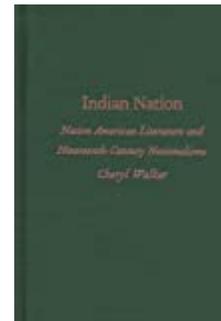




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American Nations: The View from the Forest

Roy Harvey Pearce, Richard Slotkin, Michael Rogin, Robert Berkhofer, Brian Dippie, and many others have examined images of The Indian and Indian relationships to the psychological and practical needs of white Americans. Turning the tables, Cheryl Walker asks how published Indian authors of the nineteenth century envisioned relations between themselves, or their people, and the American nation. She does not discover an Indian Mind, but identifies multiple voices whose discourses have more in common than their conclusions. Sauk chief Black Hawk, Pequot missionary William Apess, Ojibwa author George Copway, Cherokee journalist John Rollin Ridge, Paiute historian and lobbyist Sarah Winnemucca, and Potawatomi novelist and essayist Samuel Pokagon differ in their assessments of their own and the Other culture, their prescriptions for a more just system of relationships between the tribes and the United States, and their understandings of Indian contributions to the American nation. But all, in varying proportions, speak transpositional discourses and subjugated discourses. Transpositional discourses point to reciprocal and egalitarian relations, similarities among peoples, and utopian reconstruction of race relations. Sub-

jugated discourses assume hierarchical relations among cultures and peoples; alternate (sometimes antically) between self-abasement and inflated egotism, or between idealizing and denouncing the Other; and serve political rather than utopian purposes.

Black Hawk, who gave his name to an 1832 war between the Sauk and the United States, fell prisoner and got trips to eastern cities to impress him with the might of the Americans. In his dictated autobiography, Black Hawk commends the industry of the people who built the cities and railroads, and he finds West Point a place where the white soldiers can do their dances and elder warriors instruct the young—a useful and unexpected adaptation of the Sauk system. But Black Hawk considers himself as great a leader as Andrew Jackson, thinks the Sauk better warriors and more consistent practitioners of Christian principles than Jackson's people, and believes in the general superiority of Sauk culture before alcoholism spoiled it. Though his factional enemies excluded him from the tribe, Black Hawk remained transpositional, and Sauk, in his attitudes. Able to see virtues in some practices of the white Americans, he evaluated each all on their own

merits as he observed them. His Indian America as utopia would have been a family of independent nations.

More ambivalent was William Apess, a Pequot removed at six from his alcoholic family to be adopted and converted by whites. His autobiographic *A Son of the Forest*, first published in 1829, mimicked the conversion narrative and idealized Christianity, but his self-abasement was accompanied by a sometimes ironic critique of American hypocrisy. A Methodist evangelist, Apess saw his nation sometimes as “America,” sometimes as the Pequot tribe, and sometimes as Indians in general. Mirroring Indian and Other approaches to war, he points out that when Indians defended their liberty others regarded them as savage; when Americans defended their liberty against British invaders, they called themselves patriots. In one of his essays, Apess presented King Philip, whose war killed five thousand Indian and white New Englanders, as a practitioner of martial, Christian, and republican virtue superior on all counts to George Washington. A just nation, he insisted, would permit Indians to participate equally in national life; America was not a just nation. However attractive its cultural ideals, its practices proved uniformly iniquitous. “Apess is ready,” Walker points out, “to indict white society as thoroughly corrupt, and yet clearly also wants to join it (p. 57).” Having no Pequot nation left to rejoin, he seeks not national independence, but equal suffrage in the American state.

Still more unstable in his imaging of American ideals was George Copway, whose *Life History* (1847) presents him as “a text, a personification of Indian progress toward acculturation (p. 84).” Copway veers between adulation of white culture and denunciation of white perfidy, between pride in his newfound beliefs and nostalgia for the loss of his childhood convictions. In life, Copway joined the Know-Nothings, who knew how to appreciate real Natives, kidnapped Indian boys for the Union army, practiced “Indian” medicine, and converted to Catholicism. He consistently used hierarchical language but couldn’t decide who belonged on top. He venerated traditional culture, found Christianity (mostly) superior to traditional belief, and believed that alcohol had rendered traditional society irrecoverable. Rather than vanish, Indian people should discover a final resting place in South Dakota, in a state called Kahgega (Ever to be), where they could live as farmers under a white governor and an Indian lieutenant governor and receive their education in English. Walker finds Copway representative of a tendency among postcolonial writers “to juxtapose the fragmented experience of the individual with the dream of a

significant polis or group, without being able to resolve the emergent contradictions.”

Son and grandson of the men who headed the Treaty Party among the Cherokees and lost their lives for signing the 1835 Treaty of New Echota, John Rollin Ridge escaped the consequences of Cherokee factionalism by emigrating to California. There he pursued a successful career as a journalist, making his mark in 1854 with a legendary account of a composite Mexican outlaw, Joaquin Murieta, the first novel authored by an American Indian. Walker finds Ridge ambivalent about the rule of law: ideally it should prevail but where law is unjust, honor requires revenge and transcends law. Ridge fully appreciates American racism, embodied in the lawless law excluding non-whites from the gold fields, and finds in both Murieta’s fictional California and his own real California a war of all against all. Walker emphasizes Ridge’s sense of isolation from any just community; no doubt his experiences of factional battle in the Cherokee Nation West led both to his isolation and to his ambivalent regard for law and honor. California was not the only place where the honorable pursuit of revenge clashed with law and order.

Born in 1844 among the Paiutes of Nevada, Sarah Winnemucca accompanied her grandfather to California, briefly attended a convent school there and worked for white families, one of which adopted her. After massacres and disease took most of her Paiute family, Sarah decided to rejoin the tribe. She continued to move back and forth between Paiute and white societies, served as a scout for the army, and used her English, Spanish, and Indian languages in the service of U.S. Indian agents. Her *Life Among the Piutes* represents one of many efforts to influence congressional policy for the benefit of her tribe. An advocate of bilingual education, she briefly managed a school in hopes of replacing the government’s ethnocidal educational policies with more culturally sensitive practices. Like Harriet Beecher Stowe, she appealed to the Golden Rule and asked her readers to identify with the lowly. She commended the Paiute practice of involving women in political decision-making. Though she was a Methodist, she valued the traditional beliefs of her tribe and saw no conflict between Christian convictions and reliance on dreams and Ghost Dancing. A mediator between Indian and white, she sought citizenship both in her tribe and in the United States.

Novelist and Potawatomi chief Simon Pokagon addressed the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair with a progressive paean to education. Privately, he also handed out a com-

position he had inscribed on birch-bark, "The Red Man's Rebuke," reprinted as an appendix to Walker's book. In it, he explains his reluctance to "celebrate our own funeral, the discovery of America" (p. 211). He imagines a heaven in which the Great Spirit finds whites guilty of perverting the use of tobacco, cheating and robbing Indians of land, money, and goods, and introducing the "beverage of hell" to newly converted Indians. The Great Spirit commands that whites cease and desist from all these practices, and licenses red men to cast them out of heaven should they continue their nefarious doings.

Many of the themes Walker discovers in literary documents emerge also from tribal petitions, treaty talks, and other official messages. Cherokee negotiators and petitioners were fond of combining pride in "civilization" with assertions that the United States rarely lived up to its Christian professions or its republican laws. The sentimental language of subjugation, or victimization, found in Sarah Winnemucca's writings, also produced calculated effects in Cherokee petitions and editorials in the tribal newspaper. Nor were members of that and other tribes agreed on the terms of their relationship to the United States. Some sought citizenship; others preferred independent nationhood. The politics of Indian America were as multivocal as its literature.

Walker offers both interesting and persuasive read-

ings of literary texts, but she is occasionally less adept in describing U.S. policies and practice. She associates the development of off-reservation boarding schools with the passage of the general allotment act of 1887, though her own text makes clear that experiments at Hampton and Carlisle preceded that legislation. She takes too literally Russell Thornton's counterfactual estimate that the Cherokees of the post-removal period would have had a much larger population had there been no removal. Thornton does not assert, as Walker does, that eight thousand Cherokees perished on the Trail of Tears. John Marshall's decision in *Worcester* did not put the Cherokees in a "special category, thus shielding them from the threat posed by the terms of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 (p. 115)." It simply acknowledged that U.S. treaties with the tribe gave them the right of self-government. The decision was intended not to exempt the Cherokees from negotiations looking to their removal but to prevent Georgia from governing them before they agreed to remove. Such misleading statements are few, and none of them affect Walker's major interpretations and conclusions. She quite successfully counters the White Man's Indian with the Indian's White Man.

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