in which an inter-tribal consensus is attempted in order to form pressure groups against federal and state policies actually begins to develop at the turn of the 20th century, perhaps in reaction to the chaos after the General Allotment Act of 1887 (Dawes Act). The beginning of Native American political activism is usually set after the end of World War II (Steiner 1968, Day 1972), but certainly by 1911, with the establishment of the Society of American Indians (Hertzberg 1971), the foundations were laid for the policies later developed by organizations like the National Congress of American Indians (1944), the National Indian Youth Council (1961) and the American Indian Movement (1968). Finally, the founding of the International Indian Treaty Council in 1974 and its advisory status after 1977 in the United Nations Subcommittee on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Apartheid and Decolonization indicates that Native American political evolution is slowly taking on international dimensions (Johansen and Maestas 1979).

As a combined result of cultural resistance movements and political evolution—especially after the active campaign for self-determination in matters of education during the 1960s and 1970s (National Advisory Committee on Indian Education 1975)—Native American efforts to counteract the assimilative effects of language shift have crystallized into two basic forms: language loyalty and a reorientation in the use of the adopted language to fit Native American needs. According to Weinreich (1953), as long as a dominated group continues to feel equal or superior to the dominant one, it may develop a strong sense of loyalty to its original language in a demonstration of cultural persistence. Thus the inclusion of traditional languages as part of the curriculum for Native American students has been a major demand in the political concept of self-determination in education, and several such programs have been developed in the community colleges and survival schools throughout the country. One concrete example for language loyalty is the Native American Language Education project developed in 1973-74 on the Papago and Zuni reservations under the direction of D-Q University. In this case members of the D-Q staff, who felt that there was definite evidence of language loss among all tribes and feared the political implications of this observation as well as the threat it posed to Native American identity, worked in direct cooperation with native speakers residing in the two communities to develop an orthography in which to publish

materials in the traditional languages. Here then, we have a situation where politically active Native American scholars, whose education was strictly Eurocentric and whose primary language was English, nevertheless became instrumental in the revitalization of traditional languages (Forbes and Adams 1976).

By reorientation in the adopted language is meant the process through which the previous one-directional flow of information caused by language shift is reversed, from dominated to dominant, so that the English language can actually serve as a vehicle for Native American self-expression in cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural in this context not only implies that which is communicated to the dominant society, but also the exchange of information between the various autonomous Native American groups. Presently, the English language also serves as the *lingua franca* for all Native American political organizations. In general terms of literary communication, a pattern can be discerned similar to that described by Fanon (1962) in Africa. From an imitative style with a predominately self-effacing or at best self-justifying content directed entirely at members of the dominant society (colonial literature), there has emerged a new and original style with a self-assertive content progressively more oriented towards an in-group reading public as well (national literature).

Although there are numerous documented letters written in the 17th century (Meserve 1956), the production of literary texts in the English language probably began with the publication in 1772 and 1774 of works by the Mohegan Samson Occom and his pupil Joseph Johnson, both of whom had been educated at Eleazar Wheelock's Indian Charity School to serve as missionaries to the tribes in Connecticut. Their published sermons, hymns and letters are characteristic for much of the writing done by Native Americans well up into the last half of the 19th century. Some major authors of that period, William Apes, Peter Jones, Peter Jacobs, and George Copway, wrote religiously oriented autobiographical accounts that focused upon their conversion to Christianity or kept detailed journals of their missionary activities that were later published (for a bibliography of prose by Native Americans from 1772 to 1900 see Peyer 1980). At that time, the Church had sole control over the education of Native Americans and was the only major institution that might have had a vested interest in such publications. This interest, of course, furthered works by Native Americans who acknowledged the superiority of the conquering society and sup-

ported the conversion of their people. Nevertheless, the works written by these converted Native Americans, many of whom were ordained priests, still reflect the political views of a certain faction of assimilated individuals who, relative to their position in historical time, also managed to express some of the earliest criticism of the adopted culture.

Not all of the works published by Native Americans during this period, however, were Christian oriented. Various monographs were written during the first half of the 19th century by authors like Hendrick Aupaumut, David Cusick, Paul Cuffee, Maris Bryant Pierce, and Maungwudous, which ranged in their themes from sea adventures and European travels to recordings of traditional tribal histories. Also to be mentioned here are the letters, articles and petitions written by Elias Boudinot and John Ridge, who approved of the removal of the Cherokee in the 1830s, and John Ross, who opposed it. All three contributed articles to the *Cherokee Phoenix* which was probably the first Native American newspaper published bilingually.

The last quarter of the 19th century saw several major changes that had some effect upon the style and content of Native American literary production. In the first place, responsibility in matters of education gradually shifted from the missionaries to the federal government, which instituted the boarding school and day school systems as a part of its policy of enforced assimilation culminating in the Dawes Act of 1887. In this way many Native Americans obtained an education which was not aimed at conversion alone and, consequently, the literature published after this period was no longer the work of preachers or missionaries. Secondly, the end of any major Native American military resistance by 1890 at the latest and the confinement of tribes in reservations, gave rise to a scholarly and humanist interest in the history and fate of Native Americans, if only because it was assumed that they would soon vanish forever (Pearce 1953). As there was a much greater market for literature containing information on traditional life during this period, often called the "golden age" of anthropology (Liberty 1978), Native American authors like Richard C. Adams, Andrew J. Blackbird, Elias B. Johnson, Joseph Nicolar, Simon Pokagon and Sarah Winnemucca, primarily wrote historical accounts of their tribes which included much ethnographic detail. Thirdly, literary production shifted more and more to authors from the recently subdued Plains tribes, who felt a strong pride in their traditions and took a more determined stance against federal policies.

Several of the authors who began their careers towards the end of the 19th century, notably Gertrude Bonnin, Charles Eastman, Thomas Sloan, Sherman Coolidge, Henry Roe Cloud, Alexander C. Parker, and Carlos Montezuma were all more or less active members of the Society of American Indians (SAI) and contributed regularly to its *Quarterly Journal*, which was later published under the title *The American Indian Magazine*. Montezuma had a rather ambiguous attitude towards the SAI that ranged from very positive to very negative. Dissatisfaction with the editorship of the SAI publication prompted him to start his own newspaper in 1916, titled *Wassaja* (Iverson 1980). Although political thought as expressed by these authors is basically self-justifying in its attempt to legitimize the value of Native American cultures and pro-assimilationist in its demands for equal opportunity within the dominant system, it still is representative today for a significant part of the more educated Native American population. At the same time, the policies and ideas formulated by the SAI must have had at least some influence—and vice versa of course—on the development of progressive thought leading up to the John Collier Administration and the beginning of the struggle for self-determination in education after the Meriam Report of 1928. Major authors not yet mentioned whose works appeared between the turn of the century and the period beginning in the latter part of the 1960s are Francis LaFlesche, John Milton Oskison, John Joseph Mathews, Luther Standing Bear, James Paytiamo, George Webb, John Tebble, John Rogers, and D'Arcy McNickle.

The attempt made by the federal government after World War II (House Concurrent Resolution 108) to terminate its responsibilities met with unexpected Native American resistance organized on a national, or supra-tribal level. The right to determine and direct the process of acculturation became the focus of political thought that finally erupted into the more militant activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Rather than striving only for equal rights, the newly formed political organizations also demanded the right to be different from the dominant society, to preserve and protect that which made them unique—their ethnic identity. The apparent need to justify the value of Native American cultures when compared to the dominant society gave way to a definite feeling of superiority on many aspects such as spirituality, social organization, and ecology. This trend in thought is particularly well and succinctly formulated in the preamble to the Declaration of Indian Purpose drawn up at the American Indian Conference in Chicago,

June 13-20, 1961, which reads as follows: "In order to give due recognition to certain basic philosophies by which Indian people and all other people endeavor to live, We, the Indian people must be governed by high principles and laws in a democratic manner, with a right to choose our own way of life. Since our Indian culture is slowly being absorbed by the American society, we believe that we have the responsibility of preserving our precious heritage, recognizing that certain changes are inevitable. We believe that the Indians should provide the adjustment and thus freely advance with dignity to a better life educationally, economically, and spiritually" (Josephy 1971:37).

Although the present stand of Native American political evolution is a result of the entire historical process since contact, certain more recent factors had a direct bearing on the outcome. First of all, the already mentioned and partially successful experiences gained in organizing on an inter-tribal level after the turn of the century, which reached full maturity with the foundation of the National Congress of American Indians in 1944; secondly, the experience gained by enlisted Native Americans during World War II and the Korean War which intensified cross-cultural contact and provided chances for better professional training as well as education; thirdly, the contact experiences resulting from the steady shift in population from rural or reservation to urban areas, promoted by the federal policy of relocation; and lastly, Native American affairs were affected by the general political climate in the U.S. at the time, especially by the Civil Rights Movement and the minority-oriented Kennedy Administration.

According to Steiner (1968) and Day (1972), a markedly important event in Native American political evolution was the Santa Fe meeting in 1956 between a group of young educated activists and elder traditional leaders. Up until then, Native American thought had been formulated independently by an educated minority leading a marginal existence away from reservation or rural communities, an elite usually regarded with some suspicion by the more conservative and usually older local residents. The Santa Fe meeting was the first of a series of meetings in which an attempt was made to bridge the gap between these two factions, and it marked the beginning of a reorientation among young intellectuals towards the knowledge of the tribal elders. On the other hand, the willing participation of many elders from various tribes was a concrete show of confidence in and support of the future role of the edu-

cated younger generation. It could be said that the Santa Fe meeting symbolically incorporated the experiences of more acculturated individuals into the general Native American cultural spectrum at a time in history when the dangers of assimilation were very evident, both factions recognizing the eminent need to reorganize. Of course, the solidarity shown at the meeting has only partially materialized in Native American politics, where the cleft between intellectual activists and reservation conservatives is still an obvious problem.

Along with the upsurge of activism in the 1960s, there was also an unprecedented boost in literary production. As the more spectacular events like the Washington fish-ins, the occupation of Alcatraz, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and Wounded Knee II drew the attention of the public through the mass-media, a general demand arose among publishers and readers for more books about and by Native Americans which has currently spread to countries all over the world. Some Native American scholars and literates who had achieved international renown began to use their success as a means through which to express themselves in books that were no longer strictly geared towards the usually stereotypic tastes of a White reading public. Creative writers turned more and more to Native American oral tradition in order to reorganize the symbolic content and the style of the English language, while writers of expository literature began to formulate the more aggressive politics of self-determination. To some degree at least, the English language in written form was finally being adapted to Native American needs. However, the market for such literature which did not conform to the stereotypical demands of the dominant society soon fluctuated in the U.S. Writers were confronted with quotas on Native American literary production among publishers that were usually filled up. A younger generation of writers—and artists—saw their development hindered by their ethnic backgrounds and demanded more attention for the quality of their works. Finally, in a crucial step towards what might well be called freedom of expression, Native Americans formed literary and scholarly organizations such as the American Indian Historical Society and, more important perhaps, they established their own small but still effective publishing facilities such as the Indian Historian Press, Strawberry Press, and Ten Mile River Poets Cooperative and Press. Among the younger literates, notably the Acoma poet, short story writer, and essayist Simon Ortiz, there is

also a tendency to write increasingly for a Native American reading public, thus using the English language as a means to politically educate their people. A list of contemporary writers would fill many pages, but it will suffice to mention only a few of the better known here: for expository writing, Howard Adams, Robert Burnette, Harold Cardinal, Rupert Costo, Vine Deloria Jr., the late Edward P. Dozier, Jack D. Forbes, Jeanette Henry, Bea Medicine, Alfonso Ortiz, and Robert K. Thomas; for creative writing, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Silko, Duane Niatum, Simon Ortiz, Gerald Vizenor, James Welch, Ray Young Bear, and many more (Rose 1980). Lastly, the same period saw the establishment of a great number of tribal newspapers (*Navajo Times*), national newspapers (*Akwesasne Notes* and *Wassaja*), and journals (*The Indian Historian* and this journal, the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*).

There is no evidence that language shift among Native Americans in the U.S. and Canada has led to loss of identity. On the contrary, much of the impetus behind contemporary cultural resistance and political movements has come from educated Native Americans whose primary language is English. Perhaps this faction, through its own bi-cultural experience, is especially sensitive to problems of identity caused by language shift within a neocolonial situation and has, therefore, reacted in part with a demonstration of language loyalty or a reorientation in the use of the language of the dominant culture. Native American writers and their literary productions are, in a way, focal points by which the various stages of acculturation and counter-acculturation could be measured; they should by all means be taken into account in any serious study on the results of cultural contact in North America.

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