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**TITLE:** Placing the Ancestors: Postmodernism, “Realism,” and American Indian Identity in James Welch’s “Winter in the Blood”

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Yet I had felt it then, that feeling of event. Perhaps it was the distance, those three new miles, that I felt, or perhaps I had felt something of that other distance; but the event of distance was as vivid to me as the cold canvas of First Raise’s coat against my cheek. He must have known then what I had just discovered. Although he told me nothing of it up to the day he died, he had taken me that snowy day to see my grandfather.

The narrator, Winter in the Blood

All through *Winter in the Blood*, a novel by Blackfeet and Gros Ventre writer James Welch, the narrator searches for a way to put to rest his nagging sense of “distance”—a distance from himself, from his Blackfeet culture, from his homelands. At thirty-two, the narrator closes this distance and comes home, personally, culturally, and geographically. Among American Indians, the decolonization of communities as well as of individuals often involves a process of recovery, a conscious act of reclaiming knowledge of a tribal self, knowledge that has been distorted by centuries of European and American oppression. Like other colonized people, the Blackfeet narrator organizes his cultural recovery through the principles of identity and experience. Already identifying as the son of First Raise, he “discovers” through “that feeling of event” an experience that allows him also to identify as the grandson of Yellow Calf.(FN1) His experiences of living close to his tribal people and lands—as well as the experiences of oppression that erode tribalism—inform his knowledge of himself as a Native person. At the same time, the depth of his self-understanding as an American Indian helps the narrator to sustain his relationship to his people and lands and to understand the workings of colonialism. This narrative thus not only illustrates the maintenance of culture but also describes a procedure of political growth. New knowledge about colonial relations of power develops one’s own relationship to a community and history as well as to a dominating culture. In this novel, political awakening and the recovery of Blackfeet self-hood are intertwined, each informing the other. By reinterpreting more accurately a distant yet somehow familiar event, Welch’s unnamed narrator of *Winter in the Blood* recovers knowledge of his Blackfeet culture and lands. Because the real world preservation of indigenous cultures and the defense of homelands similarly depend on this process of decolonization, Native studies cannot do without a convincing explanation of the recovery of American Indian cultural identity.

Before turning to Welch’s fine novel, I would like to foreground a crucial theoretical concern facing Native studies today. Of the many issues American Indian intellectuals debate, the concept of identity draws considerable critical attention in Native studies because many scholars understand that, for American Indian peoples to build an anticolonial movement, we must have a clear understanding of the modern tribal self. As early as 1984, Taeno intellectual José Barrerio recognized the importance of identity in the process of Native cultural renewal when he declared that

there appears to be surfacing an agreement among informed observers of American Indian education that a strong identity—that is, the fullest possible knowledge of one’s own language, culture, cosmology and history—is a necessary prerequisite for any successful venture into the non-Indian world.(FN2)

American Indian scholars theorize cultural identity not only to benefit Native people but also to edify other people who have been insisting on defining and naming tribal peoples for centuries. With Native nations today under siege, I feel that our work on identity should confront more than the problem of an individual being accepted by her or his tribal community. In the present piece, I take up the question of American Indian identity for this one reason: what people think of identity affects their politics. It is with this crucial goal of collective tribal self-definition in mind that I would like to advance a new theory of Native identity that I hope will prove more politically defensible and useful.

In the field of U.S. literary and cultural studies, the concept of identity arouses severe doubts among postmodernist theorists, who often warn that a struggle for the development of cultural identity is actually a search for "foundations," timeless essences in which cultures inhere impervious to external forces.(FN3) In the 1980s Native scholars such as Paula Gunn Allen, Ward Churchill, and Annette Jaimes set forth an often essentialist view of American Indian identity by emphasizing a metaphysical attachment to the world: "A solid, impregnable, and ineradicable orientation toward a spirit-formed view of the universe, which provides an internal structure to both our consciousness and our art, ... [is] shared by all members of tribal psychic reality," as Laguna Pueblo and Sioux scholar Paula Gunn Allen puts it.(FN4) Although this theoretical position reclaims intrinsic Native self-worth on its own terms, essentialism also mystifies Native identity beyond self-reflection and potential for change and thus limits the possibility of the continued development of persons and communities. Robert Warrior, an Osage intellectual, explains the problem with essentialism: "Appeals to essentialized worldviews ... always risk an ossifying of American Indian existence."(FN5) Essentialism ultimately not only fails to promote sovereignty but also offers no means of evaluating more complicated theoretical positions such as postmodernism in terms of their ability to politically mobilize Indian Country.

Perhaps in response to the insularity of the essentialist position, many Native intellectuals in the 1990s, such as Kimberly Blaeser, Louis Owens, and Gerald Vizenor, have been drawn to what is often called "poststructuralism" in linguistics and literary studies or, more generally, "postmodernism."(FN6) Postmodernism is a theoretical position through which French theorists in the late 1960s began to question the reliability of knowledge production in conditions of unequal class relations. Adapting this theory in order to critique power in a cultural and social context, U.S. postmodernist scholars explore, for example, how imperialist discourses distort representations of minoritized cultures. In the study of American Indian peoples, scholars influenced by postmodernism interrogate often-colonialist disciplines such as anthropology to reveal how historical and cultural attachments at times shape observers' conclusions regarding Native lifeways. Native scholars implementing postmodernism explain how the racial construction of the misnomer Indian is historically tainted with colonialist coercion, and thus they deconstruct this identifying category. "The use of the word 'Indian' is postmodern, a navigational conception, a colonial invention, a simulation in sound and transcription," writes Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor.(FN7) But the challenge to confront the use of delimiting categories of analysis such as "race" is also a call to deconstruct other knowledge products such as cultural identity—because postmodernism is in the end a view of knowledge. While postmodernist theory promises to challenge dominating constructions of Native identity, as a principle, it also necessarily demands the dismantling of all identities, those not only external but also internal to indigenous cultures.

The postmodernist exposes how the construct called "identity" cannot avoid the use of power to subdue internal differences to invent a stable "subjectivity." In this

contemporary cultural theory, the individual is actually incoherent and fragmented though she or he may sustain the illusion of coherence. Postmodernists theorizing alterity typically deconstruct the self to reveal a matrix of power that inescapably distorts knowledge. In this view, a category of identity such as "Anishinaabe person," which must inevitably exclude in order to identify culturally, is constructed by the very oppressive forces it hopes to resist. Judith Butler, an influential postmodernist, doubts the viability of an oppositional politics based on identity because categories of subjectivity are inevitably unstable: "The domains of political and linguistic 'representation' set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed, with the result that representation is extended only to what can be acknowledged as a subject."(FN8) Postmodernists tend to consider identities an illegitimate way of organizing one's view of the world because identities are constructed from necessarily subjective personal experience. Jonathan Culler explains this poststructuralist view in his often cited epistemological thesis on experience in *On Deconstruction*:

For a woman to read as a woman is not to repeat an identity or experience that is given but to play a role she constructs with reference to her identity as a woman, which is also a construct, so that the series can continue: a woman reading as a woman reading as a woman. The noncoincidence reveals an interval, a division within a woman or within any reading subject and the "experience" of that subject.(FN9)

The "interval" Culler identifies exposes a division within the self, a site of epistemic slippage that makes experience unreliable. In the prevailing discourse of postmodernism, experience cannot be a source of objective knowledge, for it is mediated by social and linguistic signification.

Seeking both to challenge narrow definitions of the Native experience and to expand its potential, American Indian scholars often turn to a postmodernist account of experience such as Culler's above. Vizenor leads the postmodern turn in American Indian studies with fiction and criticism that embrace, explore, and advance postmodernism. Although I would argue that Vizenor's fiction ultimately inhabits the stable moral center represented in the behavior of one whom he himself calls "the compassionate tribal trickster ... the one who cares to balance the world,"(FN10) his criticism, which is my present concern, advocates a skeptical view of tribal knowledge that leads to a number of disabling theoretical problems for American Indian scholars and activists. In his benchmark article, "The Ruins of Representation," Vizenor charges Charles Larson with employing an essentialist approach to experience in Native culture and literature: "Larson must search for racial purities in tribal literature because [he denied] crossblood identities and tribal survivance. He assumed, based on the novels he considered, that he would discover and understand the essential tribal experience."(FN11) In deconstructing the "essential tribal experience" and instead asserting a more freely defined model of American Indian identity predicated on marginality, Vizenor attempts to liberate Native discourse from colonialist demands that American Indians be "authentic" and adhere to an ahistorical, static model of tribal living. Because it attempts to challenge dominating constructions of Native people, the postmodernist theory of identity remains a widely supported theoretical position in American Indian studies.

So that they may disrupt the foundations of Eurocentrism that have produced the Noble Savage, many Native scholars continue to support a postmodernist formulation of American Indian identity, often explored in a "trickster discourse" called "mixedblood" or "crossblood" identity, terms popularized by Vizenor. Anishinaabe scholar Kimberly Blaeser discusses Vizenor's introduction of the trickster conception of identity to American Indian studies:

In Vizenor's writing the trickster figure becomes nearly synonymous with and a metaphor for the tribal mixedblood, whose symbolic role is to subvert the artificial distinctions of society. Like the trickster, whose very identity reflects all duality and contradiction, the mixedblood is a marginal character, one who exists on the border of two worlds, two cultures, the white and the Indian. In fact, the existence of the mixedblood resists even that definitiveness.(FN12)

The trickster promises to destabilize concretized definitions of American Indian identity and culture. But I feel that this position also draws critical support among Native scholars because this view provides a trickster identity as a model for being Native in a modern world of often complex cultural interaction. Vizenor asserts that one is not bound by a fixed cultural category but, rather, one may inhabit the interstitial space between the colonies and the nations,(FN13) the Anglo and the American Indian, without being fully determined by either site. Such goals of decolonization are no doubt desirable in American Indian studies. But in exposing the ways in which European history and society produce the Indian, and do so always inaccurately, Native scholars—if they are to be epistemologically consistent—must support a mode of inquiry that discounts all objective knowledge about Native peoples. If we, like postmodernists, deconstruct the Indian, how are we then able to present a reliable construction of tribal peoples, either for U.S. society or for ourselves? Noticing these theoretical problems, many American Indian scholars find that by subverting tribal identities, Native critics such as those mentioned above actually undermine the very claims on which American Indians make their best appeals for justice.

Native scholars implementing postmodernism liberate at a great cost. For if such scholars endeavor to subvert constructions of tribal identity, they are still unable to distinguish distorted (colonialist) constructions from more accurate constructions, in order to offer a flexible, though "objective" account of the real lives of American Indians today. In their deconstruction of tribal experience, Native critics using postmodernism inadvertently delegitimize the status of experience altogether. In this view of identity and experience, with the progressive idea of "difference" itself subverted and identity uprooted from experience, Native people are left with their own "ruins of representation," for they in the end cannot explain how tribal experiences might be different from mainstream or industrialized experiences. Most important, American Indian scholars implementing postmodernism and theorizing Native literature and culture, because they cannot provide a way to evaluate the relationship between experience and identity, are unable to offer an account of how culture can be recovered, how Native people can grow and develop through cultural practice.

Native activists and scholars working within this mainstream view of knowledge and attempting to mount a defense of indigenous lifeways through an account of American Indian cultural recovery, then, are justifiably wary of appealing to concepts such as identity and experience to theorize decolonization within the rather limiting theoretical dyad of essentialism versus postmodernism. Although both theoretical positions still find support within American Indian studies, neither view of knowledge is ultimately politically efficacious to answer the call for a First Nations intellectually based politics, a demand that Dakota scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn remembers to be the organizing force for the fostering of American Indian studies in 1970:

It called for the development by Indians of bodies of indigenous knowledge, and it called that development "Native American Studies as an Academic Discipline." Its major thrust was the defense of the land and indigenous rights. Several of the speakers at this convocation said, "we cannot defend our languages and cultures if we cannot defend our homelands."(FN14)

From this historic moment, Native scholars in American Indian studies have often sought in American Indian identity a basis for the defense of indigenous lands and

values, though discerning the theoretical position for its grounding has been troublesome. During the past few years, a growing number of Native scholars committed to tribal development, such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Greg Sarris, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack, have led readers to question the ability of trickster postmodernism to serve political action.(FN15) These scholars suggest that Native self-understanding is immensely important in the preservation of American Indian cultures. Indeed, the history of colonialism in the Americas is a history of eliminating the indigenous presence—not only through the destruction of Native lives through warfare but also through federal policy designed to erase the American Indian identity of those who survive. The removal of Native nations from their ancestral homelands, the taking of American Indian children from their families to boarding schools to silence the children's indigenous languages, the outlawing of tribal religious practices, and the system of tribal enrollment and "certified degrees of Indian blood" were and are colonial impositions to control the identities of Native peoples. Cook-Lynn disapproves of the crossblood or mixedblood view of identity because in it "there is explicit ... accommodation to the colonialism of the West... an identity which focuses on individualism rather than First Nation ideology" of responsible community membership.(FN16) The postmodernist trickster subverts endlessly, but Native community organizers want a theory to help them decide which structures of power should be subverted: Should indigenous activists subvert treaty rights, for example? If colonialism constructs the Indian, who remains after the Indian is deconstructed? Those American Indians who actually travel across and are often detained at colonial borders do not find this so-called crossblood cultural margin all that liberating. A politics of pure subversion cannot avoid the difficult theoretical imperative of adjudicating between self-defeating and self-liberating acts of subversion; for if we simply choose to avoid the issue, Native identity will continue to be controlled by the colonizer. In resistance to U.S. imperialist attempts to erase indigenous identity, many American Indian people reclaim tribal identity as central to the preservation of tribal culture, history, and nationhood. As a philosophical construct, identity can be explored, theorized, better understood, and even owned by Native peoples to serve Native peoples. I argue that American Indian scholars may avoid the political loss of identity by default only if they are prepared to interrogate and utilize Native cultural identity as a genuine philosophical issue. Vizenor creates a space in which to explore with humor new conceptions of tribal identity, but it is nonetheless a space without shape.

Many Third World scholars, however, have been noticing the debilitating effects of postmodernism on anticolonial criticism: the postmodern diffuses the political force of identity by detaching identity from social location. The crucial philosophical challenge posed to oppositional discourses, then, is to return to cultural identity its capacity to refer to the social facts that make up social location. During the 1990s, minority scholars in and around Cornell University, dissatisfied with the theoretical positions available in understanding minority literatures and serving political action, began to formulate a "realist" approach to identity and culture. Drawing on the philosophy of science and the works of Charles Sanders Peirce, W.V.O. Quine, Hillary Putnam, and Donald Davidson, realist theory acknowledges that identities are constructed but claims that we can nonetheless evaluate various identity constructions according to their ability to interpret our experiences accurately. Many intellectuals and activists are drawn to realism as a theoretical position because it takes seriously the uses of experience and identity in anticolonial studies of culture and literature. An interdisciplinary group of scholars has recently produced a collection of essays entitled *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, in which the contributors elaborate the realist approach to identity and experience in readings of Third World

literatures and cultures.(FN17) The book represents scholars from a broad range of disciplines and social groups: Michael Hames-García, who writes on Chicano identity and sexuality; Amie McDonald, on racial program houses in the university; feminist philosopher Linda Alcoff, on identity politics; and intellectual historian John Zammito, on experience.

Paula Moya, a Chicana feminist who utilizes realism to support a Third World feminism, summarizes the context of the realist project with a critique of the work of postmodernist feminists Donna Haraway and Judith Butler:

Common to both Haraway's and Butler's accounts of identity is the assumption of a postmodern "subject" of feminism whose identity is unstable, shifting, and contradictory: "she" can claim no grounded tie to any aspect of "her" identit(ies) because "her" anti-imperialist, shifting, and contradictory politics have no cognitive basis in experience. Ironically, although both Haraway and Butler lay claim to an anti-imperialist project, their strategies of resistance to oppression lack efficacy in the material world.(FN18)

Moya makes a realist claim to identity because she recognizes that "a politics of discourse that does not provide for some sort of bodily or concrete action outside the realm of the academic text will forever be inadequate to change the difficult 'reality' of our lives."(FN19) In reconsidering the possibility of objective knowledge achieved through the link between identity and social location, Moya and other realist scholars find identity a philosophically defensible basis for political resistance.

Satya Mohanty, in his *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics*, defends a realist theory and describes recovery as an epistemological process involving the relation among identity, experience, and knowledge. In a section he calls "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," Mohanty argues that even though personal experience is socially constructed, it is through this very mediation that experience has the ability to yield objective knowledge. According to Mohanty, projects of recovery in fact demand a form of theory mediation such as identity. He explains that when a woman in a consciousness-raising group "discovers" a more accurate emotion through which she can now disclose the realities of her unclearly felt oppressive experience, she does not appeal to a "fully formed emotion that was waiting to be released."(FN20) Instead, Mohanty argues,

the reason why we say that Alice "discovers" she has been angry is that the anger underlay her vague or confused feelings of depression and guilt; now it organizes these feelings, giving them coherence and clarity. And our judgement that the anger is deeper than the depression or guilt is derived from (and corroborated by) our understanding that is based in part on a "theory."(FN21)

The decolonization of the self and community involves this very process of recovering a relationship to self and nation that has been displaced by historically produced erroneous knowledge. Argued in realist terms, the narrator of *Winter in the Blood* discovers a Blackfeet cultural identity not by unearthing a ready-made history but through the process of recovery Mohanty describes above. For this reason, the protagonist's closing of the distance and his discovery of himself, his community, and their history represent not an essentialist romance but, rather, an epistemically justified (realist) process of cultural recovery.

Scholars and activists of color are drawn to realism as a theoretical position because it takes seriously the uses of experience and identity in anticolonial studies of culture and literature. Drawing on Moya's description of the realist theory of cultural identity,(FN22) let me summarize its basic claims:

1. Different social facts are causally relevant to the experiences we will have. The "facts" of race, gender, class, and sexuality constitute an individual's social location in

a cultural and historical matrix. For this reason, a person "racially" coded as American Indian will likely have experiences that are different from those of a white American.

2. Experiences influence but do not entirely determine the formation of an individual's cultural identity. Identity within any cultural group is nuanced because experiences are theoretically mediated.

3. Identities possess a cognitive component that allows for the possibility of accuracy and error. The theory-mediated quality of experience allows us to interpret the same experience in better or worse ways and to revise our interpretations.

4. Some identities are more "real" than others because they can better account for the social facts that constitute social location. The cultural identity "Indigenous Exile" is likely to refer more accurately to an ancestral tie to homelands and a history of colonialist displacement than the identity "Native American," a racial marker designated by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Welch understands the crucial role played by identity and experience in the decolonization of both self and community in American Indian literature and culture. In *Winter in the Blood*, he takes seriously the role that identity plays in explaining the rich realities of Blackfeet life—both the everyday stress of colonialist oppression and the joy of stories that teach something new about an Indian past and Indian lands—as cultural actors grow culturally and justifiably come home. Unlike Vizenor and other postmodernist theorists who today deconstruct identity, Welch, writing during the Red Power era, situates American Indian identity as a central concept in recovering knowledge of ancestral lifeways and homelands. Though he recognizes that the recovery of Native knowledge through evolving identity represents a complex process of interpretation, Welch can still show how the narrator of *Winter in the Blood* discovers his place in his Blackfeet culture and homelands because he understands the epistemological relationship between identity and experience. Avoiding both essentialist and postmodernist theories of American Indian identity, *Winter in the Blood* shows how the recovery of Native cultural identity is neither a search for a pristine origin nor a wholly fabricated process. Instead, *Winter in the Blood* reflects a realist theory of identity, a nonessentialist approach to cultural recovery in which identity functions as a cognitive (as opposed to a purely affective or emotional) apparatus through which American Indians evaluate personal and tribal experiences to produce more accurate knowledge of the social facts that constitute social locations. In this theory of Native identity, the Blackfeet narrator's homecoming—in all its aspects—is real not because the narrator discovers the essence of being American Indian but because his new understanding of himself as a bearer of Blackfeet tradition in the social location of his homelands is historically more justified. Welch shows how American Indian identities can be grounded in historical facts without being essentialized beyond understanding.

I will now direct the discussion in the next section of this article to Louis Owens, a Choctaw Cherokee Irish theorist who implements postmodernism to understand the American Indian novel and who writes on *Winter in the Blood*. Although Owens begins with a postmodernist account of identity to understand the condition of the nameless narrator of *Winter in the Blood*, he ultimately seeks an alternative view of American Indian identity that accounts for what he sees in Welch as an "act of recovery." In hopes of deepening what Owens recognizes as a need for a more politically enabling explanation of the recovery of identity in the Native novel, I employ a realist theory of American Indian identity that explores the notion of a cultural center with which American Indians can measure personal and cultural recovery. Later, in the final section, I show how Welch's novel of a Blackfeet man returning to his tribal community and homelands represents a realist process of cultural recovery in which identity, experience, social location, and knowledge are connected. In my reading of this novel,

I develop a nonessentialist conception of American Indian cultural identity by charting the narrator's recovery of his relationship to the land and the values this process generates.

#### **ON RECOVERY: OBJECTIVITY, ORAL TRADITION, IDENTITY**

Perhaps Louis Owens's use of and ultimate call for transcendence of postmodern theory best illustrates how it can be inadequate in analyzing Native literature. Welch's *Winter in the Blood* at first might appear to be amenable to postmodern theories of reading and knowledge: though the narrative moves chronologically, linear time is punctuated with painful flashbacks and surreal dreams. Most important, the narrator himself seems to embody the postmodern problem of interpretation: his struggle for self-knowledge is thwarted by a disunified past, present, and future, a relentless destabilizing process that makes him unable to connect himself to a body of knowledge that might resemble a cultural and spiritual center and which thus denies the young Blackfeet man a coherent identity.

But Owens also recognizes the limitations of postmodernism. His struggle with contemporary theory peaks, it seems to me, when he tries to explain how an extremely colonized Native person regains a place in her or his culture. On this issue, he speaks directly to American Indians and addresses the responsibility of how best to secure Native freedom. Owens's reading of *Winter in the Blood* reveals his desire for a theory to make sense of the cultural development of the novel's Blackfeet narrator, beginning with the postmodern problem of the concept of recovery itself. Owens approaches the problem of cultural recovery through the account of postmodernism produced by David Harvey:

We can no longer conceive of the individual as alienated in the classical Marxist sense, because to be alienated presupposes a coherent rather than a fragmented sense of self from which to be alienated. It is only in terms of such a centred sense of personal identity that individuals can pursue projects over time, or think cogently about the production of a future significantly better than time present and time past.... Postmodernism typically strips away that possibility by concentrating upon the schizophrenic circumstances induced by fragmentation and all those instabilities ... that prevent us even picturing coherently, let alone devising strategies to produce, some radically different future.(FN23)

The postmodernist's claim is most shocking because it denies oppressed people hope for a better future; the postmodern condition, according to Harvey, obviates human agency by controlling, in often unknown ways, virtually all aspects of our lives. In this view, the alienated "postcolonial" self can no longer even be considered as such because the colonized individual cannot identify the "center" from which she or he is alienated.(FN24) This lack of self-knowledge locates the problem of uncertainty not in the alienation of the self from one's culture but in the very absence of a recognizable center or collection of cultural norms of behavior and beliefs against which to compare our selves as we form our ideas of how those selves function within our cultures. For this reason, the postmodern individual—and certainly a colonized individual struggling under the conflicting demands of tribal and assimilated senses of self—cannot plan a future. One cannot project or chart one's moral, spiritual, or cultural growth because one has no normative, central concept of identity by which to build and measure one's development.

Now let me quote Owens's response to the postmodernist:

Welch's narrator, however, is neither a victim nor a celebrant of this kind of postmodern fragmentation and transience; he is, in fact, alienated precisely in the [Marxist] sense described here. For Welch's narrator there is a "coherent ... sense



of self" and a "centred sense of personal identity" that may indeed be recovered. It is a recovery dependent upon a renewed sense of identity as Indian, as specifically Blackfoot, and Welch's novel represents such a recovery project. Once the narrator has made significant progress toward that rediscovery of a coherent, culturally determined identity, he will be able to unify past, present, and future and begin finally to project a future at least slightly, if not radically, different from the present.(FN25)

Strikingly, Owens begins his support for the possibility of an individual's cultural recovery as represented in Welch with a lengthy quotation that describes its impossibility, but in the end he cannot help but reject this theory of identity. If we follow his argument, Owens agrees with the postmodernist up to a point: the state of knowledge, our condition, consists in ever shifting forces that make the possibility of conceiving of a self born out of a coherent history a challenging affair. In an act of healthy skepticism, Owens exposes the problem of knowing ourselves in terms of essential cultural truths and exposes the way in which we all inevitably construct a coherent narrative in order "to unify past, present, and future." Ultimately, Owens disclaims "postmodern fragmentation and transience."

Owens's use of concepts such as "progress" and "discovery" or "project[ing] a future ... different from the present" demonstrates his ultimate dissent from the postmodernist theory of identity that Harvey identifies. Concepts of progress, discovery, and a better future require a more stable ground for knowledge than that afforded by strictly postmodernist theorists. The Blackfeet narrator can reintegrate himself with his culture only by reconciliation of the self to a normative notion of what it means to be Blackfeet, and this process of self-discovery and cultural reconciliation is one for which the postmodernist's theory of identity cannot account. Owens responds that the narrator not only can plan a future but can also come to understand himself better by imagining himself a confident Blackfeet man connected to his ancestral past, culture, and lands, "living to the best of his ability," as Yellow Calf says. The act of projecting a "better" relationship to the world is deeply evaluative; that is, to secure a better life, the narrator would also have to be able to identify how his life is worse today or might even have to evaluate which practices, whether individual or communal, are "right" or "wrong." Such decisions, of course, require a normative vision, a more or less objective idea of what it takes to become fully human in the Blackfeet world, the world against which the narrator can gauge the relative moral worth of his actions as he develops. The version of post-modernism that Harvey describes and Owens rejects is based on a view of objectivity that demands absolute certainty and is thus intolerant of error. The postmodernist cannot, then, provide an account of a "different future" or cultural development because this theory of identity does not allow for a self who can imagine who a young Blackfeet woman or man should become—an objective idea of who a good Blackfeet person is. A more applicable theory of self-hood would require an epistemology that interrogates the ways in which our value-laden presuppositions influence our moral decisions—but one that also accommodates a normative notion of how we should live and allows us to imagine a method for reformation of the colonially constructed Native self.

So Owens explains the Blackfeet narrator's act of recovery as an act of the imagination, a process through which the narrator re-members a past, reassembling the fragmented pieces as one would a jumbled puzzle. In returning to painful events such as the death of his brother, the narrator learns to forgive himself; or, in remembering, he realizes that First Raise, his father, really did love him. As Owens shows, the narrator relearns his culture from Yellow Calf: "With the revitalizing rain in the offing, for the first time the narrator engages his imagination in an attempt to comprehend a relationship involving deep commitment between man and woman."(FN26)

But Owens does not explain how we might know whether new interpretations of the narrator's past experiences are more accurate than previous interpretations. How does the narrator come to realize he was wrong about his past? No doubt the narrator has his own account of error as he comes to know himself better, but in order to understand this social phenomenon, we need a more adequate way to describe this process of cultural and moral growth, the recovery of a Blackfeet cultural identity. Because Owens has not foregrounded an alternative view of knowledge to explain individual cultural development—how we come to live better—he is ultimately unable to describe this vital decolonizing project.

For the narrator to recover his identity, he must appeal to an idea of what it means to be Blackfeet. Blackfeet culture functions as a repository of knowledge that collects and tests ways of living in the world and thus maintains the importance of such practices within cultural values or spiritual beliefs. Of course, the body of knowledge within a culture is always changing, adapting to new colonial relations, as Native cultures have, for example. In this way, cultural knowledge is not drawn from a rigid collection of essential truths but, rather, is continuously constructed by tribal members. The constructedness of Blackfeet culture should not discount its ability to refer accurately to their world, however. Often, an alternative theory of culture requires a new way of conceptualizing how we produce knowledge; our gathering of cultural knowledge is an evaluative yet largely stable process that sees cultural objectivity as a normative collection of ideas about Native people. A more politically enabling theory of Native culture recovers a cultural center by redefining objectivity in the realist terms I describe in the previous section.

In her study of Flathead culture, *Disciplined Hearts*, Theresa O'Neill, a professor of psychiatry, identifies the above idea of the center as a source of cultural anxiety because the center, as it is now understood, does not exist. Widespread depression in the Flathead community stems from a feeling of failure to be authentically Indian:

This elaborate lament, which I call the rhetoric of the 'empty center,' argues that there are no more 'real Indians.' ... [T]he rhetoric of the empty center is a conscious construction about what it means to be Indian. [It] culminates in a message that contemporary Flathead Indian identity is, in essence, inauthentic."(FN27)

Psychologists Eduardo Duran, who is Pueblo and Apache, and Bonnie Duran describe a similar felt emptiness among American Indians that they term the "soul wound": "The notion of soul wound is one which is at the core of much of the suffering that indigenous peoples have undergone for several centuries."(FN28) If, however, we resituate the idea of the objective center in the terms I have outlined above, Flathead culture can now imagine a future less colonized and more culturally viable. Such a notion of a cultural center frees Native persons from demands that they become "real" or "authentic" and allows them instead to strive simply to be better tribal members, based on the normative idea of the ways a Native person should live, as represented in a flexible, though centered and centering, core of beliefs.(FN29) And, though she is not explicit, O'Neill implies that a healthy self-conception is never an all or nothing affair in which one is either a fake or a real Indian but, rather, that it demands the careful evaluation of a community committed to maintaining a better idea of being American Indian. In her model, both colonialism and Flathead culture construct identity by imposing a revolving standard of evaluation: "The idealized characteristics of those in the inner circle and those outside the outermost circle are used to assess and negotiate the relative positions of individuals within the intervening circles."(FN30) Though O'Neill identifies the above evaluative process as a detrimental "system of authority," it is not inherently so. In fact, members of the Flathead cannot avoid such evaluations but can only work to achieve the above characteristics among tribal members in the most equitable terms.

Michael Wilson, a Choctaw scholar, outlines this alternative view of a cultural center in his article "Speaking of Home: The Idea of the Center in Some Contemporary American Indian Writing." Wilson shows how Bahktinian dialogics conform to a Native model of objectivity, the moral component of which is communicated through the oral tradition:

Thus, the participants in the oral tradition receive the stories not as artifacts but rather as changing sources of knowledge and entertainment. Their conception of literature has little commerce with the distinctions most crucial to anthropological science: distance and determinate representations. Instead, I would argue, the oral tradition provides a theory of reading that sees stories as rooted in place, as having indeterminate origins, where "authentic" reproduction of the stories occurs at continually re-created moments of reception, and yet as having a normative function that, like M. M. Bakhtin's centripetal concept of language, constantly pulls people and stories inward toward a relatively stable arena of life and value.(FN31)

Wilson identifies oral tradition as a vessel for the transmission of a core of "provisional truths" to which members of an Indian community can turn in their ongoing evaluations of individual behavioral practices, as members grow morally. Wilson's model of an American Indian cultural center agrees with O'Neil's model, in that both versions understand the actively constructed and dynamic quality of its knowledge production, but Wilson provides a model of how to fill O'Neil's notion of the empty cultural center by extending a degree of moral agency—and corresponding potential for cultural development—to individual community members.

#### **A REALIST READING OF WINTER IN THE BLOOD**

I have been arguing that oral tradition resembles a realist theoretical method for the philosophical evaluation of moral and social practice. For this reason, though the knowledge gained from tribal experiences may be theoretically mediated, it is still objective. I make this claim by drawing on a realist definition of objectivity that sees value-free objectivity as neither a possibility nor a worthwhile goal. Welch's insightful novel, *Winter in the Blood*, describes such an interpretive process. In *Winter in the Blood*, oral tradition (with its experiential and cognitive dimensions) provides Blackfeet people with theoretically mediated ancestral knowledge, knowledge that has a moral component, as the experiences of their forebears explain how Blackfeet people should live. In this novel, personal experience, then, is also an extension of a collective tribal experience because of the connection to ancestors through ancestral lines. And because cultural identity draws heavily on experience as a source of self-knowledge, ancestral tribal experience transmitted through bloodlines and stories informs individual moral and social practice.

Unlike many American Indian novels that represent a tragic view of contemporary Native life, *Winter in the Blood* uses dark humor to communicate the often farcical experience of being an Indian today, "on a great earth of stalking white men" (54), in the story of a thirty-two-year-old (the eighth stage of spiritual training) Blackfeet man's modern vision quest for a cultural purpose—for a name.(FN32) Perhaps because of this novel's comic treatment of a ritual search, various critics have debated whether the narrator recovers his culture and sense of place at all.(FN33) Peter Wild doubts whether the narrator experiences any kind of cultural growth: "By book's end, despite the listless comings and goings, the circumstances of his life seem to have changed little."(FN34) But while other critics do agree that "the winter in his blood has thawed" (as does LaVonne Ruoff),(FN35) that he has recovered his Blackfeet identity, we still have not been able to provide an explanation of this cultural recovery. I find that if we take seriously the connection among knowledge, experience, and American Indian

identity, we should be able to articulate fully this process of cultural recovery as a form of personal as well as social inquiry. Drawing on a realist theory of cultural identity that insists that experiences have a cognitive dimension, I would like to show how tribal people evaluate and regulate cultural knowledge. In my realist account, Welch's narrator becomes truly Blackfeet by deriving knowledge from ongoing cultural practices.

Because Winter in the Blood relies heavily on the power of story to replace individuals within Blackfeet culture and homelands, cultural recovery involves appealing to kinship bonds between both the living and the dead. The unnamed narrator of Winter in the Blood recovers a Blackfeet identity by achieving more objective knowledge of his ancestors and their ties to the land. He gains a new, deepened sense of himself as the grandson of the hunter Yellow Calf and is thus reconnected to traditional Blackfeet culture and its attendant tribal knowledge. His recovered tribal history deepens his identity as a moral agent in the community; what he comes to discover is the fact that his grandfather—in an act of moral solidarity—decided to break from his band and hunt for a woman his people wrongly abandoned. This resonating history to which the narrator is suddenly deeply attached demands a revision in the way he understands himself. In order to account for this experience, the narrator recovers a new indigenous identity. He thus grows culturally, not because he returns to a cultural or historical foundation but because he now sees his world more for what it is. His relationship to his forebears and their land offers a relatively stable center through which he can guide his own growth.

Moving between various places and times—between rural Blackfeet country and more urban and white areas and contemporary, more colonized times for Blackfeet people and earlier days just before the encroachment of the U.S. cavalry and the forced relocation and reservation living—Winter in the Blood is centered in a significant event that occurred in a specific place: one brutal winter, through which the narrator's ancestors struggled to keep their lives and their dignity:

Many people starved that winter. We had to travel light—we were running from the soldiers—so we had few provisions. I remember, the day we entered this valley it began to snow and blizzard. We tried to hunt but the game refused to move. All winter long we looked for deer sign. I think we killed one deer. It was rare that we even jumped a porcupine. We snared a few rabbits but not enough. (152)

The other events in the novel seem to hearken back to this central place and time; the narrator is drawn for unknown reasons to the site of his ancestors' famine and to the elder Yellow Calf, who eventually tells him of an event that shaped his life more closely than the young man knew. Yellow Calf "remembers" a time among his people when food and warmth were scarce, when soldiers pursued his band in order to destroy them or forcibly march them to reservations, where Americans hoped to end the traditional way of life of the Blackfeet people. Other Native peoples share similar stories of a significant event that demanded our survival and in which our ideas of ourselves as peoples were put to test. As a Cherokee man, I have heard stories of my ancestors surviving the Trail Where We Cried, for example. Through story, we struggle to give meaning to our suffering: the experiences of mass death brought on by genocidal campaigns against Native peoples, even though we remember them bitterly, help us to explain ourselves as we evaluate our past actions in desperate times. When Kathleen Sands, in "Alienation and Broken Narrative in Winter in the Blood," points out that "the function of storytelling in Indian communities is to keep life going, to provide a continuum of the past into the present, to allow for the predication of a future," she does not fully recognize the frustratingly ironic place of story in the novel.(FN36) The narrator's alienation from Blackfeet oral tradition deprives him of the very culturally integrative process story engenders; only a profound act of the

imagination can break this colonialist cycle of cultural deprivation. In *Winter in the Blood*, the land—tied to story—sparks this creative moment of cultural revelation. The geographical location of the tribally significant winter of Standing Bear's camp becomes literal moral ground to which the band's descendants may go for ancestral knowledge; it is to this "winter in the blood," this winter that is part of their history (even if it is not in their conscious memories), to which the blood relation of Yellow Calf may return in order to better understand himself in relation to his past and thus to recover his Blackfeet identity. In this way, Yellow Calf's narrative functions as a moral landmark in a novel otherwise problem-atically distanced from history and tradition.

In the opening pages, the narrator's homecoming to the place of his people is ironically estranging; but it is this very alienated feeling of distance in a home place among one's people that becomes the nagging problem that complicates his identity:

Coming home to a mother and an old lady who was my grandmother. And the girl who was thought to be my wife. But she didn't really count. For that matter none of them counted; not one meant anything to me. And for no reason. I felt no hatred, no love, no guilt, no conscience, nothing but a distance that had grown through the years.

It could have been the country, the burnt prairie beneath a blazing sun, the pale green of the Milk River valley, the milky waters of the river, the sagebrush and cottonwoods, the dry, cracked gumbo flats. The country had created a distance as deep as it was empty, and the people accepted and treated each other with distance.

But the distance I felt came not from country or people; it came from within me. I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon. And that was why I had no particular feelings toward my mother and grandmother. Or the girl who had come to live with me. (2)

The narrator begins his story of coming home with a declaration of unbelonging to both his people and his land; the women to whom he is related, his mother and grandmother, do not "mean anything" to him. But his sense of estrangement is most severe if we consider the importance of clan membership through matrilineal descent and how ancestral knowledge is passed on through this kinship. Welch attaches the narrator's alienation from his maternal line to his alienation from the land itself, land that is both "milky" and thus fertile yet somehow "burnt" and inert. The narrator blames the land itself for the distance among his people and within himself: a cruel and unforgiving land has forced its people to be like it. In the lines quoted above, the narrator attempts to place his feeling of distance, as he tries to know why he does not know himself. At first he can find "no reason" for his feeling of distance, later he identifies the "burnt prairie" as the cause, and then he finally realizes: "It came from within me." And if we look ahead to the new knowledge he gains of his hereditary connection to Yellow Calf and the winter, we see that his internal distance is real; his grandfather is like the "hawk" of his distanced self, whom he comes to know as he comes to know himself, thus closing his distance from his ancestors: "His back shook, the bony shoulders squared and hunched like the folded wings of a hawk" (159). When he finally closes this distance during his discovery with Yellow Calf, the narrator gains a reason for the above feelings and even recovers a meaningful relation to his mother and grandmother.(FN37)

The repeated word distance throughout *Winter in the Blood* undergoes a gradual change in meaning; in the beginning, the narrator both desires to become closer to himself and his Blackfeet culture and irreverently resents the epistemological responsibility that the process entails. As the novel continues, the young narrator slowly closes this distance by learning more about himself, his past, his people, and

their land.(FN38) His recovery of new knowledge comes in degrees, through a careful process of reinterpreting the past events of his people, as heard through the stories of his mother, his grandmother, and Yellow Calf, the elder he discovers to be his grandfather. Through the "theory" that is oral tradition, he evaluates their—and, by natural extension, his—experiences for their relative ability to make sense of his life and, at the thrilling moment of his discovered tie to Yellow Calf, the hunter, finds immediacy in a stable center of value composed of his ancestry and their stories. As the protagonist approaches this center, he experiences the unification of past and present, and his alienation all but disappears. This experience of cultural discovery should not be taken lightly, even though Welch mingles farce with remorse in its presentation. An experience similar to a paradigm shift in scientific inquiry, the recovery of cultural identity often demands a radical top-down reassessment of one's known world. Seated in the sun beside his horse, the narrator feels this insight come to light:

I though for a moment.

Bird farted.

And it came to me, as though it were riding one moment of the gusting wind, as though Bird had had it in him all the time and had passed it to me in that one instant of corruption.

"Listen, old man," I said. "It was you—you were old enough to hunt!" (158)

Welch offers no romantic tale of an Indian being mysteriously bestowed with tribal wisdom: Bird "farts" to underscore the unavoidable "corruption" inherent in the process of decolonization and cultural recovery; because producing and regulating knowledge are cultural practices unavoidably tainted with theory, recovering knowledge requires a great deal of interpretive work that must distinguish between and account for both the sacred and the profane. By offsetting an otherwise pristine moment of ancestral knowledge with the play of "fart-wisdom" (this repeated "rumble" interrupts the narrator's thoughts throughout), Welch comments on the nature of inquiry; knowledge comes with the "awk! awk!" of magpies and not through a sentimental search for the pure origin of Native culture. Ancestral insight may ride the wind, but it is "not like you'd expect, nothing like you'd expect" (172). Unlike the questing Fisher King at which Welch hints, the narrator struggles to uphold a persona of indifference toward his people and land. "Such realistic humor grounds the narrative vision and illusion in honesty and awareness," says Kenneth Lincoln.(FN39)

Of course, the narrator already knew the version of Yellow Calf's winter story told by his grandmother, but she omitted key parts of the story to avoid a return to the painful memories of a time when the U.S. government actively sought to destroy her people. While the "old woman's" story remains clear in the narrator's mind as he lies in bed, now a man remembering, it still leaves him with an air of the unexplained. His feeling of absence, of an incomplete story of his tribal past, remains haunted yet taunting and is associated with other painful memories such as those of his brother Mose, which could offer explanation if only he were prepared to return to them, as he seems to in this moment of his life:

A low rumble interrupted my thoughts. I sat up and looked about the dark room. When I was young I had shared it with Mose and his stamp collection and his jar full of coins. In one corner against the wall stood a tall cupboard with glass doors. Its shelves held mementos of a childhood, two childhoods, two brothers, one now dead, the other servant to a memory of death. (38)

Our own individual acts of decolonization often involve reexamining the personal experiences that have shaped our lives. But because this reinterpreting project is likely to demand a return to desperate times of loss, we often choose silence, especially when it guarantees the cultural invisibility and ahistoricity that accompany modern

mainstream living. Or perhaps it is worse if we decide to speak, for then we often tell a kinder story in which the abusive events have been removed; to avoid painful memories we sacrifice the call for justice that telling the real story entails. And so the freeing of our selves is blocked by our own fear of drawing near the events that would threaten a comfortable yet empty distance from our own pasts. In the above passage, the narrator is called back from his distant place by the bodily reality of a comical release, the "low rumble" of his brother's memory, and is thus compelled to confront an experience that blocks his own self-knowledge. In his recovery of his Blackfeet identity, the narrator will have to assume the agonizing role of "servant to memory," a title that makes him relive his nightmares of death and estrangement but will, in the end, give him a way to reinterpret his experiences and thus better explain his past and himself.

But even if the narrator gains new knowledge of himself and his relationship to his people, as revealed in Yellow Calf's version of his band's terrible winter, how can the narrator be sure it is better or more objective (as a realist theorist would claim)? Owens describes cultural recovery as a reassembling of the jumbled pieces of "the puzzle of identity," but how can we be sure we reassemble the puzzle correctly? What process guides our interpretation of experiences, old, new, and recovered, our views of ancestral stories? No doubt, this process of reinterpretation is frustrated by the very cultural distance the narrator strives to overcome: "I tried to understand the thinking, the hatred of the women, the shame of the men. Starvation. I didn't know it. I couldn't understand the medicine, her beauty" (155-56). But if we understand identity as an idea of ourselves, both individual and collective, that explains our experiences, our own and tribal ancestral pasts, we can evaluate such an idea on the basis of how well it explains our experiences. The narrator's new identity as the grandson of Yellow Calf, the hunter, necessarily explains more accurately the narrator's world. It makes sense of his place in his Blackfeet family in a largely Gros Ventre community and of why his father ritually led him as a child to visit the "old man." But most important, the narrator's reinterpretation of his tie to his ancestry places him in a world of rich history and belief and fills a previous cultural emptiness, thus making better sense of his world. Indeed, he is led to this new identity in ways that test conventional knowledge: "The answer had come to me as if by instinct, sitting on the pump platform, watching his silent laughter, as though it was his blood in my veins that had told me" (160). The young Blackfeet man has thus grown culturally: he now understands that winter in his blood.

#### ADDED MATERIAL

#### FOOTNOTES

1. James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* (New York: Penguin, 1974), 161-62. Page numbers for quotes from the book have been cited parenthetically in the text.
2. José Barreiro, "The Dilemma of American Indian Education," *Indian Studies* 1, no. 1 (1984): 4-5.
3. The debate on identity is taking place in both the humanities and the social sciences. See Anthony Kwame Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., *Critical Inquiry*, Special Issue, 18 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, eds., *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Many scholars of American Indian culture study postcolonial identity in Native communities. See Michael K. Green, ed., *Issues in Native American Cultural Identity* (New York: Lang, 1995); Devon A. Mihesuah, "American Indian Identities: Issues of Individual Choices and Development," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 193-226; and Scott B. Vickers,

Native American Identities: From Stereotype to Archetype in Art and Literature (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998). On the U.S. regulation of American Indian identity, see M. Annette Jaimes, "Federal Indian Identification Policy: A Usurpation of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America," in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 123-38. See also Judith Butler and Joan Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

4. Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon, 1992 [1986]), 165. For a selection of essentialism in Native scholarship, see Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us?: Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Monroe ME: Common Courage Press, 1994); and M. Annette Jaimes, "American Indian Studies: Toward an Indigenous Model," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 11, no. 3 (1987): 1-16.

5. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xvii.

6. For an entire volume devoted to postmodernist readings of Native literature to which these authors have contributed, see Gerald Vizenor, ed., *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993 [1989]).

I understand poststructuralism to be a philosophical movement begun in the late 1960s as a corrective to structuralism. Structuralism found support among French anthropologists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss. Poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Lacan seek to question the grand narratives of civilization by decentering (the colonial center of) knowledge and thus emphasize multiplicity. On this development in literary studies, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 91-150.

Unlike poststructuralism, postmodernism is not necessarily a reaction to modernism. Used to describe an aesthetic movement and a period in history, as well as a view of knowledge, the term has become unclear. In this article, however, I use the term postmodernism to describe a theoretical position. Drawing on the largely linguistic critique of poststructuralism, postmodernism makes its entry in the study of culture and especially of identity. I consider those theoretical positions that present extreme skepticism regarding objective knowledge or universal moral claims to be postmodernist. For helpful definitions, see Philip Lewis, "The Post-Structuralist Condition," *Diacritics* 12 (1992): 2-24.

7. Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990 [1976]), xxiii.

8. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.

9. Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 64.

10. Gerald Vizenor, *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), xii.

11. Gerald Vizenor, "The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance," *American Indian Quarterly* 17 (1993): 15.

12. Kimberly M. Blaeser, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 155.

13. See Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 25-41.

14. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Who Stole Native American Studies?" *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 9.



15. These American Indian intellectuals have begun to see the necessity of a theory of identity to locate Native people and literature in a world of their own. See Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can't Read Wallace Stegner: A Tribal Voice* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Warrior, *Tribal Secrets*; Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Craig S. Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). See also Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
16. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story," *American Indian Quarterly* 20 (1996): 67.
17. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García, eds., *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
18. Paula M. L. Moya, "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity: Cherrie Moraga and Chicana Feminism," in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 134.
19. Moya, "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity," 135.
20. Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 206.
21. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, 208.
22. Moya, "Postmodernism, 'Realism,' and the Politics of Identity," 137-38.
23. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1989), quoted in Louis Owens, *Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 131.
24. Unlike the "post" in postmodern, the "post" in postcolonial describes not a historical moment or even a theoretical position but a theory of colonized personhood, most often in which the self is always internally destabilized and fractured by the often unconscious influence of colonial ideology on one's identity. For this view of the postcolonial subject, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 271-313; and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 40-65.
25. Owens, *Other Destinies*, 131.
26. Owens, *Other Destinies*, 131.
27. Theresa DeLeane O'Neill, *Disciplined Hearts: History, Identity, and Depression in an American Indian Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 55.
28. Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 24.
29. See Simon Ortiz, "Towards a National Indian Literature: Cultural Authenticity in Nationalism," *MELUS* 8 (1981): 7-13.
30. O'Neill, *Disciplined Hearts*, 56.
31. Michael Wilson, "Speaking of Home: The Idea of the Center in Some Contemporary American Indian Writing," *Wicazo Sa Review* 12, no. 1 (1997): 134.
32. John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders of the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 162-63.
33. Ron McFarland, "'The End' in James Welch's Novels," *American Indian Quarterly* 17 (1993): 319-20.
34. Peter Wild, *James Welch* (Boise: Boise State University Press, 1983), 27.

35. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, "Alienation and the Female Principle in *Winter in the Blood*," *American Indian Quarterly* 4 (1978): 121.
36. Kathleen M. Sands, "Alienation and Broken Narrative in *Winter in the Blood*," *American Indian Quarterly* 4 (1978): 105.
37. In his alienation from the land and from women, the narrator dramatizes the destructive effects of colonialism on American Indian men. Native men often struggle with the popular image of the fallen warrior. This common "End of the Trail" image is a negative stereotype produced by the dominating American culture, which often desires to associate American Indian men with the frontier past. According to Judith A. Antell, "The psychological, if not physical, impairment of Indian men is seen as critical to the colonial scenario. Indian women are more easily discounted regardless of the state of their mental health" ("*Momaday, Welch, and Silko: Expressing the Feminine Principle through Male Alienation*," *American Indian Quarterly* 12 [1988]: 214). The narrator has internalized this tragic image presented by the majority culture, and so he often feels sorry for himself. Yellow Calf pokes fun at the young man for this.
38. Welch complicates any easy reading of "distance" in *Winter in the Blood* by letting distance resonate differently throughout the novel. So, while the narrator's distance from his culture is steadily closed, other distances remain. The highline prairie will always be somehow distant in its vastness. At the novel's conclusion, the narrator actually enjoys being "distant in a clean rain" (172). Kathleen Mullen Sands comments: "The distance here does not cut him off.... On the contrary, in this solitary moment, he claims the past, washed clean of bitterness by the summer storm" ("*Closing the Distance: Critic, Reader, and the Works of James Welch*," *MELUS* 14 [1987]: 77). Some distance is necessary and even good—as long as we have the ability to choose.
39. Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 162.