

Journal of American Indian Education

Volume 38 Number 3
Spring 1999
Special Issue 1

The Education Connection: Christopher Columbus to Sherman Alexie

Margaret Connell-Szasz

Education should be viewed as "the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations."¹

For almost two decades the University of New Mexico students enrolled in the American Indian/Alaska Native History courses offered under my direction have been asked why they chose to study this dimension of American history. The varied responses reflect both their personal experiences and their ethnicity. Non-Native students frequently cite their lack of knowledge and general interest in Native cultures. Promising teachers assert their need to gain background for their future courses. Native students admit their curiosity about tribes other than their own. The bond that links all of these students, however, is the common quest for understanding our past as it emerged through the lengthy and often hostile relations between Native North Americans and the many outsiders who came as immigrants to this land.

In recent years this quest has been epitomized by the students' keen enjoyment of one of the books discussed in class: Sherman Alexie's collection of stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, recently adapted by Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) and Chris Eyre (Cheyenne-Arapaho) to create the film *Smoke Signals*.² Although many books come under the students' purview in these courses, The Lone

Ranger and Tonto has become the *sine qua non*. More than any other volume, for these students it epitomizes efforts to reach across the cultural chasm between Native and outsider. Alexie's uncanny ability to capture Native voices and project these voices to both Native and non-Native American audiences symbolizes the five-century educational exchange that began with Christopher Columbus and has persisted to the present. Through their shared interest in Native history these students have become a part of the education exchange between Native and non-Native America.

In this paper I will suggest that from earliest contact the education connection has moved in both directions: outsiders have taught Native Americans about their means of education; Natives have taught other Americans about their means of education. Simultaneously, tribes have exchanged educational ideas and customs within Indian Country.

The existence of an education exchange does not infer cross-cultural understanding. The record of understanding between Indian Country and mainstream America holds many harsh memories. The federal government's Task Force on Indian Nations At Risk, a study of American Indian and Alaska Native education which held hearings across Indian Country in 1990-91, heard ample testimony to this effect. In Seattle, a specialist in Indian education charged that "newspapers only report on crises--the negative things that happen--which creates an undercurrent of negativism in the community regarding Indian people." In Billings, another educator placed responsibility for negative stereotyping of Indians upon the "portrayal of Native Americans in films, and to discussion in the media and on the street."³ Nor has stereotyping been one-sided. In the late 1960's, when Vine Deloria, Jr., wrote *Custer Died for Your Sins*, he

lambasted missionaries, anthropologists and "other friends" of Indian Country. Countless tribes have entertained themselves with "joking imitations of Anglo-Americans." Placing this in context, Keith Basso wrote, "whereas Whitemen are indisputably human beings, American Indian conceptions of 'the whiteman' are inevitably cultural constructions." Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., looked at the other side of the coin when he assessed "the White image of the Indian," as an image that "was always alien to the White."⁴ Stereotyping has persisted between tribes, as well. According to one story, when the bureaucrats of the Indian New Deal attempted to introduce sheep raising on the northern Plains, the Lakota drove all of the sheep into the river, where the animals died. When asked why they had taken this action, they replied that they did not want to become short of stature, like those mutton raisers who lived in New Mexico.

The stereotyped Indian, alongside the stereotyped other American and the stereotyped "other tribe," have colored our perceptions of each other through the last five centuries. Accepting this as a given, we need to move beyond it to the cross-cultural teaming that has also woven itself into the fabric of our shared past.

Many of the students in those Native American History courses had long accepted the notion that these centuries of cultural exchange have affected only one side of the cultural divide, namely, American Indians and Alaska Natives. According to this view, when immigrants arrived with their means of education, that is, the process by which they transferred their culture from one generation to the next, any educational changes that resulted from the meeting of these cultures were absorbed exclusively by Native people. Since I am dubious about this position, I would like to explore its validity by looking at some of the cultural frontiers of Native and non-Native interaction from

colonial through late-twentieth-century America, focusing on the education connection as a cross-cultural phenomenon that moved in both directions.

These five centuries can be divided into roughly three eras: first contact through the mid- 1800s, mid- 1800s through the mid- 1900s; and the 1960s forward. The flexibility of these dates results from the variability of contact. For example, in the Native-Spanish border region (Florida to California), contact began in the early 1500s, yet some of the region did not become part of this nation until the mid- 1800s, when Americans began to emigrate to the Pacific.

Since all people have transmitted their culture across generations, the universality of this broadly defined theme of education suggests that some commonalities link all of humankind in the rearing of children. This clearly holds true in America. On all sides of the cultural frontier families and communities have taught children specific fundamental skills necessary for their maturity. Whether Wampanoag or English, Tewa or Spaniard, Huron or French, the children of these diverse cultures have learned how to survive through mastering of economic skills, acquiring knowledge of their cultural heritage, and gaining spiritual awareness. The skills, the heritage, and the spirituality, all differed. The means by which these aspects of culture were taught also varied. But the core needed to transfer these skills has remained a constant for all of the diverse peoples engaged in America's cultural exchange.⁵

The early encounters of the education connection saw a considerable give and take. Whether they were Spaniards, Dutch, Scots, Russians or Africans by heritage, the immigrants had much to learn about living on Turtle Island, and wherever they settled they depended on instruction by the Native people. Once Natives of another land, these

immigrants probably taught their children the cultural heritage and spiritual awareness that they carried on board ship in the guise of cultural baggage, but initially most of them were novices in their understanding of those economic survival skills appropriate to the conditions of North America.

In some regions, the immigrants were looked upon as weak and pitiful because they could not or would not support themselves. Among the Tewa, Tiwa, Towa, and Keres people of the Rio Grande, Vasquez de Coronado and his men appeared like a plague of locusts because they ate the stores of food that these high desert people had saved for future seasons. Among the Algonquian people of Powhatan's villages, the English settlers at Jamestown became objects of scorn because they did not plant and care for the maize necessary for the winter, and were forced to trade with the Powhatans to stave off starvation. Among hunting and gathering people, early contact with outsiders proved equally imbalanced. Even when the immigrants began to adapt Native techniques in raising maize, beans and squash, or Native skills of travel by canoe and snowshoe, Natives also recognized the immigrants' lack of knowledge about the flora and fauna. Consequently, Natives taught these strangers how to use plants for healing. In the early 1700s Virginian William Byrd described native cures for snake bites:

We found in the low ground several plants of the fern root, which is said to be much the strongest antidote yet discovered against the poison of the rattlesnake The root has a faint spicy taste and is preferred by the southern Indians to all other counterpoisons in this country. But there is another sort preferred by the northern Indians that they call Seneca rattlesnake root, to which wonderful virtues are ascribed in the cure of pleurisies, fever rheumatism and dropsies, besides it being a powerful antidote against the venom of the rattlesnake.⁶

Although the outsiders' physical survival was contingent upon Native willingness to instruct them, as Jacques Cartier learned in a disastrous winter encounter with scurvy

along the St. Lawrence River, the exchange of economic survival skills was not exclusively one-sided. When the Spaniards brought their customs to the Rio Grande, and thence to Navajos and Apaches, Natives across North America gained much that they wove into their own cultural imprint of the world. The Navajo Elders said that "back in the days when time was new, the Twin War Gods went to father Sun and asked for gifts for their people, . . . Sun offered the Twins horses, and they refused them ... they told Sun: "We shall need this in the future, but not now." As the horse came to be part of their culture, the Navajos celebrated it in song.

My horse has a hoof like a striped agate
His fetlock is like a fine eagle-plume;
His legs are like quick lightning.
My horse's body is like an eagle-plumed arrow;
My horse has a tail like a trailing black cloud.

* * * * *

His mane is made of short rainbows.⁷

In the north Pacific, one of the earliest exchanges of cultural worlds pitted Alaska Natives against Russians seeking furs. While the Russians became totally dependent on the skilled Aleut sea otter hunters, the Aleuts themselves became "great tea drinkers as well as tobacco chewers."⁸

Thus, economic survival and adaptation absorbed from these encounters and then taught to one's children dominated much of the early exchange between Native and outsider. On both sides of the cultural divide Natives and immigrants shared some commonalities in the means by which they transmitted their cultural heritage across the generations. This was, however, more characteristic of certain regions. For example, in New England the gap between Puritan and Algonquian was accentuated by the line that divided a literate from a non-literate people. Perhaps the most literate of colonial

Euroamericans, these English nonconformists transmitted much of their cultural heritage through study of the Bible and other devotional works. By contrast, in the Carolinas, like their Native counterparts, most Euroamericans and African Americans remained illiterate. Here, the family/community passed on an oral cultural heritage in both Native and immigrant communities.

The importance of literacy to the immigrant community determined to a large degree its commitment to transferring that skill to the Native community. Where immigrant groups provided schools for their own children, so too did they open schools for Native children. Where immigrants did not concern themselves with formal schooling, they seldom saw it as a necessity for Natives. The Puritans provided perhaps more schooling for the southern New England Algonquian than did any other immigrant group. In both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, New England witnessed a panoply of figures, both Native and English, involved in their effort toward Native literacy. Elsewhere, Euroamerican interest in teaching the written word was sporadic. Outside New England, New York, and Virginia, the immigrants' interest in this dimension of the education connection was restricted by limitations of geography, specific denominational positions on schooling (i.e., the Quakers) or the presence of large slave populations whose potential for literacy was discouraged by Euroamericans.⁹

In the early years of contact (with the exception of the Puritans), most of those who sailed from European homelands had themselves received scant formal schooling. Like their hosts, they had absorbed their cultural heritage within family and community. Since most of the immigrants were nonliterate, they, too, depended heavily upon an oral heritage. Through the medium of story telling they related ancient accounts of the

people's origins, taught the standards of behavior, and provided entertainment.¹⁰ A familiar character to many Native children was coyote or Trickster, who was recalled by a Maidu woman of California,

A long time ago, when I was a little girl, I used to go around with my grandmothers and grandfather. I used to go along when they went to the mountains ... when it got dark, we all used to sleep in a little house, built Indian style. Then, the children would all be bedded down and my late grandfather would tell tales of coyote.... "All of you listen very closely," he would say to us. "I am talking in the ancient manner."¹¹

This native custom of learning by the telling and hearing of stories must have struck a chord with many immigrants. Among the people of Africa, as well as in Europe, story telling had long been a familiar custom, and even among Europeans it did not decline until the late seventeenth century when it succumbed to the power of the written word.¹² The early immigrants, therefore, brought with them to the new environment the old habit of telling stories, or "cuentos," as the Spaniards call them. Perhaps in places like New Mexico, the new arrivals shared more in common with the Native residents than we commonly assume. To generalize about this dimension of the education encounter, however, is dangerous. The Cherokee, for example, became literate in less than a decade due to Sequoyah's perfecting of the Cherokee syllabary, and in Indian Territory their school system exceeded that of the non-Natives who lived in adjacent regions.

If specific groups of immigrants were eager to teach literacy as a means of transmitting cultural heritage, so, too, were others anxious to promote their forms of spiritual awareness. From the Jesuits along the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes to the Franciscans in California, from the Anglicans among the Mohawk River to the

Methodists and Presbyterians in the Columbia River Plateau, Euroamerican spiritual leaders were determined that their Christian faiths should replace those of the Natives.

In the early eighteenth century, when the Boston Commissioners of the New England Company wrote to Connecticut officials about sending a missionary to preach to those Algonquian who were Natives of Connecticut, they synthesized this determination:

It is well known that you have a body of Indians within the very bowels of your Colony, who to this day ly perishing in horrid ignorance and wickedness, devoted vessels of satan, unhappy strangers to the only Savior.¹³

Much of this dimension of the education encounter relied on the mistaken notion that the Natives were either ignorant of religion, as the Boston Commissioners argued, or that Native American spirituality was a step below the Europeans' on the hypothetical totem pole of world faiths. Many Europeans failed to recognize that the Natives' transmission of their spiritual heritage retained a number of commonalities with other major religious traditions. Many Native groups relied on a shaman or medicine man/woman (or priest); they saw their ceremonies as central to their lives; and they deemed as crucial the training of youth in spiritual awareness. In an often harsh environment, one needed spiritual assistance; hence, the power gained through a guardian spirit quest of other means was an essential entree to maturity.

The teaching of spiritual awareness, therefore, was an unbalanced aspect of the education encounter. Non-Natives deliberately crossed the cultural frontier to promote the religion of their cultures; Natives did not reciprocate.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the education encounter between Native and non-Native had already begun to shift. As this change occurred in areas like the Great Plains, Alaska, and the Columbia River Plateau, it must be recalled that the shift

had already been initiated in regions where contact had been more pronounced. The Cherokee and other eastern tribes subjected to removal to Indian Territory during Andrew Jackson's administration had adapted many aspects of the immigrants' cultures, such as the Cherokees' written Constitution. Like their counterparts along the Indian-Spanish borderlands, these tribes had been early participants in the cross-cultural encounter. Nonetheless, the era bounded by the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries was important because it brought virtually all of the remaining Native groups into the widening circle of non-Native education that the outsiders urged as an alternative to the ancient ways of child rearing.

From the 1850s through the 1950s, the federal government made a conscious effort to impose the education propounded by this immigrant population on American Indians and Alaska Natives. Interrupted only by John Collier's Indian New Deal (1933 to 1945), this era brought a major shift in the education encounter. From first contact to the mid-1800s, the education encounter bore a degree of flexibility. Immigrants had depended on Natives to teach them about the land, and they, in turn, had introduced new animals, foods and technology to the Americas, which the Natives quickly adapted into their cultures. The immigrants had also introduced their forms of spiritual awareness, which the Natives had often grafted onto their own, thereby creating many varieties of spiritual syncretism. Through much of this era, most of the immigrants remained either illiterate or semi-literate, although access to schooling varied widely. Even though specific cultural regions promoted schooling for Native youth, they remained the exception. Therefore, large numbers of Native and non-Native communities continued to teach their cultural heritage orally through family and

community. Unique circumstances affecting groups such as the Choctaw or Lenni Lenape (Delaware) or others once located east of the Mississippi River, meant that their experiences did not conform to this general pattern. Moreover, tribes that had been almost decimated by deadly European diseases, such as smallpox, found themselves able to retain only a modicum of their ancient methods of educating their youth. Nonetheless, up to the middle nineteenth century, the education exchange still moved in both directions. This would soon change.

The conscious push toward assimilation that coalesced reformers, congressmen, missionaries, and even presidents in the post-Civil War decades led toward a precipitous imbalance in the education encounter. Since the aggregate pressure of these leaders sought to impose non-Native interpretations of education on Native people, during this era Native Americans often found themselves in a holding position. By the late nineteenth century, mainstream America was no longer interested in what Natives knew about the land; the immigrants had borrowed this knowledge and adapted it into their own culture.¹⁴ Moreover, with the rapid growth of public schooling, mainstream America was becoming a literate nation that had largely cast aside its story-telling tradition. The zeal of missionaries to teach Christian forms of spiritual awareness also declined in this era. In Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr.'s words, the Protestant "missionary directors and patrons saw millennial hopes dashed upon the stubborn reality of culture conflict and misunderstanding."¹⁵

When the population of Indian Country dropped below 250,000 at the turn of the century, America began to imagine the demise of these people. Stimulated by the 1890 census report announcing the end of the frontier, which coincided with the massacre at

Wounded Knee Creek in December of that same year, Americans began to peer across the cultural divide that separated them from Native America and reassess their dismissal of Native cultures. This renewed romanticism, reintroduced decades after the popularity of George Catlin's paintings and James Fenimore Cooper's novels had waned, was encapsulated in the photography of Edward S. Curtis, whose most famous photo of Native Americans was entitled, "The Vanishing American."¹⁶ At the same time, anthropologists, spurred by Franz Boas, scrambled for oral records of "pure" Indian culture that Vine Deloria, Jr. would later attack in *Custer Died for Your Sins*; and western painters like Charles Russell captured on canvas their impressions of "the old West," replete with portraits of Russell's Montana Indian friends.

One tangential result of this romanticism was the renaissance in Native American art. Beginning in the Taos and Santa Fe art colonies, the resurgence of interest in Native American painting, pottery, and rug weaving led to the marketing of these arts and crafts, which later spread from Santa Fe to both coasts under the auspices of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board established during the Indian New Deal. The widespread popularity of pottery by Maria and Julian Martinez of the pueblo of San Ildefonso illustrates the power of this artistic revival. If Americans had lost their interest in oral history, they had awakened an interest in the visual legacy of Native America, which continued to hold their attention down to the present.

Nonetheless, the artistic renaissance was like a solitary spring in a barren land. The nineteenth century marked the rise of Protestant hegemony in this country, and with the coming into power of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant, much of the nation began to conform to a widespread public school system reflecting the values of the WASP world.

During the Gilded Age, this movement picked up momentum as industrialization attracted millions of new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, bearing their Roman Catholic and Jewish faiths and other dimensions of their distinctly different cultures. This large immigrant population, which swelled America's cities, spurred the Establishment to expand the public schools as carriers of the majority's cultural values. Even as the nation moved toward its status as an industrialized society dominated by big business, the majority of its citizens continued to cherish the America of its ancestors, clinging to an anachronistic belief in those vanishing institutions of individualism and the yeoman land holder of Jeffersonian dreams.

In this milieu, reformers of federal Indian policy quickly made the leap from schooling for immigrants to schooling for Native Americans, and from retention of Indian reservations based on communal land holdings to division of those reservations into individual plots of land based on Indian land ownership, and the shift of Indians' societal status from tribal membership to American citizenship. The proposed break-up of the reservations also appealed to the acquisitive nature of Gilded Age westerners, who rapidly acquired "surplus" reservation lands, and later leased or purchased Indian allotments.

The massive pressures brought to bear on Native Americans at this time culminated in the establishment of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools and the passage of the Dawes Act of 1887, which led to the loss of 91 million acres or much of the Indian land base outside of Alaska. From the 1880s to the Indian New Deal of the 1930s, this frontal attack against American Indians disrupted any balance remaining from the earlier education exchange. With the exception of the romantics who lamented

the perceived loss of Native cultures, the select numbers who appreciated Indian art, and the cultural anthropologists, who saw themselves as salvage scientists, at the turn of the century most of non-Native America delivered a clear message to the tribes. Through its ethnocentric lens, it asserted that mainstream culture and the means by which that culture was transmitted should be adopted by all who lived in the United States.

In short, mainstream schooling dominated the education exchange during this prolonged era. In Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and public schools non-Native teachers taught Native children the language, world view, religion, and basic economic skills valued by mainstream America. Much of this instruction was contingent on the written word. Moreover, Indian children who were sent to boarding schools like Chemawa (Oregon) or Carlisle (Pennsylvania) or Haskell (Kansas) no longer participated in the story telling that highlighted long winter evenings. Nor did they hear their language spoken, their ceremonies performed, the drum beat or the songs. At school they moved in an alien world that taught them to deny any merits of the education long transmitted by their people. Despite this bleak portrayal, mainstream schooling for Native children was by no means a homogenous experience. Although enrollment in BIA schools often was enforced, children were also sent to school voluntarily because their communities wanted selected tribal members to learn about the outside world in order to become cultural intermediaries between the tribe and the federal government. Jesse Rowledge, Arapaho leader from Oklahoma, illustrates the impact of this BIA schooled leadership on tribes in the twentieth century.¹⁷ Still other parents parted with their children because their own poverty made it necessary. Moreover, Indian children who attended schools

located in communities adjacent to their people, such as Chilocco (Oklahoma), Phoenix (Arizona) or the Santa Fe Indian School (New Mexico), often returned home during the summer where they strengthened the ties to their own culture.¹⁸

Indians also influenced the BIA schools. Although Richard Henry Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian School, believed that the BIA schools would sever the ties between Indian youth and tribe by removing the child from the Native environment, in practice, the schools reflected the unique makeup of the student body. Since a number of these institutions unwittingly thrust together children from many different tribes, the students created a boarding-school English and a pan-Indian subculture. When they returned, they often became cultural intermediaries, like Rowledge. Others maintained contact with former classmates, occasionally through marriage, more often through employment with the BIA or within the network of pan-Indian religion (especially the Native American Church) or pan-Indian organizations, such as the Society of American Indians, prominent before World War 1. By remolding these schools to their own cultural norms, the students created an educational syncretism characteristic of Native cultural adaptation.

Even during this intensive onslaught against their own forms of education, therefore, Native Americans stamped BIA institutions with their unique cultural imprint. Still, the earliest solid opportunity to retrieve some of the balance in the education connection did not come about until the Indian New Deal. John Collier's administration ended the allotment of Indian lands, provided for new forms of tribal government, and introduced some biculturalism into the BIA schools, but it was curtailed by Collier's own limitations, as well as opposition in Congress and among certain tribes.

Although the Indian New Deal had disastrous repercussions for specific tribes, such as the Navajo, at the same time it made an important statement to the nation. Collier told mainstream America that the education on the other side of the cultural divide had important values to teach the nation. Few people of national stature had said anything like this for a long time. Thus, even though Collier's stance bore its own deficiencies, for many tribes the Indian New Deal forecast the acknowledgment of Native culture that would emerge during the sixties.

The termination era that dominated the Indian policies of Harry S Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidencies retrieved the thread interrupted by Collier by reinstating the notion that mainstream education--and all that this implied--should be absorbed by Indian Country. Reflecting the anti-Communist paranoia of the Cold War, federal terminationists argued that individualism outranked tribalism. Hence, Natives should sever their tribal relationships by dismantling tribes, moving to urban areas, and enrolling students in BIA schools where they could be trained for urban jobs. Like the Indian New Deal, the termination era brought disaster to specific tribes (i.e., Klamath, Menominee) and uprooted others through urban relocation, but it also spurred pan-Indianism and aroused the ire of mainstream adherents of Indian self-determination. Under Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard M. Nixon, the milieu created by the civil rights movement, Native American leadership, and a sympathetic Congress led the nation to take a fresh look at the perspectives of Indian Country. Disenchantment with the Vietnam War and the nation's domestic policies toward minorities awakened an interest in Native people. Mainstream Americans began to ponder the cultural heritage, spirituality, and survival skills of tribal people. They

explored the concept of communalism, both theoretically and pragmatically; they studied Native story telling and Native music; they became admirers of Native art. From the popular media to the academic community, this country focused on Native cultures with a curiosity piqued by Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Black Elk's *Black Elk Speaks* (edited by John D. Neihardt), the quickening environmental movement, and the Indian "Fish-Ins" in the Pacific Northwest. The political liberalism of the 1960s spawned the legislation of the 1970s that provided Natives with the potential to become self-determining in their schooling, health, and economic status. American Indian/Alaska Native leadership was crucial for passage of measures such as the Indian Education Act of 1972 and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, as well as for the implementation of these measures. In this brief interval, tribal leaders worked both individually and through pan-Indian pressure to renegotiate contracts with energy companies, regain lands that had been lost, and persuade Congress to return sacred sites, such as Mount Adams ("Pahto") of the Yakama Nation or Blue Lake of the pueblo of Taos. Simultaneously, Native educators struggled to establish control over tribal schools and to open tribal colleges.¹⁹ Native and mainstream attorneys fought to gain Native legal rights, and measures such as the Native American Religious Freedom Act of 1978 or the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 testify to their perseverance.

In this short time, the American public gained a hazy awareness of the complexities of Native cultures. During the mood of national unrest that characterized the late 1960s and early 1970s, those Americans who questioned the validity of their own society eyed Native society as potential instructor. Their troubled voices implied:

where has the United States gone wrong, and what do Native Americans have to offer. Although this soul-searching was also derived from America's guilt over its historic treatment of Native people, it was an honest questioning. The continent's deteriorating environment also propelled an exploration of the Native philosophy of maintaining balance with the land. The self-destructive individualism prevalent in our cities reminded Americans of the persistent communalism of Native groups. The anxiety inherent in urban society turned still others away from western medicine to the holistic approach practiced by many Native people. The malaise in the Christian churches suggested to some Americans that Native spirituality might hold some answers. For those Americans, the troubles of this era had turned the tables: they had become the students; Native Americans had become the teachers. Once again, the balance of the education connection had shifted; this time it had moved from mainstream ethnocentrism to cultural parity.

Although the Ronald Reagan and George Bush years witnessed a conscious effort to reverse this trend, the post-1960s federal government was to learn that it faced a more formidable foe within Indian Country itself as Natives fought for their rights with intensified legal and political tactics. Despite the post-1960s and 1970s backlash movement prevalent in certain regions, such as the western Great Lakes, and the increasing conservatism of the United States Supreme Court, the gains wrenched from these years suggest that the balance in the education exchange may continue to retain some flexibility.

From the perspective of the year 2000, over five centuries after first contact, the education connection appears to have served as a crucial link between the Native

people of this land and those whose ancestors arrived as immigrants. In no era of this lengthy relationship has the connection been exclusively a one-way path. The French learned from the Huron and other Great Lakes people but they also introduced iron pots and tools; the Spaniards may have encountered the merits of green chile and maize, but they also introduced horses and sheep; non-Native teachers moved to Indian Country, where they expected to do all of the instructing, and discovered that they learned more from their students than they taught to them; traders along the Great Lakes and by the great waterways of the Southeast married into Indian families and in these situations the learning stretched back and forth, across the cultural divide. In this meandering fashion, the learning has passed from Native to outsider, and outsider to Native as each has borrowed from the other. Even in the most oppressive times, such as the late-nineteenth century, the borrowing of education from Indian Country continued, albeit at a much reduced level. Were Christopher Columbus to return in the new millennium and discover that those people he characterized as the "Indios" were being portrayed with compassion and humor in recent films, such as *Powwow Highway* or *Smoke Signals*, his shock would be something to behold. By strengthening the bonds of cross-cultural learning, through Indian humor and an Indian "take" on the world, Sherman Alexie and other Natives involved with portrayals of Indians in books and on film have reinforced the centuries-old tradition of the education connection; but in so doing they have traveled an immeasurable distance from the Genoese sea captain who sailed for Queen Isabella.

Professor of History at the University of New Mexico, **Margaret Connell-Szasz** teaches courses on American Indians/Alaska Natives and Celtic peoples. Her publications include two studies of American Indian education and an edited volume: *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker*. Currently she is writing a book linking Scottish Highlanders and Iroquois and northeast Algonquian in the 18th century.

References

-
- ¹ The author would like to thank Ferenc M. Szasz and Maria Szasz for their assistance in the preparation of this essay. An earlier version of this essay was delivered as a keynote lecture for the American Indian History & Culture Conference, Green Bay, Wisconsin, November 7-9, 1991.
- ² Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994). The film "Smoke Signals" opened in 1998.
- ³ Bonnie Johnnes, Regional Indian Education Specialist for Puget Sound ESD (Educational Service District). Testimony for Indian Nations At Risk (hereafter INAR), Seattle, September 11, 1990. Dave Schildt, Physical Education Instructor, Billings, August 20, 1990. INAR testimony.
- ⁴ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), p. 83; Keith H. Basso, *Portraits of "The Whiteman"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 4, 32; Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), p. xv. For an assessment of Deloria's impact on the discipline of anthropology see *Indians and Anthropologists, Vine Deloria, Jr. and the Critique of Anthropology*, eds. Thomas Biolsi and Larry J. Zimmerman (University of Arizona Press, 1997).
- ⁵ George A. Pettitt, *Primitive Education in North America* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, vol. 43, 1946); Margaret Connell Szasz, "Native American Children," in *American Childhood A Research Guide and Historical Handbook* Joseph M. Hawes and Ray Hiner, eds. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 311-342.
- ⁶ William Byrd, "History Of The Dividing Line Betwixt-Virginia And North Carolina, Run In The Year Of Our Lord, 1728" in *Prose Works of William Byrd of Westover*, ed., Louis B. Wright (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966), p.23 1. (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), pp. 311-342.
- ⁷ Laverne Harrell Clark, *They Sang for Horses, The Impact of the Horse on Navajo and Apache Folklore* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1966), pp. 11, 43-44.
- ⁸ Thomas Vaughan, Historical Introduction, *Soft Gold, The Fur Trade and Cultural Exchange on the Northwest Coast of America* (n.p.: Oregon Historical Society, 1982).
- ⁹ Margaret Connell Szasz, *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), chapter 2.
- ¹⁰ On storytelling see Kenneth M. Roemer, "Native American Oral Narratives" in *Smoothing the Ground, Essays on Native American Oral Literature*, ed. Brian Swann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 39-54; Pablita Velarde, *Old Father, The Story Teller* (Globe, Arizona: Dale Stuart King, 1960); Victor Barnouw, *Wisconsin Chippewa Myths and Tales and Their Relation to Chippewa Life: Based on Folktales Collected by Victor Barnouw, et al* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), p. 4; John Bierhorst, *The Mythology of North America* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1985).
- ¹¹ Malcolm Margolin, ed., *The Way We Lived, California Indian Reminiscences, Stories and Songs* (Berkeley, California: Heyday Books, 1981), p. 135.

¹² See Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), pp. 96-98.

¹³ William Kellaway, *The New England Company, 1649-1776* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1961), p. 251.

¹⁴ For an example of this adaptation see William Cronon, *Changes in the Land* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).

¹⁵ Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., *Salvation and the Savage* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), p. 160.

¹⁶ On this theme, see, for example, Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1982); Frederick E. Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indian, 1880-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), chapter 3; Lee Clark Mitchell, *Witness to a Vanishing America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 145-150.

¹⁷ Donald J. Berthrong, "Jesse Rowledge: Southern Arapaho as Political Intermediary," in *Between Indian and White Worlds: The Cultural Broker*, ed., Margaret Connell Szasz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). pp. 223-239.

¹⁸ See Sally Hyer, *One House, One Voice, One Heart, Native American Education at the Santa Fe Indian School* (Santa Fe: The Museum of New Mexico Press, 1990).

¹⁹ See Norman T. Oppelt, *The Tribally Controlled Indian College* (Tsaile, Arizona: Navajo Community College Press, 1990); Schuyler Houser, "Underfunded Miracles," chapter 4 in Supplement Volume, *Indian Nations At Risk: An Educational Strategy or Action*, (U.S. Department of Education: Washington, D.C., October 1991.) For an update on these institutions see Paul Boyer, *Native American Colleges, Progress and Prospects* (Princeton, N.J.: An Ernest L. Boyer, Project of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1997). Between the late 1960s and the late 1990s the number of tribal colleges grew from one (Navajo Community College) to thirty-one. The best ongoing source of information on these institutions is *Tribal College, Journal of American Indian Higher Education*.