

This Land Is Your Land, This Land Is My Land: Conflicting Images of Land, People, and Nature of Native Americans and Euro-Americans

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Abstract

This paper explores varying dimensions of an enduring conflict between people of European origin and indigenous communities over land and land related issues. This means not only wrestling with differing understandings of land and natural world, especially as a visual landscape, but what we might learn from indigenous people that can lead to the creation of a common future that enhances both human and nonhuman life. Illustrative of some of the issues at the heart of white-Indian misunderstanding is a case-study of the conflict between Euro-Americans and the Lakota people over the Black Hills of South Dakota. The closing section of this paper concludes with an examination of the work of Wendell Berry and the myriad ways he can facilitate a needed dialogue between whites and Indians.

1. Introduction

The title of this paper comes from a familiar American song composed by Woody Guthrie. The ballad was the theme song for George McGovern's ill-fated 1972 presidential campaign and has been popularized by everyone from Pete Seeger and Peter, Paul, and Mary to United Airlines and the Ford Motor Company (Klein 1980:433). For many people this song is a romantic celebration of America that is embodied in refrains such as "from California to the New York Island, from the Redwood Forests, to the Gulf Stream waters, this land was made for you and me." (Woody Guthrie Pages: 1). At the same time, the images that Guthrie's ballad evokes, in his rendition of what is best about America in terms of its vivid and dramatic landscape, have a way of rendering invisible the original inhabitants of what is now the United States and the meaning that this land has had, and continues to have, for Indian people. None of this should be surprising, argues Charles Long (Richie & Jones, eds. 1974: 214), when you consider that the cultural language of the dominant people is grounded not only in "the physical conquest of space, but equally a language which is the expression of a hermeneutics of conquest and suppression."¹

We have come to take for granted that the history of the United States centers on the telling and re-telling of the mighty acts and deeds of white people.² It has meant that over the course of time the very terms which Euro-Americans have used to describe themselves, and their history, prevents them from "seeing themselves as they really are." (Richie & Jones, eds. 1974: 214) The resulting tragedy, especially for Indian-white relations, is what Euro-Americans could have learned from indigenous people about the land and our relationship to the natural world that could have given shape to a very different history. That is, of course, a matter of conjecture, for what I want to explore are varying dimensions of an enduring conflict between people of European origin and indigenous communities over land and land related issues. This means not only wrestling with differing understandings of land and the natural world, especially as a visual landscape, but what we might learn from indigenous people that can lead to the creation of a common future that enhances both human and nonhuman life. Illustrative of some of the issues at the heart of white-Indian misunderstanding is a case-study of the conflict between Euro-Americans and the Lakota people over the Black Hills of South Dakota. The closing section of this paper concludes

with an examination of the work of Wendell Berry and the myriad ways he can facilitate a needed dialogue between whites and Indians.

2. Conflicts over Land and Nature

Gibson Winter (1981: 97-98) makes a convincing argument that people of European origin and indigenous people have differing “interpretations of human life, community, and nature” that are ideologically reflective of different “root metaphors of the world.” Europeans, Winter contends, particularly with the development of capitalist based economies, have been governed in their thinking and interaction with the world by “mechanistic” metaphors and paradigms that seek to understand and interpret “reality” by means of a “calculating rationality and manipulative control.” Mastery of one’s environment is most evident in the ends to which science and technology are designed to serve.

Perhaps, that is why Wendell Berry (1977: 3-26) believes that to Europeans who came to North America the United States was never a homeland, but a place, a territory, a frontier to be exploited and used. The violence we have done to nature we have done to Native people and thus there is an interrelationship between the violence of wasted resources, violence of people, and the violence of power over both people and nature. Our seemingly utilitarian approach to life has reduced the world to a marketplace where exalted on high are the supposed benefits of competition, but as Berry (1990: 123-144, 197-210) observes competition does not lead to community but winners and losers, the losers, like industrial waste become “human dumps.”

The end result was that the aboriginal landscape, like its people, was viewed as an impediment to European colonial designs and victory over the natural world was seen as a necessary step in controlling the North American environment (Sales 1991; 287-292). This lead, according to Kirkpatrick Sales (1991: 288), to the “commodification of nature”--a commodity to be bought and sold, just as disposable as people. William Cronon (1983: 166-67) stresses, as does Sales, that Europeans “filtered” their understandings of land and natural resources through the “language of commodities” such that the accumulation of material wealth, based on the exploitation of the natural world, had few of the constraints that governed Indian attitudes toward nature. It is important also to point out that whether one speaks of the “language of commodities,” as does Cronon, or the “commodification of nature,” as does Sales, that the natural world is so easily commodifiable for Europeans because the physical environment is composed of inert lifeless matter, of objects that are distinctively different from human beings (Callicott 1989: 179-184).

Indigenous people, by contrast, “dwell within an organistic world of interdependence, communal participation, and commitment to the sacredness of the world (Winter 1981: 3-4,116-118).” This way of viewing the world is best captured by the Lakota phrase *Mitakuye Oysain*, “I acknowledge everything in the universe as my relations (Pierre & Soldier 1995:47).” Similarly, contemporary indigenous women writers, irrespective of their distinctive tribal backgrounds, speak of our connectedness with the earth and how all living things are our relatives, and as such have value. Stretching across the centuries they have kept alive, through story telling, an oral tradition that knows the integrity of creation and of our interdependence as human beings upon our relatives.³ Paula Gunn Allen (1989: 9), whose tribal affiliations are both Laguna and Dakota, stresses that fundamental to Native life is an awareness that “humans exist in community with all living things (all of whom are known to be intelligent, aware, and self-aware), and honoring propriety in those relationships forms one of our basic aesthetic positions.” Native women remind us of the web of life that holds all of creation together and how much we are in need of holding on to the precariousness of all that is.

Thereby, what sustain the lives of people are bonds of kinship relations that bind human and nonhuman life together with a sense of mutual responsibility and caring (Allen 1989: 98). We are dealing, once again, with a kinship system that extends the bounds of community, for which human beings have moral and social responsibility, to animals, plants, rocks, and soil. It is a world in which life is not confined to human beings alone, but embodied in what Euro-Americans have come to commodify as things and objects to be bought and sold with impunity. However, when the world is seen through the eyes of Ojibwa people “animals, plants, and minerals are not. . .rightless resources, as is the case with Western economic assumptions.” (Overholt & Callicott 1982: 153-155) Other tribal communities, such as the Onondaga, believe, according to Orien Lyons (1989: 74-75), that indigenous people have a special responsibility

“to speak on behalf of the rights of the natural world.” “We hear”, writes Lyons, of the “hue and cry for human rights,” but “what of the rights of the natural world? Who is speaking for the waters of the earth? Who is speaking for the trees and forests? Who is speaking for the fish--for the whales--for the beavers--for our children?. It is our duty to say that we must stand for these people, and the natural rights and its rights.

Humility and respect, rather than arrogance and dominance, are the most appropriate relationship that one seeks to establish with the natural world.

Serious questions, consequently, are raised by Native people about the supposed benefits of progress that accompany an expansion of human power, notably when done at the expense of the degradation of life and the natural world upon which all life depends (E. Deloria 1944). Frank T'Selie, a member of the Dene people of Northern Canada, wonders how those who work in “carpeted boardrooms” and “paneled” offices can without a sense of accountability destroy the land, not realizing that “by scheming to torture my land you are torturing me. By plotting to invade my land you are invading me. If you dig a trench through my land, you are cutting through me...” He believes that it is far better “to learn to understand the world and to live in it; to be part of it; to learn to understand the animals, for they are our brothers and have much to teach us (Watkins as cited in Winter 1981: 101).”

Contrasting Indian and European root metaphors about how we should live our lives are markedly apparent in differing feelings about land. Vine Deloria, Jr. (1989: 261), like Sales and Cronon, emphasizes how for Europeans land is a commodity and thought of primarily in terms of ownership and control. Land becomes something that is a quantifiable and measurable entity that has value only in terms of its market value. The real problem, argues Wendell Berry (1987: 135-136), is that when land is reducible only to its market price then land has no value for what it is, and thus land ceases to be a source of meaning by which human life is measured but only a resource to be exploited, packaged, and ultimately thrown away.

Land for indigenous people was not something that one owned, but used and occupied and in so doing certain duties were incumbent upon you. “When an Indian thinks about traditional lands,” writes Deloria (1989: 261), what comes to mind is

“what people did there, the animals who lived there and how the people related to them, the seasons of the year and how people responded to these changes, the manner in which the tribe acquired possession of an area, and the ceremonial functions ... [one] was required to perform to remain worthy of living there.”

Just as important was the fact that the land was a gift of “higher powers” and the ceremonial duties that one performed were a constant reminder of one’s obligations towards the land (261-262). Furthermore, land is sacred and not just any land, but specific land and places that

form an organic part of the life histories, stories, and oral traditions of countless tribal communities throughout the Americas. That is why Deloria (1994: 67) stresses the following:

the vast majority of Indian tribal religions. . . have a sacred center at a particular place, be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature. This center enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands, to relate all historical events within the confines of this particular land, and to accept responsibility for it. Regardless of what subsequently happens to the people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in their cultural or religious understanding.

As a result, to be driven from one's homeland was to be deprived of the very center of one's existence and today Indian people still live with the social and psychic consequences of the dislocation of thousands upon thousands of their people.

3. Nature and Landscape

It can be rightly asserted that not only indigenous people, but Euro-Americans as well, value the land and can appreciate its sacred quality and beauty and have shared feelings about their connectedness to the natural world. Simon Schama's work *Landscape and Memory* (1995) is a case in point. Schama challenges certain predatory renderings of western culture's attitudes toward the natural landscape and offers instead a rich, complex, and fascinating exploration of a landscape tradition that links together Western culture and nature. Making use of Aby Warburg's notion of "social memory" Schama delves into western art, literature, and history that constitutes a "journey through spaces and places (17)" that he believes will "keep faith with a future on this tough, lovely old planet (19)." In spite of his largely European focus, he does not overlook the contributions of Henry David Thoreau and John Muir in shaping American environmental consciousness or exemplary examples of Euro-American veneration of the nature as diverse as Yosemite and New York City's Central Park.

Nevertheless, there still are some fundamental differences between how Euro-Americans and Native people envision the natural world. The word "landscape," it has been claimed, is a "painter's word," and is Dutch in origin and is used to describe a "pictorial representation of countryside" as well as "as visual phenomenon" (Barrell 1972: 1-2) that is something as human beings we see and appreciate visually. Celebrations of the natural landscape refer only to what we see and experience visually, but that which is separate from us, for while human beings are part of the natural world we are separate from our natural surroundings. Raymond Williams (1976: 188) reminds us that the word "nature" is one of the most complex words in the English language and though since the eighteenth century it has referred, like landscape, to "countryside," it is also clear that it indicates something other than human beings, for "nature is what man has not made."

Leslie Silko (1996: 27) believes, however, that for the Pueblo people, who like the Navajo, inhabit the American southwest, both as story tellers and potters that the term landscape is "misleading" for it "does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings." While it might seem a question of semantics, Silko is careful to stress that for her people "human consciousness remains within the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and sky" and there is no separation between the viewer and what they survey. There exists, therefore, a form of interrelationship between human beings and their surroundings that is complex, and for Silko also "fragile," that depends upon "harmony and cooperation (29)" among human beings and all that is. That is why the maintenance of an oral tradition is so important, for it is a constant reminder of the human connectedness, both in terms of human origins and human life, with the world (31-35).

The seemingly artificial separation that Euro-Americans, and perhaps western culture in general, make between human beings and their surroundings is most evident as one enters the world of the Navajo people. We often assume, as a given, the distinction between subject and object, mind and matter, observer and what is observed that underlines the difference between human beings and the natural landscape. To the Navajo the world came into being through language, for they assume “that mental and physical phenomena are inseparable, and that thought and speech can have a powerful impact on the world of matter and energy (Witherspoon 1977: 8-9).” It is to live in a world in which harmony, balance, order, and beauty are the creations of thought, of language and ritual that form an interdependency of the human beings and nature unknown to western metaphysics (62, 178-180).

As one shifts from the southwest to the Great Plains one discovers this same sense of human interdependence with one’s natural surroundings. The Great Plains traditionally was home to a vast array of tribal communities that ranged from the Blackfeet and Cheyenne to the Kiowa, Pawnee, Mandan, and Lakota.⁴ Comparative studies have demonstrated that Plains Indians’ relationship to grass rangelands was qualitatively different from that of Euro-Americans. Not only was there a belief in the interrelationship of plants, animals, and people but, as illustrated by Lakota cosmology, the notion that life was a circle that bound together human beings and the natural world in ways that protected and preserved the grasslands, and that all life that depended upon the continuance of this interrelationship of human and nonhuman.⁵ Black Elk, according to Raymond DeMallie’s (1984: 288) rendition of his teachings, affirms that “the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and the mother earth were supposed to be relatives-like and all three of us living together as relatives, we were doing just fine.” And yet, the coming of Euro-Americans resulted not only in the introduced “domesticated agriculture,” that upset the established ecosystem, but the wanton slaughter of 60 million bison that once inhabited the Great Plains.⁶

It might be asked, in light of the foregoing observations, to what degree Euro-Americans’ veneration of nature, be that in specially designated national parks, or even our visualization of nature on canvas, has done anything to halt the destruction of our environment? Given that the natural landscape is conceived as something that is not part of us, but rather as something external to our very being as persons, it might be well worth pondering the ways in which it has led to a devaluing of the importance of land, nature, and the environment itself. This perspective on both self and nature stands in marked contrast to Vine Deloria, Jr.’s (1994: 281) emphasis on how for tribal communities “sacred places are the foundation of all other beliefs and practices. . . [and] inform us that we are not larger than nature and that we have responsibilities to the rest of the natural world that transcend our own personal desires and wishes.” Conceivably it means to destroy the land is in essence to destroy the better part of ourselves and perhaps our own best hope for a viable future. That is why Deloria (Jaimes, ed. 1992: 281) also reminds us that even Euro-American “reverence” for nature, notably embodied in our notion of the special quality of the “wilderness,” is still evidence of a “perceptual gap” between Indians and non-Indians. For the distinction that Euro-Americans inevitably draw is not only between land they have “settled” and land they set aside as wilderness, but between themselves and the natural world as other.

4. The Black Hills: A Case-Study

The Black Hills, or what in the Lakota language is Paha Sapa, have been considered as sacred land not only to the Lakotas but the Cheyennes, Arapahos, Kiowas, and Kiowa-Apaches.⁷ Geographically, the Black Hills are six thousand square miles that encompass an area bound by western South Dakota and northeastern Wyoming and extends approximately 120 miles in a north-south direction and approximately 40-50 miles in an east-west direction.”

The Black Hills form the eastern part of the Rocky Mountains and its streams and rivers flow into the Missouri River and it has been aptly described as “a forested island in a grassland sea.”⁸

To the Lakota Paha Sapa are sacred because they are the place of origin of the stories and traditions that have shaped their understanding of themselves as a people.⁹ David Blue Thunder, a Lakota elder, maintains that the Black Hills “are the heart of our home and the home of our heart (Worster 1992:136).” But to Euro-Americans the Black Hills represent tourism, recreation, exploitable natural resources, and evidence of Euro-American dominance. The conflict between the Lakotas and Euro-Americans over the nature of the Black Hills, so contends Donald Worster, is not just about ownership, property rights, or land usage, but the ways in which the Black Hills are central to the Lakota cultural survival.¹⁰

The sources of the present conflict between the Lakota people and Euro-Americans have not only to do with the historical relations between whites and Indians but how the Lakotas and the federal government have over time framed the issue of the Black Hills. Attitudinally the relations between Indians and whites are best described, according to John Mohawk (1992: 439-442) whose tribal affiliation is Seneca, as governed by the belief in the innate superiority of European culture, religion, and civilization. When conjoined with the empire building ambitions of Europeans, who established the United States, it led to colonial expansion by means of an internal consolidation of conquests that as a process was not fundamentally different from other European ventures in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. As Europeans expanded their colonial frontiers from East to West, and North to South, their encounter with the indigenous people led to resistance, subjugation, and domination.

No group of indigenous people was more resistant to Euro-American colonial designs than the Lakotas, who along with the Northern Cheyenne and the Arapahos, were perceived as a major impediment to westward expansion of the territorial boundaries of the United States (Olson 1965: 4). The Lakota, who are most often referred to as the Sioux, were part of a diverse group of Indian people that shared certain political, linguistic, and geographical commonalities who made up what was known as the Oceti Šakowin, which means the “Seven Council Fires.” Historically, the Oceti Šakowin established themselves on the headwaters of the Mississippi in an area of marshes and lakes during the sixteenth century.¹¹ But by the middle part of the nineteenth century, given both conflicts with other Native people and encounters with Europeans, the Oceti Šakowin comprised three geographical and political units who spoke different dialects of the same Sioux language. The first group, who made up the first council fire was that of the Tetons, a Lakota-speaking people who came to occupy the prairies and plains of what are now North and South Dakota in an area west of the Missouri River. The Tetons were composed of a number of bands such as the Hunkpapa and Oglala, the largest subdivision of the Tetons. The second group, made up of the second and third council fires, were the Yanktons and Yantonais, who spoke Nakota and occupied a geographical region that encompassed the prairies of Minnesota and the eastern region of North and South Dakota. The third and last group were the Dakotas and made up the four council fires of the Mdewakanton, Whapeton, Sisseton, and Wahpekute. These Dakota speaking people lived in the wooded region of the upper Mississippi and Minnesota rivers and west to the prairies of North and South Dakota.¹²

The Lakotas that Euro-Americans encountered on the western plains in the early part of the nineteenth century were a people dependent upon a buffalo hunting economy and according to Robert Lowie (1992: 189) “became the embodiment of Plains nomadism.” To the Lakota, kinship relations formed the cultural matrix that bound human and nonhuman life together and the buffalo were given to them as the means by which they might live by Wakan Tanka, best perceived as the power by which the universe is maintained.¹³ At first, the relationship between the Lakotas and whites were peaceful in nature, especially as various

Lakota bands entered into treaties with the United States government. In 1825 a treaty of trade and friendship was established and again in 1851 another treaty was signed that set certain boundaries to tribal territory and provided for the establishment of roads and military forts in Indian country. The United States government, in return, agreed to grant annual annuities of \$50,000 for fifty years; which were quickly reduced by the Senate to ten years in duration, with an additional five years at the discretion of the President (Prucha 1994: 143, 238-240).

The treaty did not prevent the encroachment of white settlers on Lakota land, increasing conflicts between the Lakotas and the United States military, or the resentment of certain Lakota bands, not party to the treaty agreements, to the establishment of roads and military forts in their territory. Events came to a head with the signing of the 1868 treaty of Fort Laramie. The treaty between the United States government and the "Sioux Nation" established the Great Sioux Reservation that included not only the Black Hills, but all of what is now the state of South Dakota west of the Missouri River that is "set apart for the absolute and undisturbed use and occupation of the Indians."¹⁴ It was also agreed that "the country north of the Platte River and east of the summits of the Big Horn shall be held and considered to be unceded Indian Territory. In addition, there was a provision for the protection of Lakota hunting rights north of North Platte River and on the Republican River, a territory that included Wyoming, Montana, and Nebraska, "so long as the buffalo may range. . .No treaty for cessation of any portion of the reservation," it was claimed, was valid unless "signed by at least three-fourths of the adult male Indians. . ." (Lakota Home Page: 4).

Characteristically, as soon as the proverbial ink was dry on the treaty the federal government failed to live up to its end of the bargain. The U.S. government did little to stop the influx of white settlers, hungry for Indian land, or prospectors who believed there was gold in the Black Hills. In 1874, in violation of the treaty, George Armstrong Custer was commissioned to explore the Black Hills for possible sites where military outposts could be established, and not surprising he was accompanied by geologists, prospectors, photographers, and journalists who verified that there was gold in the Black Hills. Following closely upon Custer's incursions into Lakota territory, government scientists also acknowledged the potential wealth of the Black Hills, not in terms of gold, but in timber and grassland. While they clearly recognized that Lakota considered the Black Hills as sacred they contended that the Lakota "were not using them" and economic gain surely outweighed any spiritual claims.¹⁵

By 1876, the Lakota and the U.S. government were at war and in the aftermath of the Battle of Little Big Horn the Lakota were forced to hand over the Black Hills and their hunting rights in violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty by an agreement that was signed by only 10 percent of adult male Lakotas. In the ensuing years the Lakotas were forced to surrender more and more land and by 1889 the once Great Sioux Reservation was partitioned into six smaller reservations, with eleven million acres of Lakota territory now designated as part of the public domain of the United States.¹⁶

A once nomadic people were now confined to reservations, that coupled with the vanishing of the buffalo as their primarily food source, had to endure an "Indian police force," be subjected to a set of rules of regulations, formulated and enforced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, that governed "family, religious and economic affairs". The Supreme Court, furthermore, ruled that indigenous people were subject to "the plenary power of Congress in their domestic affairs, without the protection of the Bill of Rights." Tribal law was now null and void and it was not until 1934 that Indians ceased to be regarded as wards of the state (Barsh and Henderson 1980: 62-63. 85-95).

It has been persuasively argued that in a world where "foreign language and foreign institutions were now commonplace, the Black Hills claim emerged as one of the few bridges to a cherished past" (Lazarus 1991:119). Over the past decades the Lakotas have pressed their

claims to the Black Hills and finally the Supreme Court decided on June 30, 1980, in the case of the United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians, that the Lakotas were due compensation, with interest, for the unlawful “taking” of the Black Hills in the agreement of 1876 in violation of the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Once again the U.S. government, as exemplified by the decision of the Supreme Court, has failed to understand the demands of indigenous people. The Court assumed that monetary compensation, to the tune of \$117 million, for the “taking” of Lakota land, was a sufficient remedy to correcting past wrongs (Prucha 1994: 388, 390; V.Deloria, Jr. 1988: 35).¹⁷

Frank Fools Crow, the nephew of Black Elk, and considered the “greatest Native American holy person to live during the last hundred years,” is adamant that the only settlement relating to the Black Hills that is acceptable is the return of the Black Hills to the Lakota people (Mails 1991:9; Mails 1990:213). A meeting of elected and traditional elders of eight Lakota/Dakota reservations, who gathered at Fort Yates, North Dakota, concurred with Fools Crow that “all land involved in the 1868 is not for sale, and all monies appropriated for such sale will not be accepted by members of the traditional people of each reservation (Mails 1990: 211). Fools Crow, speaking on behalf of the Traditional Lakota Treaty Council while testifying before the Lloyd Means Subcommittee on Interior and Insular Affairs, explained to member of the U.S. Congress that they needed to abide by their own laws, especially the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. He also reminded them of the sacredness of the Black Hills to the Lakota people, and like the giving of the Sacred Pipe, the Black Hills are central to Lakota religion. They needed to understand that “the Black Hills is our church, the place where we worship. The Black Hills is our burial grounds. The bones of our grandfathers lie buried in those hills. How can you expect us to sell our church and our cemeteries for a few token white-man dollars? We will never sell (212)”

Given the Lakotas’ refusal of any monetary settlement for the Black Hills, attention has shifted to Congress, which has the power to restore title to Indian lands. In 1985, Senator Bill Bradley introduced a bill entitled the “Sioux Nation Black Hills Act” which called for a return of the Black Hills to the Lakota people but not all of the land stipulated in the Fort Laramie Treaty. This bill has continued to be opposed by the South Dakota state officials and business interests and has found no sponsors in the South Dakota Congressional delegation. The bill calls for the return of 1.3 million acres from the federal government to the “Sioux Nation” and a rather paltry sum of \$450,000 for the more than \$18 billion in gold extracted by whites from the Black Hills.¹⁸ At this point in time the opposition of the state of South Dakota continues to prevent an adequate hearing on the proposed legislation. The irony is, so suggests Gerald Clifford (as cited in Pommershein 1988: 23), a member of the Oglala band and chairperson of the Black Hills Steering Committee, is that the bill is “animated by a spirit of reconciliation to heal the breach between Indians and non-Indians in South Dakota” and is an opportunity for a constructive dialogue about the past.

A fitting conclusion to the story about the on-going conflict between the Lakotas and the Euro-Americans over the Black Hills is the creation of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. It has been claimed that Mt. Rushmore is an embodiment of American idealism and virtue, for in the faces of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt, who are seen to be “gazing eastward towards the plains,” the guardians of national greatness personify “independence, freedom, justice, equality, self-reliance... [and] individuality...” (Fite 1995: 235-238). In 1927, President Calvin Coolidge, at the consecration ceremony for the Mt. Rushmore memorial, spoke of how important was the location of memorial, because it stood “in the heart of the continent” and represented Euro-American domination. For here was to be a monument carved on “the side of a mountain where probably no white man had ever been in the days of Washington, in territory that was acquired by the action of Jefferson, which remained an almost unbroken wilderness beyond the days of Lincoln, which was

especially beloved by Roosevelt” and portrayed the “spirit” of patriotism (Mount Rushmore National Memorial, 1930:x). Vice-President Hubert Humphrey believed that Mt. Rushmore should be thought of as a “shrine to our immortal leaders,” a “breathtaking” piece of sculpture that truly symbolizes “America’s past ... [and] inspires us to a still greater future.” (Borglum 1966: Foreword). The response of many Lakotas to this “shrine to democracy” is most powerfully expressed by John Lame Deer (1972: 80) “What we object to is the white man’s arrogance and self-love, his disregard for nature which make him desecrate one of the our holy mountains with these oversize pale faces.”¹⁹

5. Conclusion

Lakota writer John Marshall III (1995: 224), like Lame Deer, criticizes Euro-American arrogance, or what he terms “self-aggrandizement,” that assumes that human beings are the center of everything and define the natural world solely according to human standards. The resulting tragedy, he argues, is that it has led to a separation of human beings from the environment that surrounds them and has pitted humankind against nature with an “anthropocentric arrogance” that sees only “the facets of the natural environment,” be they “water, timber, minerals, animals, and land,” as “resources” for human “use and disposal (225).”

An appropriate question is where do we, Indian and non-Indian alike, go from here? A starting point is the work of Wendell Berry (1977: 3-26) who has wrestled with how we treat the land and the natural world. Berry is a poet, writer, and farmer who has over the years voiced his concerns about the environment and of the impoverishment of our ability to communicate about issues of meaning. A sense of place, of rootedness, of respect for the natural world is for Berry (1969) of utmost importance. He believes that indigenous people have much to teach us, of how we should think of ourselves and our relationship to the land. “Their way of life,” he writes, “had evolved slowly in accordance with their knowledge of the land, of its needs, of their own relationship of dependence and responsibility to it.” This was because they are people who understand the meaning of place, of an intricate relationship with their surroundings. By contrast, Euro-Americans were “placeless,” and without a deep sense of devotion to place and the knowledge that springs from it. It has meant that land, or more specifically any place, is interchangeable since “they belonged to no place; it was almost inevitable that they should behave violently toward the places they came to.” While it might be argued that this attitude toward land and place is something that historically we have superseded it seems to Berry that “we have not, in any meaningful way, arrived in America.” For America still is not our home, “and in spite of our great reservoir of facts and methods, in comparison to the deep earth wisdom of established peoples, we still know but little.” (183)

At the same time, Wendell Berry (1995) argues that Euro-Americans cannot turn their back on who they are, and “cannot exempt ourselves from our cultural inheritance, our tradition.” It is a tradition that has not only shaped our literature and language but belief that people matter and words such as “democracy, liberty, civic responsibility...[and] stewardship” are more than mere rhetoric. There is recognition, as well, that the western cultural tradition is not immune to “errors and mistakes, damages, and tragedies.” (73). The way forward is an understanding of the interrelationship between what we do to ourselves and the natural world that values a sense of place and limits “our work and our economies to a scale appropriate to our places, to our place in the order of things, and to our intelligence.” (74). Furthermore, it entails a realization that what we term the “environment” is not a something that merely surrounds us, for we need to “see that our relation to the world surpasses mere connection and verges on identity. And we can see that our right to live in this world, whose parts we are, is a right that is strictly conditional.” (74-75).

Berry (1995) offers the Menominee of Northern Wisconsin as an example of a balanced relationship to the natural world, with an appropriate sense of place. Living on largely forested land they have developed a sense of forest management that preserves a people, the land, and the environment.²⁰ Not unlike other communities of the Upper Midwest, which live by logging, they have practiced a management style that is in keeping with their deepest held cultural beliefs and provides a livelihood for their people. They have managed, according to Berry, “to preserve the identification of the human community with the forests, and to give an absolute priority to the forest’s ecological integrity.” They began logging in 1854 when it was estimated that the forests they inhabited contained approximately a billion and half board feet of timber. After 140 years of logging the forest still contains the same amount of timber (42). They have practiced highly selective cutting and diversified the products that they produce. Berry concludes that the most important lesson that we can learn from the Menominee people is that they see the forests not as “an economy (43).” The forests are the basis of their culture and their goal has been to maintain “a diverse, old, healthy, beautiful, productive, community--supporting the forest that is home not only to its wild inhabitants but also to its human community. To secure this goal, the Menominee, following the dictates of their culture, have always done their work bearing in mind the needs of the seventh generation of their descendants (44).”

In closing, it is important to stress a word of caution. Jay McDaniel (1995) has written of how his white students, along with New Age advocates, in seeking to appropriate Indian spirituality and teachings, often end up reducing indigenous people to romanticized stereotypes of the dominant culture. For all of their supposed sensitivity to the ecological concerns of Native people they seem to have little interest in the contemporary struggle of indigenous people with issues related to treaty rights, land claims, and the preservation of their religious and cultural traditions (192). In attempting to overcome how “Native ways have become commodities in the spiritual marketplace” McDaniel refers to the insights of Martin Brokenleg, a Lakota teacher, as to a possible path that Indians and non-Indians might travel together. Brokenleg’s answer is that you can learn from our people, and we can learn from yours. It all hinges on the idea of kinship. We believe that you can learn from us with respect if you act like a relative to us; we can learn from you if we do the same. We act like relatives to one another if we spend time with each other; if we help each other out, if we take time to build relationships (193).

Notes

¹ Charles H. Long, “Civil Rights--Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion” in *American Civil Religion*, edited by Russell F. Richey and Donald G. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 214. Another approach to the type of issues raised by Long can be found in the work of Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

² David Edmunds, in a recent analysis of historical scholarship on Native American history, has stressed the degree to which Samuel Elliot Morrison’s view of the history of the United States--the “history of the American People is the history of the immigrants from other countries”--is finally being reexamined, though it can be argued that “popular” perceptions of what constitutes the history of this country have not significantly been altered. R. David Edmunds, “Native Americans, New Voices: American Indian History, 1895-1995,” *American Historical Review* 100/3 (June, 1995), 726.

³ *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*, edited by Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 19-30. *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women*, edited by Paula Gunn Allen (New York: Fawcett Columbie, 1989), 1-25. Donald A. Grinde and Bruce E. Johansen, *Ecocide of Native America: Environmental Destruction of Indian Land and Peoples* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 1995), 24.

- ⁴ Robert H. Lowie, *Indians of the Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954, 1982), 2-12.
- ⁵ Paul A. Olson, "Cultural Perception and Great Plains Grasslands," in *The Changing Prairie: North American Grasslands*, edited by Anthony Joern and Kathleen H. Keeler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27-29.
- ⁶ Paul A. Olson, "Cultural Perception and Great Plains Grasslands," in *The Changing Prairie: North American Grasslands*, edited by Anthony Joern and Kathleen H. Keeler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 39-40. For data on the destruction of Plains' bison see: *The Native American Almanac*, edited by Arlene Kirschfelder and Martha Kreipe de Montano (New York: Prentice Hall, 1993), 18-19.
- ⁷ Linea Sundstrom, "Mirror of heaven: Cross-cultural transference of the sacred geography of the Black Hills," *World Archaeology* 28/2 (October, 1996), 177. Black Coal (Arapahoe), "Black Hills is our Country: Testimony to a Federal Commission, September, 1876," in *Great Documents in American Indian History*, edited by Wayne Moquin and Charles Van Doren (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973, 1995), 230-231.
- ⁸ Linea Sundstrom, *Rock Art of the Southern Black Hills: A Contextual Approach* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990), 51. Martha E. Geores, *Common Ground: The Struggle for Ownership of the Black Hills National Forest* (Lanham: MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1996), 29.
- ⁹ James LaPointe, *Legends of the Lakota* (San Francisco: The Indian Historian Press, 1976), 13-20. William K. Powers, *Sacred Language: The Nature of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 7, 37. Steve Young Bear and Theis, *Standing in the Light: A Lakota Way of Seeing* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 28-33.
- ¹⁰ Donald Worster, *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 136-153. Ward Churchill, "The Earth Our Mother: Struggles for Indian Land and Liberation in the Contemporary United States," *The State of Native America*, ed. M. James (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 168.
- ¹¹ George Hyde, *Red Cloud's Folks: A History of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1937, 1975), xi. Robert Craig, "Christianity and Empire: A Case Study of American Protestant Colonialism and Native Americans," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21/2 (1997), 6.
- ¹² Raymond J. DeMallie, "Preface" to *Indians of the Plains Oglala Religion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press by Robert H. Lowie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1954, 1982), xi. *Sioux Indian Religion*, ed. Raymond DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 6-7. William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982) 11-18. Marla N. Powers, *Oglala Women: Myth, Ritual and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 23-25. Robert Craig, "Christianity and Empire: A Case Study of American Protestant Colonialism and Native Americans," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21/2 (1997), 6.
- ¹³ Raymond J. DeMallie, "Kinship and Biology in Sioux Culture," in *North American Indian Anthropology: Essays on Society and Culture*, edited by Raymond DeMallie and Alfonso Ortiz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 127-133. Raymond DeMallie, "Lakota Belief and Ritual in the Nineteenth Century," in *Sioux Indian Religion*, ed. Raymond DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 30-32.
- ¹⁴ Lakota Home Page, web site managed by Rev. Raymond A. Bucko, "Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 with the Lakota and Dakota," http://maple.lemoyne.edu/~bucko/1868_la.html, 1. Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills: White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 48. Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Land Claims in the Mainstream of Indian/White Land History," in *Irredeemable America: The Indians' Estate and Land Claims*, edited by Imre Sutton (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1985), 25.
- ¹⁵ Martha E. Geores, *Common Ground: The Struggle for Ownership of the Black Hills National Forest* (Lanham: MD, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 1996), 33-34. Edward Lazarus, *Black Hills: White Justice: The Sioux Nation Versus the United States, 1775 to the Present* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 74-76.
- ¹⁶ Thomas Biolsi, *Organizing the Lakota: The Political Economy of the New Deal on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1992), 5-6. Wilcomb E. Washburn, "Land Claims in the Mainstream of Indian/White Land History," in *Irredeemable America: The Indians' Estate and Land Claims*, edited by Imre Sutton (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1985), 25.

¹⁷ Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Treaties: The History of a Political Anomaly* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 390. Vine Deloria, Jr., "Reflections on the Black Hills Claim," *Wicazo sa review* 4/1 (Spring, 1988), 35.

¹⁸ Frank Pommersheim, "The Black Hills Case: On the Cusp of History," *Wicazo sa Review*, 4/1 (1988), 21-22. Philip J. Stevens, "Compensation for the Plundering of \$18 Billion of Sioux Gold, Silver and Other National Resources from the Black Hills is Unjust and Unacceptable," *Wicazo sa review* 4/1 (Spring, 1988), 49.

¹⁹ For a discussion of AIM (American Indian Movement) protests against Mt. Rushmore see: Russell Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 167-70, 182-86.

²⁰ Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1995), 41-44, 74-75.

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