35. The concept of "gender-crossing" is from Evelyn Blackwood, "Sexuality and Gender."

36. In Peter H. Wood, Gregory A. Waselkov, and M. Thomas Hatley, *Powhatan's Mantle: Indians in the Colonial Southeast* (Lincoln, 1989), 173–95.

37. Theda Perdue, "Nancy Ward," in C. J. Barker-Benfield and Catherine Clinton, eds., *Portraits of American Women* (New York, 1991), 83–100.

38. "Lesbians in American Indian Culture," *Conditions* 3 (1981), 67–87.

39. "'Warrior Women—Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women," in Albers and Medicine, *Hidden Half*, 267–80.

40. "The Political Context of a New Indian History," *Pacific Historical Review* 40 (August 1971), 357–82.

41. Ibid., 368.

42. Ibid., 374.

43. Ibid., 381.

44. John H. Moore, "Dialectics of Cheyenne Kinship: Variability and Change," *Ethnology* 27 (1988), 253–69.

45. Daniel Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (1983), 528–59.

46. In particular, the one advanced by William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton, N.J., 1986).

47. "Women, Men, and American Indian Policy: The Cherokee Response to 'Civilization'" in Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 90–115; "Women in the Early Cherokee Republic," in Rennard Strickland and Chadwick Smith, eds., *Cherokee History* (forthcoming).

48. In Shoemaker, *Negotiators of Change*, 26–48.

49. *The Removal of the Cherokee Indians from Georgia*, 2 vols. (New York, 1907), 2:150.

5

Indian Peoples and the Natural World

Asking the Right Questions

Richard White

I

Methodology is at the heart of any historical endeavor because methodology goes directly to the most critical of historical questions: How is that we claim to know about the past? I will make this more specific. Historians concerned with questions of Indians and the environment have made a series of sweeping claims. They have argued that many Indian peoples had, and some still have, quite distinctive ways of understanding and culturally constructing nature and that Indian actions, in fact, shaped much of the North American world that whites regarded as wilderness. How is it that they claim to know this?

In answering this question, we appeal largely to our practice. Academic historians assert knowledge of the past because they agree on a set of methods according to which claims about the past can be evaluated and judged. These methods will ideally yield general, but hardly universal, agreement among practitioners as to whether some claims are more valid or less valid than other claims. Arguably, there may be a consensus on historical methodology in general, but the environmental history of Indian peoples is another, quite separate case. Writing an environmental history of Indian peoples involves a hybrid methodology in which the methods of environmental history meet the methods of Indian history (a.k.a. ethnohistory, a.k.a. anthropological history.) Ethnohistorical methods of cultural reconstruction, scientific methods of landscape reconstruction, and more conventional historical methods all overlap. The result is often dissonance and confusion.

The most basic tasks of any historical method involve asking and answering questions. In any historical methodology, historical methods are intimately related to historical questions. A methodology stipulates not only how to answer questions, but also how to ask them.

Talking about questions in the abstract is confusing, so let me provide as an illustrative text two very broad questions (hereafter Big Question One and Big Question Two) that recur both in the academic and the popular writing about the environment and Indian peoples. They will provide avenues into this methodological issue and prevent the discussion from becoming overly abstract.

> First, how do we know what Indians thought in the past about what we now call nature, and what equivalent or related conceptions of the natural world might Indian peoples have had at various times in the past?
> Second, How do we know how Indians acted in the past in regard to the natural world, and what were the consequences of their actions?

In answering the first of these questions historians borrow from ethnohistory; in answering the second, they borrow from environmental history and environmental sciences.[1]

How we ask questions is particularly critical in Indian environmental history. It is a field full of pitfalls: hidden assumptions, questions that are really answers in disguise, and loose and unworkable categories. Any methodology that allows us to answer these big questions must stipulate that we ask the questions in a way that makes more than one answer possible. I will call this basic requirement of asking operational questions (that is, questions open to more than one answer) operationality.

To illustrate operationality and the dangers of bad questions, lets go back to Big Question 1.

> 1. How do we know about what the ancestors of the peoples we now call Indians thought in the past about what we now call nature and what conceptions of the natural world might these ancestors of Indian peoples have had at various times in the past?

This convoluted phrasing might seem to represent an excess of academic caution, the kind of thing that makes it impossible to get a straight answer out of a professor. But the construction is quite purposeful. I want to frame a question that can be answered while at the same time keeping the major concepts the question employs open to interrogation. I am trying *not* to presume too much in the question. I am, in particular, trying not to presume:

First, that there is a universal and transcendent agreement on what "nature" is and that agreement corresponds to our modern concept of nature.

Second, that modern day Indian peoples are identical with or have the same attitudes of their ancestors.

I am also trying to make clear that I *am* acting on a third assumption: that Indians are a people of history and that their beliefs can be discovered and understood through historical research.

No serious historical methodology can proceed without critically examining the concepts it is putting into play, and few terms in contemporary discourse are more contested than *nature* and *Indians*.

"The idea nature," Raymond Williams has written, "contains, though often unnoticed, an extraordinary amount of human history."[2] Nature, Williams emphasizes, is an idea that shifts and changes over time. What we choose to call nature is culturally and historically specific. You can touch deer, elk, or rocks, but you cannot touch nature. It is not a timeless concept floating through history. We cannot begin our search for what various Indian groups thought about nature without leaving open the possibility that they did not think about *nature* at all. Certainly, they thought about deer, rain, fog, water, corn, camas roots, and all kinds of other nonhuman objects, but they did not necessarily group them together in the category *nature*. Various Indian peoples certainly might have had equivalent concepts, but if they did, it is the historian's job to demonstrate that they did.

There is a corollary involved in leaving our terms open to inquiry; asking questions reveals that in actual practice our methods do not stand totally separate from our findings. In fact, they constantly inform each other. The framing of our questions and our methodology proceeds in conversation with our research itself.

The second term at issue here, *Indian*, is a good example of this conversation between methods and findings. Much of the older literature proceeded on the supposition that there was a rather unproblematic racial identity and common outlook attached to the word *Indian*. The very concept *Indian* went uninterrogated, and this approach has by now been so roundly attacked that I will not proceed to recount the arguments here.[3]

But if the term *Indian* has been problematized, much popular and indeed much academic history still proceeds on the assumption that there was a coherent "Indian" attitude toward *nature*. J. Donald Hughes writes that "when one asks a traditional Indian, 'How much of the earth is sacred space?' the answer is unhesitating: 'All.'" As an illustration, he cites Chief Seattle.[4] The easy methodological attack on Hughes is his failure to question a source, the supposed speech of Chief Seattle, that is almost certainly a fabrication.[5] But I think the more crucial issue is the easy acceptance of the term *traditional Indian* with all its universalizing tendencies. Having accepted the idea of this pan-tribal traditional Indian, one misses all the specific false notes in Seattle's speech and hears only its resonance with our construction: the traditional Indian. We cannot move from specific studies to universal Indian beliefs. Richard Nelson, for example, although he makes methodological mistakes of his own, carefully emphasizes that he is looking at Koyukon attitudes toward nature in *Make Prayers to the Raven*. Koyukon beliefs cannot stand for the beliefs of all Native Americans regarding the natural environment.[6]

This tendency to universalize and essentialize *Indian* can take quite specific environmental forms. Indians can be constructed, for instance, as the antithesis of history, which, in turn, is constructed as the antithesis of nature. Since a historical methodology presumes a history to study, defining Indians as outside history as we understand it creates a few problems. But according to Calvin Martin, *Indian* supposedly "subscribed to a philosophy of history, and of time, profoundly different from ours."[7] Our history, according to Martin, ignores the "biological perspective" of Indian history.[8]

Indians look not for history but for the "timeless wisdom of the human species, 'the phylogenetic content of human experience.'"[9] Historians, Martin contends, "need to get out of history, as we know it, if we wish to write authentic histories of American Indians."[10] Historical methodology, I will be the first to admit, is of very little use if one is attempting to get out of history.[11]

I accept none of Martin's arguments or premises, but my point here is not to argue with him but, rather, to turn him to a methodological purpose. Martin's attack on history is, in fact, itself a history, and shows the difficulties of using history to escape history. He gives a history of the invention of history.[12] Martin finds himself relying on history itself to discredit historical consciousness.[13]

But beyond this, Martin's history shows how not to frame historical questions. Martin phrases his question in such a way that there can be only one answer. Martin asserts that "real Indians" do not think in linear time, never have and never will. This statement demands a history, for how could we know this is true unless we go back and examine conceptions of time among various Indian groups in the past? The question would be: Are there Indian peoples who think in terms of linear time and conceive of a linear history? For this to be an operational question, there has to be the possibility of more than one answer. But Martin structures his argument as a tautology, for his definition of an Indian is, in effect, a person descended from the original inhabitants of the Americas who does not recognize linear time. Any Indian contaminated with linear thinking is no longer a "real" Indian.[14]

This tactic does not place Indians outside history; it places Martin outside usual historical practice. Unless a statement is posed so that it is refutable, it is not a meaningful historical question.[15]

The first step of any historical methodology, then, is asking operational questions. Let me drive this home with one final example of a bad question: Were Indians environmentalists?

To show why this is a bad question, I'll tell you a story about a seven year old, the son of a friend of my wife. The seven year old is Puyallup; he listens to adults talk about how whites have changed Puget Sound. He thinks about it and what the world must have been like before whites came. Old ways have changed; things once permitted have been curtailed. Before whites came, he decided in the way seven year olds decide such things, Indians did not have to drive on the right side of the road. They could drive their cars wherever they pleased.

But asking if Indians could drive on the wrong side of the road before whites came is not much different from asking if Indians were environmentalists. Both assume that a current set of ideas and practices can be read back into the past. A seven year old assumes there were cars, roads, drivers; those who ask if Indians were environmentalists assume there was a "nature" that corresponds to our "nature" and practices that can be evaluated according to our definitions of environmentalism. In both cases very twentieth-century practices and concepts are read back onto the past.[16]

Posing questions is, of course, only the first step. Answering them is the trick. Since Indian peoples themselves have left us very few records, we rely largely on records produced by non-Indians and on much more recent accounts left by Indians. Now given a certain construction of Indian societies, this lack of records from the past is not really an issue. An extreme view, represented by a colleague of mine at the University of Washington, a very good ethnobotanist and anthropologist named Eugene Hunn. According to Eugene Hunn, and to paraphrase an old Who song, a good informant can see for millennia. This same practice is often asserted, at least implicitly, by the description of certain practices or beliefs as traditional. In one form this embrace of tradition is straightforward and regards the past as transparent.[17]

This embracing of an unchanging tradition is, however, so extreme that it virtually negates history itself. It brackets off part of a culture so as to make it immune from the changes affecting everything around it. We have now a considerable literature on the syncretic nature of many "traditional" Indian beliefs. Sam Gill's *Mother Earth* might be controversial, but it does show the necessity of recognizing the long time that whites and Indians have been in contact and in conversation. There are numerous outside influences on modern Indian beliefs and abundant evidence that they change over time.[18]

Much more common is a second methodological technique: upstreaming, which is connected with the work of William Fenton. Upstreaming starts from a plausible premise. Current cultural formulations about things such as nature have not been formed from whole cloth. Basic cultural patterns remain constant over long periods of time. They have a history. Therefore we can, in effect, disaggregate current customs, beliefs, and practices and look for replicas in the past. So far so good. When reliable sources at both ends of the time span describe similar practices, we can supposedly use safely more abundant modern information to fill in what we do not know about ancient beliefs and practice.[19]

There are two problems here. First, it assumes that the social group in question (the tribe, or nation) has remained relatively constant. Second, it assumes that if rituals or practices exist across time then the meaning and significance of these practices also exists relatively unchanged across time. Both are problematic.

We cannot assume obvious connections between modern Indian groups and historic groups bearing the same names. Historians have sometimes presumed that any Indian group and its cultural practices could potentially be traced back to an ancestral group living before European contact. Recent work, however, has convincingly demonstrated that many tribes are very much historic creations. They did not exist before contact and more than the modern category *Americans* existed before contact. James Merrell's work on the Catawbas and J. Leitch Wright's history of the Muscogolees are two prominent examples.[20]

But the main problem with upstreaming is that similar words, customs, and practices can hold radically different meanings at various points in time. There is much, for example, that is constant in a Catholic mass, but few historians would argue that we could therefore take the beliefs of modern Catholicism and fix them on medieval Catholicism. We do not attempt to do so because we have abundant sources on medieval Catholicism that both show us that this is not true and make it unnecessary to do so. We, however, lack such sources for many Indian peoples, and so upstreaming has considerable appeal. We would be wise to resist the temptation as much as possible.

I think the basic technique in reconstructing older worlds has to remain very close to traditional historical practice: close reading, evaluation, and

contextualization of the records. Our basic rule is to know what they are, why they were produced, when they were produced, and what they represent.

Much of what we then do is a kind of literary analysis, but with a difference. History is an act of interpretation; it is, among other things, a reading and re-reading of documents.[21] Ideally, our methods are always comparative. We compare documents; we read them against each other. We order them chronologically. Deconstruction is, in a sense, what historians have done for a considerable time. We look for assumptions; hidden threads of connections; we probe for absences.

But in Indian history at the earliest stages we are dealing with an imperial history whose documents are not produced by Indians and which both record the reduction of Indians to a European order and understanding and are one of the means of their reduction. Those documents rarely contain Indian writing, but they often contain Indian voices, or what purport to be Indian voices. We need, of course, to be sure that voices speaking are, in fact, Indian. Whites often speak through Indians, particularly when Indians speak of nature. From the Adario of the Baron de Lahotan to Seattle's speech, to modern books like the *Daughters of Copper Woman*, we have had a whole array of fake Indian voices as well as the mixed Indian/white voice of classic accounts such as Black Elk.[22]

The lack of "Indian" sources might seem on first glance a debilitating liability, but it can in certain circumstances be a singular advantage. Many of the Indian voices that survive in the earliest and most problematic documents are talking to outsiders in circumstances in which both they and their listeners needed to reach a common understanding. They are engaged in a language that creates what I have elsewhere described as the middle ground.

A large chunk of our early documents, then, are conversations between people who do not completely understand each other. Methodologically this has implications. "To know a culture," Greg Deming has written, "is to know its system of expressed meanings. To know cultures in contact is to know the misreadings of meaning." We are connoisseurs of misreadings. We rarely know Indians alone; we always know them in conversation with whites. During early contact situations we never get transparent accounts that allow us to peer into a world of Indian meanings. We get mutual misreadings which often become a new common reading: a middle ground.[23]

My own operating assumption is that we will never recover a pure Indian past, a purely Indian view of the natural world as it existed before whites, because we are prisoners of the documents. What we have is mixture, impurity, and dirtiness. To seek purity is to create falsity. In Greg Deming's metaphor, this kind of ethnohistorical construction is a history of beaches. We know little of the islands that lie beyond.[24]

But to be trapped on the beach does not mean that we might not at least look into the interior. We have limited lines of sight into the islands. We have what archaeology gives us, but archaeology's ability to recreate worlds of meaning is very limited. A second line of sight comes through language. A third comes through what we might call spatial histories.

Historians have done very little with language because so few historians know any native languages. Our argument has been that there are no, or very few, documents in the language and very often no or very few native speakers are left, so what is the point of learning it? To this, we quite legitimately add a third objection: languages change like everything else. The language recorded at a given point is not necessarily the historical language.

All that is true, but languages usually change relatively slowly. Preserved in the language are conceptual frameworks, categorizations of the world that structure how a speaker perceives and organizes the world. In them are potential insights into worlds we do not know, but to follow them we need linguistic skills that most historians do not possess.

The Lushootseed language of southern Puget Sound, for instance, is now nearly extinct, but in it are clues to a way of viewing and understanding the world. There are native words that serve as straight equivalents for English words, words for porpoise, various varieties of salmon, bullheads, candlefish, and so on, but more revealing are words without direct equivalents. There are words for old salmon that has already spawned and is about to die and what fish in general are called after spawning.[25] There are classifications such as *tataculbix*—large animals—which refer not only to size but to use: large animals are food for the people.[26]

Language connects with a second way of recovering an Indian view of the world that moves behind the documents. Spatial history concerns the movement of people across the land. Metaphorically, Europeans remained on beaches, but in actuality they moved inland. Their records of travel become sources for a spatial history which is not a history of what they discovered, what they believed was already constituted, but instead a history of their movements themselves, of why they went where they did, of how and why they created boundaries. They turned space into place. They constituted a world and as they did so they often revealed another world, another possible organization of space that they were in the process of either destroying or covering over. Where they found Indians, where Indians sought to block their path or steer them, the places Indians had named and occupied before them all emerge in their travelings and can become the stuff of a spatial history critical to environmental history, which always has to be located in space.

Court cases filed by the Hopi and Zuni have provided abundant materials for spatial histories, but as an example of different conceptions of the world that can be partially retrieved let me again turn to Lushootseed. There was in the late nineteenth century a long battle over the name of Mount Rainier. Seattle wanted Mount Rainier; Tacoma wanted, not surprisingly, Tacoma, which was derived from the Lushootseed *teqʷube?* *Teqʷube?* is usually translated as "permanently snow covered mountain,"[27] and it refers actually to all mountains that have this character. Mount Rainier was just the supreme exemplar of a type. But the derivation of the name seems to come from words meaning literally "mountain bearing water." But what does it mean to be a mountain bearing water? A source of rivers? Glaciers? There seems to be a spatial relation here, a history, which sets the landscape in motion. Around such questions can come recovery over an older categorization of the world.

We do not have such histories yet. Paul Carter's *Road to Botany Bay* is the beginning of such spatial history in Australia, although he questions whether creating a European spatial history can simultaneously reveal outlines of a native one. What we have here in the works of scholars who have paid attention to Indian movements, boundaries, and names upon the land is an indication of the ways in which such a spatial history might be written. Bill Cronon, in *Changes in the Land*;[28] Eugene Hunn, in *Nch'i-wana*; Richard Hart, in the work he has done for Hopi and Zuni court cases; all indicate the possibilities of such projects.[29]

II

The second Big Question—How do we know how Indians acted in the past in regard to the natural world and what the consequences of their actions were?—carries into another set of methodological dilemmas. This question involves correlating what the landscape looked like with descriptions of Indian action. Our descriptions of both actions and landscape are partial, fragmentary, and not completely reliable. Methodologically, this is actually quite comforting. It is the kind of problem historians routinely confront. But historians, in working with this material, do not work alone. Much environmental history is interdisciplinary in the sense that historians use the findings and raw data, and much less often the methods, of other disciplines. Other scholars, in turn, use the data and findings of environmental historians. They misuse our data; we misuse theirs.

Most historians recognize the fragmentary and complicated nature of evidence. We do not treat what survives from the past as if it were in any way a random or scientific sample of documents, let alone that those documents preserve some representative random slice of human behavior. Some scientists in using historical evidence, however, sometimes treat this evidence as if it were, indeed, a random sample of Indian actions. Emily Russell, an ecologist, has, for example, made an argument for a limited Indian use of fire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the basis of European accounts reporting Indian use of fire.[30] Essentially, she evaluated sources mentioning fire as if they were a sample of Indian activities. Specific mentions of Indian burning were few; therefore, Indian burning was rare. This, of course, does not follow, but it raises an interesting issue. How do we know that Indians all across the continent burned the woods or grasslands regularly if this is not something we can easily demonstrate from the records alone?

To make the case, historians borrow from ecological studies and risk misusing ecologist's sources just as they sometimes misuse ours. We want to determine, if possible, what a landscape that was burned regularly might look like and, if it is possible to determine, whether natural fires alone might produce such a landscape. If, in fact, we find that the landscape described at contact gives signs of regular burning, and we can determine the approximate rate at which natural fires occur, and we have accounts of Indian-set fires, then we can begin to make better claims for Indian actions. If, for example, natural fires are rare but we have accounts of vegetation that thrives in frequently burned landscapes and we have even scattered accounts of Indian burning, then we can suggest that we are seeing a pyrogenic landscape.[31]

There is a second technique. If we can determine when Indian-set fires were eliminated and trace the results of this fire suppression, then we can reason that at least part of the earlier landscape may very well have been the result of Indian burning. To do this, historians need to use specialized studies that include examination of fire scarring, dendrochronology, and repeat photography. All of these methods appear in the literature. We are methodological parasites. Our conclusions depend on feeding off the work of others.[32]

There is a danger involved in this kind of parasitism and historians have already encountered it. We become prisoners of the conceptual framework of those outside our discipline and when their work changes or falls apart, so does ours. A crisis in ecology has had profound effects on environmental history. I will use myself as an example.

In 1980 I published a revised version of my doctoral dissertation with a rather turgid title that I have never been allowed to live down: *Land Use, Environment and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington*. The early chapters concern the landscape Indian peoples created in Island County and how it changed with white settlement. In the book, I used ecological concepts like community, succession, climax, and ecosystem unproblematically, as if they were scientific descriptions of actual things or events in nature. I did this even though within the discipline of ecology, these ideas had already come under attack. Looking back now, I realize that this book and other historical studies were themselves undermining such ecological concepts even as they relied on them. Historians were describing a human impact upon the natural world—including an Indian impact—so pervasive that it made questions of climax and successions seem abstractions with few equivalents in the actual landscape. The very scope of the changes that I described in the book should have made me more suspicious of what I mistook for unquestioned orthodoxy. Like most scholars, however, I was more polite and less belligerent when intruding upon disciplines other than my own.

Any intersection of the methods of different disciplines is fraught with danger. But there are also considerable opportunities. Historical studies have had a significant impact on ecological studies. Ecologists who once assumed little or limited human impact on environments before the introduction of European agriculture now are much more aware of a wide range of Indian activities from burning to grazing of domestic livestock, to farming. But at the same time the insistence of historians on these activities has undermined their own easy reliance on a methodology borrowed from an old and now obsolete ecology, and has forced them to pay more attention to newer ecological constructions in which stability plays little part and contingency is as prevalent as in history. Historians have to be aware of such changes. Historians of Indian peoples are not ecologists, but ecological studies become one of our major sources in reconstructing Indian actions.

This essay is not intended to be a mere listing of ways that historians reconstruct landscapes and surmise Indian actions, but instead to stress that the techniques for recovering these landscapes, which include dendrochronology, pollen studies, repeat photography, GIS mapping, and numerous techniques that are being developed almost constantly, become a critical part of the methodological tool kit.

This methodological tool kit is inherently unstable. Developing a historical methodology, particularly in an interdisciplinary field, means constant attention to what you are doing and what those in the fields you plunder are doing. Not only do your own findings, and those of your colleagues, influence your methods, but the basic concepts that underlie methods you borrow from other fields can be about as stable as California. Intellectual earthquakes, fires, storms, and landslides can send structures you think secure tumbling down. If interdisciplinary history is not going to be one field borrowing the mistakes of another, we need to be constantly aware of other disciplines. What seems certain is that the methodologies we learn in graduate school will not be the methodologies at the end of our own practice as historians.

Notes

1. I should add that I have chosen the easy questions for this methodological enterprise, for these two questions are linked to two much harder ones, namely:

How do we know what the natural world Indians acted upon actually looked like?

How do we know the relationship between how Indians changed the natural world and the changes in their own society? Summarized, all these questions amount to: What did they think, what did they do, where did they do it, and what happened as a result?

2. Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in his *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London, 1980), 67.

3. Robert Berkhofer, Jr., *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to Present* (New York, 1978).

4. J. Donald Hughes and Jim Swan, "How Much of the Earth Is Sacred Space?" *Environmental Review* 10 (1986), 247.

5. Rudolf Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speeche(es): American Origins and European Reception," in Brian Swann and Arnold Krupat, eds., *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature* (Berkeley, 1987), 497–537.

6. Richard Nelson, *Make Prayers to the Raven* (Chicago, 1986), xvi.

7. Calvin Martin, *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (New York, 1987), 6.

8. Ibid., 8.

9. Ibid., 20.

10. Ibid., 15.

11. Martin has reiterated and further developed these ideas in a second book: Calvin Martin, *In the Spirit of the Earth: Rethinking History and Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992). Truth for Martin is best revealed in the paleolithic, but it is transcendent. We supposedly need to recover a primal consciousness and lose our historical consciousness. History is a curse we are trying to escape. See, for example, Martin, *In the Spirit of the Earth*, 118–24. As Martin recognizes, his own argument is very close to the much older construction of Indians as noble savages who give us a window onto universal human beginnings and into human nature.

12. It is not only a history, it is an academic history complete with footnotes. His sources are sources that represent a past located precisely in time and connected to our own. *Spirit of the Earth* cites Indian views by referring to historical documents and academic monographs; for example, Marc Lecarbot, *The History of New France . . .* (Paris, 1609; 3d ed., 1618); Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985).

13. Martin, *In the Spirit of the Earth*, 122.

14. See Martin's contrast between Navajos who are "part of it" and those who are not, in ibid., 23, 24.

15. Martin's methodological failing here is more common than we might think. We see a milder version of it in Richard Nelson's *Make Prayers to the Raven*. Nelson writes in his introduction that he has "made a personal choice against discussing the negative elements and the malefactors, which of course exist in every culture." Nelson's version of real Koyukons are those who do not transgress Koyukon values, which is, of course, to read out of Koyukon society actual Koyukons who did not share or observe Koyukon values or whom Nelson perceives as negative. We know real Koyukon values and practices because those who do not observe them are not real Koyukons. This is the equivalent of arguing that all real Americans are law abiding because those who violate the laws are not real Americans.

16. I am not saying the issue under consideration is trivial. I am only arguing that a good methodology demands better questions. Did Indians influence later white conservationists or environmentalists? Did environmentalists seek to equate their ideas with those of Indians? Did Indians seek to equate some of their ideas with environmentalism and become environmentalists themselves? *These* are operational questions. See George L. Cornell, "Native American Contributions to the Formation of the Contemporary Conservation Ethic" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1982).

17. Eugene Hunn with James Selam and family, Nch'i-wana, "The Big River": Mid Columbia Indians and Their Land (Seattle, 1990).

18. Sam D. Gill, *Mother Earth* (Chicago, 1987).

19. James Axtell gives a concise definition of upstreaming, in his "Ethnohistory: A Historian's Viewpoint," in James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), 9–10.

20. James Merrell, *The Indians' New World: Catawbas and Their Neighbors from European Contact through the Era of Removal* (Chapel Hill, 1989); J. Leitch Wright, Jr., *Creeks and Seminoles: The Destruction and Regeneration of the Muscolgulge People* (Lincoln, 1986).

21. For an interesting discussion of this and its implications, see Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay* (Chicago, 1987), 325–26.

22. For Seattle, see Kaiser, "Chief Seattle's Speeche(es)," in Swann and Krupat, *Recovering the Word*, 497–537. For Black Elk, see Raymond J. De Mallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln, 1984), 1–99. The Snoqualmie tribe, among others, treats the speech as genuine; see Snoqualmie Falls Brochure, Snoqualmie Tribe, Redmond, Washington.

23. Greg Deming, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774–1880* (Chicago, 1980), 6.

24. I have borrowed this metaphor from Greg Deming, *Islands and Beaches.* Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (New York, 1991), x. See also Eric Wolf, *Europe and the Peoples without History* (Berkeley, 1982).

This problem of fragmentary records produced largely by non-Indians begins to fade as we reach the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but these accounts too, I would argue, must be read as conversations. Even when Indians speak, they are addressing whites or speaking at the instigation of whites. Their views are still best regarded as parts of conversations rather than as accounts of some isolate and pristine world. An easy example would be the writings of Charles Eastman; see, for example, Charles Eastman, *The Soul of the Indian: An Interpretation* (1911; repr., Lincoln, 1980).

25. Dawn Bates, Thom Hess, and Vi Hilbert, *Lushootseed Dictionary* (Seattle, 1994), 312 (see listings under *fish*).

26. Ibid., 219.

27. Ibid., 332.

28. Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983).

29. Hunn, *Nch'i-wana;* E. Richard Hart, ed., *Zuni and the Courts: A Struggle for Sovereign Land Rights* (Lawrence, Kans., 1995).

30. Emily W. B. Russell, "Indian-Set Fires in the Forests of the Northeastern United States," *Ecology* (1983), 78–88.

31. See Stephen Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Princeton, N.J., 1982).

32. George E. Gruell, "Fire and Vegetative Trends in the Northern Rockies: Interpretations from 1871–1982 Photographs," USDA, Forest Service, Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Ogden, Utah 84401, *General Technical Report, INT-158,* December 1983; George Gruell, "Indian Fires in the Interior West: A Widespread Influence," *Wilderness Fire Symposium,* Missoula, Mont., Nov. 15–18, 1983; Stephen F. Arno and George E. Gruell, "Fire History at the Forest Grassland Ecotone in Southwestern Montana," *Journal of Range Management* 36 (1983), 332–36; Stephen F. Arno, "Ecological Effects and Management Implications of Indian Fires," *Wilderness Fire Symposium,* Missoula, Mont., Nov. 15–18, 1983; Stephen W. Barrett and Stephen F. Arno, "Indian Fires as an Ecological Influence in the Northern Rockies," *Journal of Forestry* (October 1982), 647–50.

6

Power of the Spoken Word

Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History

Angela Cavender Wilson

Since its inception, the area of American Indian history has been dominated by non-Indian historians who use non-Indian sources to create non-Indian interpretations about American Indians and their pasts. These historians have rarely bothered to ask, or even seem to care, what the Indians they are studying might have to say about their work. Very few have attempted to find out how native people would interpret, analyze, and question the written documents they confront, nor have they asked if the native people they are studying have their own versions or stories of their past that might be pertinent to their analysis. As long as history continues to be studied and written in this manner, the field should more appropriately be called non-Indian perceptions of American Indian history.

To truly gain a grasp of the field of American Indian history, native sources must be consulted. Because few native people have left written records for historians to ponder, most of these native sources will be our family and tribal historians relaying oral history. The majority of academic historians thus far have ignored our spokespeople and attempted to write in the field with only a portion of the information, only a portion of the available sources. If an archive was filled somewhere with relevant information to a scholar's study and s/he chose to ignore it, accusations of sloppy scholarship would be hurled from all directions. But if a scholar in the field of American Indian history ignores the vast amount of oral sources, the scholar's integrity is preserved through the use of this time period," or "fact cannot be distinguished from fancy," or "I don't know any Indians!"

Would scholars in the field of history today attempt to write a history of Germany without consulting any German sources? Would a scholar of Chinese history attempt to write Chinese history without consulting Chinese sources? Is it simply because most of our sources are oral rather than written, because we have put our faith in our elders rather than on paper, that

RETHINKING AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY

EDITED BY DONALD L. FIXICO

UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS
ALBUQUERQUE

Contents

Preface ix
Introduction 3

Part 1. Historiography

1. The Ethnohistory of Native America 11
James Axtell

2. The New Indian History 29
William T. Hagan

3. The Historiography of American Indian and Other Western Women 43
Glenda Riley

Part 2. Analysis and Methodology

4. Writing the Ethnohistory of Native Women 73
Theda Perdue

5. Indian Peoples and the Natural World: *Asking the Right Questions* 87
Richard White

6. Power of the Spoken Word:
Native Oral Traditions in American Indian History 101
ANGELA CAVENDER WILSON

7. Methodologies in Reconstructing
Native American History 117
DONALD L. FIXICO

Contributors 131
Index 133

Preface

This book of essays on thinking about and writing American Indian history began as ideas for annual conferences to address the scholarship dealing with Native Americans.

As of this date, four conferences have been held, and the two most recent addressed the scholarship about American Indians. These two conferences were "New Scholarship About the West and American Indians" (1994) and "Methodologies and American Indian History" (1995). The conferences were funded by the administration at Western Michigan University, and made possible by the efforts of several people.

Certain people helped to fund these conferences, including President Diether Haenicke, former Provost Nancy Barrett, former Dean Douglas Ferraro of the College of Arts and Sciences, and Dr. Ronald Davis, chairperson of the History Department. They have encouraged the studies of American Indians at the university and have been supportive of my efforts to bring increasing attention to Western Michigan University since I arrived six years ago.

Key individuals have played important roles in planning and working at these conferences and are to be thanked for their efforts. These special people include David Anthony, now at Northern Arizona University; Professor Linda Robyn, also at Northern Arizona University; Michelle Martin Figueroa; and Eva Martinez. A special thanks is for the graduate students in the History Department and the History Graduate Student Organization. In particular, Mary Younker, Barbara Sears, Rob Galler, Kevin Vichcales, April Summitt, Charles Johnson, Deborah Blain, Jim Shiley, and others are to be thanked for finding extra time to help with the conferences. Two key people, who can always be depended upon for last-minute help and on a daily basis are Alberta Cumming and Lori Klingele of the History Department. I would also like to thank the students of the Native American Student Organization.