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Call for Change

*The Medicine Way of American
Indian History, Ethos, & Reality*

DONALD L. FIXICO

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Set in Minion Pro by Laura Wellington.

Designed by A. Shahan.

*To April, ***
who understands all of this.*

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Preface

The time for a call for change in American Indian history is now. For too many years the academic discipline has ignored the ethos and reality among Indian people or lacked the open-mindedness to understand these forces. Many years of thinking about the subject are represented in this book. The frustration has been that most scholars writing about Indian people do so with limited understanding. The idea of others writing your people's history naturally deepens the frustration, provoking feelings that "they don't really understand us," or "they just don't get it." Many Indian people would agree with these statements. Hence the task is to address how the discipline of history can be improved by reconsidering the approach toward Native people in order to produce more balanced scholarship. It is for these reasons that I offer observations about how historians have frequently misunderstood Indians.

In response, I provide as a thesis the idea of the Medicine Way of American Indian history, which demonstrates and explains the indigenous ethos and reality. The concept further demands the acknowledgment of a "Natural Democracy" paradigm consisting of what I have called the First, Second, and Third Dimensions, as a cross-cultural bridge for individuals to understand the past of Indian people more comprehensively. This is a new approach to help the history discipline intellectualize indigenous people in the Medicine Way, a standpoint drawn from the ancient postulate that medicine power is all around Indian people, who live the Medicine Way

of life. Derived from centuries of studying nature, this approach is both cyclical and circular in philosophy.

Chapter 1 addresses the general historiography of Indian history and considers which academic disciplines have promoted the field. American Indian history is a complex subject due to the need to try to understand and reconstruct Indian historical reality. This chapter also introduces the Indian-white paradigm of Indian-white contact and works retrospectively toward establishing a Native reality. In the process the Medicine Way of history, which begins with binary relationships, is revealed. Chapter 2 is about the two important concepts of “seeing” and Natural Democracy. Seeing is defined as how Native people who are close to their tribal cultures think and how this circular and visual logic has developed into a Native ethos. Natural Democracy is the inclusion of all things to be mutually recognized based on reciprocal respect among all within a totality that the Muscogee Creeks and Seminoles call *Ibofanga*. An earlier version of this chapter on Indian circular philosophy appeared in my book *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World: American Indian Studies and Traditional Knowledge* (2003).

In 1982 I taught an Indian history survey at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. As I described the democratic government of the League of the Iroquois to my class, I included the importance of the Iroquois animal clans in the worldview of life and used the phrase Natural Democracy for the first time. Later I discovered that Nobel Prize-winning author Pearl Buck illustrated in her novel *The Good Earth* a kind of Natural Democracy to describe Chinese farmers’ practice of kinship and rural life in a social community. In hearings to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, Buck used a more developed cultural concept of Natural Democracy. Much earlier, Aristotle spoke of civil government as a form of Natural Democracy in Greek society.

While Aristotle and Buck use Natural Democracy as a cultural concept and governmental practice for people, I broaden the usage to include human and nonhuman entities in a totality where all are respected on a lateral basis. In 2000 Native scholar Gregory Cajete described the earth as hosting a Natural Democracy of all things as

parts of her body, and each one has a right to live. Other scholars may have used Natural Democracy, and it is my hope that people will become familiar with it as a practical term to include the natural environment as a part of our daily lives so as to avoid disregarding animals, plants, and the natural environment.

Chapter 3 addresses the historical equation of Indian-white relations, examining the primary trends in historical literature written “about” American Indians. The chapter identifies works written about Indians as the First Dimension. Chapter 4 on the Indian-white binary discusses the present scholarship with Indians and whites as equal actors on the historical stage. Such scholarship centers on Indian-white interactions in war, trade, boarding schools, and activism. This interaction in a “shared experience” is the Second Dimension, which has developed since the mid-1980s and is where the current scholarship is mostly practiced.

An earlier version of chapter 5 was presented as “The Metaphysical Reality of American Indian History” at the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the D’Arcy McNickle Center at the Newberry Library, Chicago, during September 1997. The Third Dimension of American Indian history was conceived in my teaching seminars in ethnohistory at Western Michigan University and was initially introduced in a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Ethnohistory in 1996. The Third Dimension is Native ethos: how Indian people view history from their own perspective. This chapter explains how historians and other scholars can reconstruct Native reality.

Chapter 6 on transdisciplinary and cross-cultural analysis provides academic tools to build a bridge of understanding to cross to the third dimension and return to the first. Related to this approach is chapter 7, providing the basis of Native culture in oral tradition and its importance in accounting for the past. Chapter 8 emphasizes that the earth and indigenous women are vital to understanding the infrastructure and inner perspective called the Native ethos. This chapter is also about the role of place in providing a sense of Native reality. Chapter 9 reemphasizes the need for a call for change, to rethink Indian history and how it should be reanalyzed for a balanced history of Indian-white relations.

Ten figures are integrated into the first nine chapters to illustrate the development of the model of Natural Democracy via the three dimensions identified. Each figure represents a visual phase, starting with a binary paradigm of Indian-white relations—Creek-white, for example—that demonstrates a reciprocal relationship. Any tribal community can be used and can be represented by a circle. The same tribal community as a circle becomes the focus of a natural environment, surrounded by other circles of human and nonhuman communities. For instance, with the Creeks in the center, we also have the following binary relationships: Creek-white, Creek-Cherokee, Creek-animal, Creek-plant, and so forth. The Creeks have a binary relationship with each community, and they are all connected via their reciprocal relations within a totality that I call Natural Democracy. The one exception is the Creek-metaphysical binary in figure 9. Although the Creek people desire to remain always connected to the metaphysical, it communicates with the Creeks only when it wishes. Finally, the key to this spherical indigenous world, as depicted in multiple reciprocal relationships in figure 10, is that Indians are communal people and are inclusive of all others.

A note on terminology: I have used American Indian instead of Native American. Indians do not typically call one another Native Americans; non-Indians more commonly refer to Native people as Native Americans. People who know Indians well usually use the names of tribes.

Many people have influenced my thinking about how to develop an innovative approach to writing American Indian history. To begin with, the mentors at the University of Oklahoma who trained me as a historian were the late Arrell M. Gibson, H. Wayne Morgan, William H. Maehl Jr., and William Bittel; and Bittel introduced me to anthropology as a useful discipline to understand the interwoven combination of culture and history. Postdoctoral fellowships years ago at UCLA and at the Newberry Library added to my training and exposure to a larger thinking of American Indian history. The seminar discussions at the Newberry Library were invaluable to broadening my perspectives, although at the time they added to my personal frustration as a young scholar. These ideas needed more

honing to be developed into sharper concepts and deeper thoughts about American Indian history.

As a young professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, I benefited from the influence of Reginald Horsman and Francis Paul Prucha, who was nearby at Marquette University. I listened to their wisdom and interpretative analysis about Indian history. Further words of advice and influences on my thinking came over the years from conversations with Blue Clark, R. David Edmunds, Michael Green, Peter Iverson, Floyd O'Neil, Katherine Osburn, Donald Parman, Margaret Connell Szasz, Gregory Thompson, and John Wunder. I am grateful to all of them and to others not mentioned here. From a distance, I am thankful for the works of Richard White, Phil Deloria, James Axtell, William T. Hagan, William Fenton, Fred Hoxie, Colin Calloway, Calvin Martin, Fred McTaggart, Robert Berkhofer, and Ray DeMallie, whose writings have forced me to think more deeply about how to argue for an *Indian* Indian history.

My former graduate students at Western Michigan University deserve apologies for having had to listen to my ideas and thoughts about history and Indians, especially during the days of building a new doctoral program in the history department. These young people indulged my early concepts in seminars and contributed ideas about how to analyze American Indian history. More than the students ever realized, our exchanges helped me to shape new ideas and ponder convictions. These young scholars are Rob Galler, Mary Younker, Barbara Sears, Michelle Martin, Maribel Izquierdo-Rodriguez, JoAnne Thomas, Tim Willig, and Dixie Haggard. I am thankful to my former history chair at Western Michigan University, Ron Davis, who allowed me to experiment with new graduate seminars focusing on methodology, ethnohistory, and oral history as we built a new doctoral program.

I am also appreciative of my patient graduate students and colleagues in the history department and in the Indigenous Nations Studies Program at the University of Kansas for sharing my ideas and concerns about American Indians and history. At Kansas University, I am grateful for the support from my former colleagues Peter Mancall, Rita Napier, Don Worster, and many others, including

the Discussion Club. What I learned from the club was that a sharp mind is always young. I am especially appreciative of my former secretary Fredina Drye, who helped immensely on my arrival to Kansas. The writing for this book began at KU. Graduate students at Kansas University who helped with typing and researching articles were Tom Niermann, Sara Summers, and Viv Ibbett.

I am very grateful to Gary Dunham, former director of the SUNY Press and University of Nebraska Press, who read an early draft of the manuscript and commented fully on it. He knows all about writing from the Indian side of history. At the University of Nebraska Press, I am appreciative of the support from my editor Matt Bokovoy, assistant project editor Kyle Simonsen, and copyeditor Sally Antrobus. They made my ideas easier to understand. I also appreciate the responses from the outside readers, whoever they are, for making this a stronger book.

In addition, I am thankful for the services of Channette Kirby of the Watson Library at the University of Kansas. During the final stages of manuscript development I presented an overall paper on the complexity of American Indian history at the first regional meeting of the Organization of American Historians, held at Iowa State University, and I am grateful to those who listened to my ideas and offered comments. Particular thanks go to Chris Newman of Elgin Community College, who shared his paper with me and offered helpful comments on my work.

After relocating to Arizona State University I took up this manuscript again and revised it with new courage. I am grateful for my Distinguished Foundation Professorship and support from President Michael Crow, Provost and Vice President Betty Philips, Executive Dean Robert Page, and Interim Dean Elizabeth Langland. I appreciate the warm friendships with Matt Garcia, director of the School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies, history faculty head Phil VanderMeer, and the staff of the school as well as my colleagues Peter Iverson, Katherine Osburn, Paul Hirt, and others in history and across the campus, David Martinez, James Riding In, Bryan Brayboy, Diane Humetewa, Eddie Brown, Simon Ortiz, John Tippeconnic, Delia Saenz, Carol Lujan, Patricia Ferguson, Michael Begaye,

Laura Tohe and Rebecca Tsosie. In bringing this project to fruition I also received much help and hard work from my research assistants Clara Keyt and Chelsea Mead. In the final stages, research assistants Brianna Theobald and John Goodwin worked thoroughly to help complete the final draft and I am grateful to them.

As I completed this book, I thought considerably about the past and my parents and grandparents. My mother, Virginia Fixico (Sac & Fox and Shawnee), and my father, John Fixico (Seminole and Muscogee Creek), and their Depression-born generation, including aunts and uncles, remember when much mainstream prejudice went against them, making life harder than necessary. Even earlier, following World War I, my grandparents—Jonas Fixico (Seminole), Lena Spencer Fixico (Muscogee Creek), Glade Wakolee (Sac & Fox), and Rachel Dirt Wakolee (Shawnee)—lived during an even more difficult generation of unwarranted discrimination, all due to misunderstanding, greed, and limited acceptance of Indian people in Oklahoma. Discrimination and ethnocentrism fostered a mainstream attitude in which the ideas of others were denied. For them and other Indian people of their times, this book is intended to help today's generation toward a better understanding of American Indians and their history. I also hope this model of Natural Democracy in the Medicine Way will help other indigenous communities in the world, as we are much alike in a binary system of colonizer and colonized, although in her work on gender and colonialism, Ann Stoler effectively argues that this adversarial model is much more complicated.

Last and most important, I am eternally grateful to my son Keytha and my wife April Summitt for helping bear my personal challenge of trying for a better understanding of Indian people by the history profession and mainstream society. The patience and support of my family have nurtured my confidence and boldness to go out on the limb of putting my ideas into words; I alone, of course, should bear any criticism people may have about this attempt to “see” American Indian history in a new light and with analytical insight. I do not speak in this book for all Indians; but as a full-blood I know that many Indian people feel history has been written “about” us and our

people without real awareness of the depths of our Native cultures. I attempt to demonstrate how we see the world and live life in our Native reality while at the same time living and working in the other reality called the American mainstream. Life is seeking the spiritual balance between many challenging opposites and finding the courage to move forward to live.

Donald L. Fixico
Arizona State University

Glossary

Circle of Life means all things are connected within a totality. Via blood or symbolism, kinship provides membership that extends beyond human society to include nonhumans, such as the animals, plants, and all known forms in the earth and heavens.

Cultural bridge of understanding is the equation of Indian-white relations, (read from right to left) consisting of the First Dimension, Second Dimension, and Third Dimension. By passing through these dimensions of kinds of Native history, the bridge enables individuals to reach the Third Dimension and return with an understanding of all three types of Indian history.

First Dimension is the way in which western-trained historians write “about” American Indian history while not properly understanding the cultural reality of Native people from inside Native communities.

Medicine Way is the Native way of “seeing,” or the worldview in an indigenous paradigm, whereby American Indians experience physical and metaphysical realities as one.

Natural Democracy is an indigenous paradigm consisting of everything in a totality being mutually respected by all entities within the system.

Nation and *tribe* are interchangeable terms used with the same meaning of a group of people working under one belief or direc-

tion that gives them purpose. This understanding of nation includes more than one community speaking the same language.

Other Side is the spiritual dimension in a metaphysical world where the nonliving exists. The spirits from the Other Side make themselves known to the living world.

Second Dimension is the “shared-experience” stage of scholarship in writing American Indian history as western-trained historians are putting Indians at center stage as makers of history with white Americans.

Third Dimension is the Native reality of the physical and metaphysical combined, in which spirits and visions are a major part of the indigenous paradigm and Native worldview, with details varying by tribe.

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The Complexity of American Indian History

As it began to get dark on April 12, 1991, three Indians stood on a street corner in downtown Louisville, Kentucky. There was no doubt that they looked Indian. Two of them had long black hair. As people walked by, they stared at the Indians. One lit a cigarette and offered a smoke to the other two, but they shook their heads to decline. The smoker mentioned he was going to quit his habit someday. The long day had ended for the annual conference of the Organization of American Historians, meeting that year in Louisville. All three Native friends who attended the conference were historians with doctorates in hand from universities known for Indian history. We were deeply engrossed in conversation about one of the sessions where we had heard papers presented on Indians.

More people walked past us, but we paid them no mind. We criticized the papers, saying that the non-Indians in the session really did not know enough about Indians. We talked about the tribal differences of our people. One Indian historian said, “There wasn’t enough scholarly analysis in the papers.” The three of us concluded that American Indian history focused on Indian-white relations but that there were many tribal histories that needed to be included as well. We stood there talking for almost an hour; it was dark as we stood under a streetlight. I was hungry, and I told my friends I was going to get something to eat and go back to my hotel room. One of the other Native historians said he had to leave to meet a friend. The third said he had heard there was a blues band playing nearby, and he was going to listen to some blues.

As we left in our different directions, I thought about what the other people were thinking as they walked by us—three Indians standing on the street corner. Instantly all the stereotypes would come to their minds about Indians, and they might feel a bit tense walking past us. They might only ever have known Indians on television, or through the racist presumptions of Indians being dirty, lazy, and uneducated. I would have bet a million dollars that they would never have guessed we were three Indian scholars of history. Three Indian professors, out of fewer than fifteen Indian PhDs in history in the entire country at the time, were discussing the complexity of Indian history on a downtown street corner as the evening began to cool down.

Real Indian history focuses on how Indian people were involved in experiences from their own perspective and also on understanding the views of non-natives who participated. “How” and “why” Native peoples responded as they did in situations typically called events are significant questions for understanding Indian history. In this light, the present study is not just the history of Indian-white relations. This is not a history “about” Indians from a non-Indian point of view. Instead, it is a history of how Native people have been misrepresented, and this study sheds light on being Indian while expressing an indigenous ethos within a Native reality. In order to understand Indian history, it is necessary to attempt to “see” things from the Native perspective of a tribal community’s inside.

In addition, “experience” is more significant to Indian people than “event.” Native people describe experiences in their daily conversations or when telling about the past. In contrast, mainstream Americans place more emphasis on events as the text of history. Whether it is through experiences or events, Indians and whites have engaged each other throughout history, whether it was written or told via the oral tradition in stories.

Throughout this book, it is essential for the reader to put aside previous notions about history as a collection of events and to think about history in terms of experiences. In this Native ethos, history is a series of experiences recounted by storytellers through the oral tradition.

AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY
NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY
AMERICAN INDIANS' HISTORY
Equation of
HISTORY OF INDIAN-WHITE RELATIONS

FIGURE 1. American Indian history is equated with the history of Indian-white relations.

Current American Indian historiography represents the field of literature of historical accounts, including oral history, that non-Indian historians have produced about Indians and their relations with other peoples. This broad inclusion also takes in the works of other scholars and writers who have produced accounts about indigenous Americans as well as the writings of early chroniclers and travelers who kept diaries and journals and made reports about the Native peoples of America. It is crucial to acknowledge the oral history and written accounts produced by Native peoples, as they also produced pertinent records that are a part of American Indian historiography. While more than forty thousand books have been written about American Indians, mostly by non-Indians, there are also tribal accounts, works by Native authors, and oral histories that have added significantly to this historiography, although the mainstream academy has failed to appreciate this contribution.

In the discourse throughout the chapters that follow, American Indian history consists of understanding the *experiences* of Indian-white relations. Indian history is about relationships, including non-human relationships. However, in teaching Indian history one typically ends up teaching the history of Indian-white relations. Whatever the course is called—American Indian History, Native American History, Native Studies, or American Indians' History—the hyphenated Indian-white binary predominates, even if only implicitly.

In this equation, looking from right to left, one can imagine the settlers moving from the east toward the west as many of them re-

HISTORY OF
INDIAN — WHITE
RELATIONS

FIGURE 2. Generally Indian history courses focus on Indian-white relations.

corded their travels and wrote about Indians, keeping diaries, describing Native people in their journals, and telling others later about what they saw. In his introduction to *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West*, Dee Brown invites his readers to stand up, and he states, “Americans who have always looked westward when reading about this period [the western expansion] should read this book facing eastward.”¹

The equation of Indian-white relations can be used to illustrate that a First Dimension exists in which non-Indians write “about” Indian people, and it is from this dimension that most Indian history has been written.

A Second Dimension can be theorized of scholars analyzing and writing about the “interactions” between Indians and whites. This second door represents the threshold where the mainstream reality meets Native reality. For example, the United States and Native groups have engaged in more than sixteen hundred wars, battles, and skirmishes. This common ground includes the first encounter with Columbus as well as other historical contact situations, such as trade relations, missionaries among Indians, boarding school experiences, and even intermarriages.

This Second Dimension has always been present, but it was not opened in academic circles until the 1970s. Ironically Native peoples have been using this door to go both ways: to enter white reality and to return to their own world as a part of the government’s efforts to assimilate them in the mainstream.

A Third Dimension is proposed, which is actually the First Dimension from the Indian point of view, as indigenous people saw whites approaching from the east. This Third Dimension of Indian-white relations involves researching, analyzing, and writing from the inside

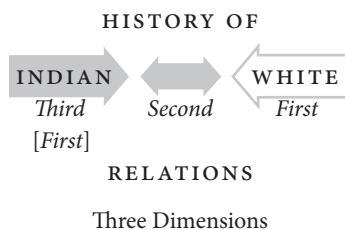


FIGURE 3. Three dimensions of history are illustrated from right to left: history written by non-Indians, history focused on both Indians and whites, and the Third is from a Native approach, which is actually the First from a Native view.

out, based on Indian views of history. Applying the equation of Indian-white history as outlined in the following pages provides a framework and route for enlightening non-Indians about the Indian perspective.

A key consideration in studying American Indians is to understand their reality and learn how it has changed. It is the “real life” of how people lived, what they thought, how they formed their values, and how they viewed the world of medicine power in all things, including the universe, that is most relevant in writing the history of American Indians in the Third Dimension. This perspective is the Medicine Way of Indian history/experiences. This power-in-everything interpretation consists of the three dimensions as described and uses a binary paradigm of Indian-white relations. The interaction of the three dimensions creates a “cultural bridge of understanding” that becomes more familiar with regular usage. Within this indigenous paradigm is a Native reality called a “Natural Democracy” that contains all things (see the glossary for special terms used in this book). For example, medicine is all around Native people, and it is part of the metaphysical component of Native reality called the Third Dimension. This is the Medicine Way of understanding power. And the three dimensions in the equation in figure 3 illustrate a bridge of cultural understanding that can be crossed by mainstream academics from right to left.

In this sense, understanding the “historic” and “traditional” real-

ity at any point in time becomes the task for historians and scholars from other fields in their efforts to explore, understand, and analyze the actual history/experiences of American Indians.

It is imperative to realize that indigenous reality has changed throughout the course of time and that indigenous communities have had various and sometimes conflicting worldviews. The constant in the Indian universe was and remains change due to adaptation for survival against the forces of nature and other powers, including white settlement. Forces of the universe and external pressures from white encroachment caused an acceleration of changes in Indian life, although the rate varied with the control of cultural evolution possessed by Indians themselves. It bears repeating that such external forces acting on Native communities and causing change occurred well before the arrival of Columbus in the Americas in 1492.

Yet continuity persisted as change occurred within the indigenous communities. The continuity consisted of an evolution of change as the people adapted new ideas and new material items from Europeans, such as the horse from the Spanish, guns from the French, and metal items from the British, to improve their societies.

This continuum was aided by the power of “story,” the vehicle of oral tradition as generations of people told and retold stories of myths and legends and of experiences that made them a part of the present. Prophetic accounts of experiences to occur in the future were made a part of the present reality so that the past and the future were entertained in one time continuum. This was the Circle of Life for Native peoples, who believed in cycles of events and whose fundamental philosophy and thought functioned circularly (see glossary).

The survival of Indian people has enabled them to rebuild and adapt their communities and cultures. This ability might be called transformation of cultural adaptive systems. American Indians are indeed products of their environments, and their oral traditions of stories and myths corroborate this adaptive ability. Yet Indian history in the Third Dimension of an Indian reality is about understanding the indigenous ethos.

It is foolish to suppose that there is only one canon or one Amer-

ican Indian viewpoint, which presents us with a question—which point of view do we mean? “Indian perspective” means a point of view from a Native reality—not a specific tribal ethos. Within the indigenous context is a Navajo ethos, a Muscogee Creek ethos, a Mohawk ethos; each Native nation has its own way of seeing. All these ways of seeing represent a collective Indian perspective called the Medicine Way.

It is imperative to acknowledge the presence of more than one category of perspectives—or ways of interpreting Indian history. Standpoints range from that of the academic historian to that of the generic category of Native people, some of whom are also professional historians. American Indians who speak of and write history may be academically trained, and/or are trained in oral traditions, and they include those persons who are historians of their tribes, bands, communities, or organizations. Further discussion still needs to be addressed to determine “whose interpretation is it?” That is, Native people have an inherent right to preserve and/or write their own history, although the gatekeepers of Indian academic history who decide what gets to be published largely continue to be non-Indians. In fact, many non-Indian scholars and writers have made handsome careers from writing books about Indians without giving back something to the Native communities. Some scholars have even tried to keep others from studying and writing about “their” Indians. Yet to be fair, since the 1980s growing numbers of young scholars have become more sensitive to Indian views and Native concerns and now include Indian voices in their work.

Indeed, several historians have boldly attempted to write or compile books on the complexity of American Indian history. Historians and other scholars have produced articles on writing Indian history; some scholars have elaborated on the skills of history and how they feel such skills should be broadened. In his anthology *The American Indian and the Problem of History* (1987) Calvin Martin compiled many Indian and non-Indian views in essays on the nature of Indian history, which led to his book *In the Spirit of the Earth* (1992). Martin’s anthology consists of essays from various scholars in disciplines that are troubled by bringing together two different kinds of histo-

ry—one linear from the western thinking and the other circular from the Native consciousness. He called for an Indian perspective in Indian history, while challenging historians to think about history and time beyond their western-mindedness as trained historians. His *In the Spirit of the Earth* was more meaningful in articulating his view of connecting Native people with the earth, which has produced an Indian-earth consciousness. Although this work is insightful, the aspect that various kinds of medicine powers are always present is shortchanged. How this can be understood is addressed in the following chapters.

Colin Calloway's anthology *New Directions in American Indian History* (1988) suggested additional ways for other disciplines to approach Indian history. Calloway argued that we should not rely solely on the discipline of history. My own anthology *Rethinking American Indian History* (1997) left more to be said, although part 1 demonstrated the need for ethnohistory and part 2 argued for scholars to employ additional disciplines in writing Native history. Laurence Hauptman said much about the irony and challenge of writing about Indian people in his *Tribes and Tribulations: Misconceptions about American Indians and Their Histories* (1995). Hauptman argues that Indian people have been inaccurately represented, and these miscues have produced erroneous and harmful stereotypes about American Indians. Peter Nabokov, in *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (2002), argues that a history from an Indian viewpoint is too large an undertaking for historians alone and suggests the inclusion of folklorists, anthropologists, linguists, historians of religion, and Indian oral historians. In order to understand the Medicine Way, one must use a transdisciplinary approach to contextualize an indigenous paradigm.

These studies contributed to the need to explore the Native perspective about the Indian version of Indian history. Yet how are non-Indians to engage the Native point of view and its reality for understanding the other side of historical issues, events, and shared experiences? A special edition of the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* (2010) on contemporary Native communities argues that Native Studies scholars can provide a better understanding of

historical and contemporary events.² Based on their insights into their own communities, they can yield an approach from the inside out for presenting research and analysis of the infrastructures of tribal nations.

American Indian history in this light is both a paradox and an enormous challenge, and unfortunately it is typically understood from one's personal point of view. Perhaps it is best to consider the paradox first, and then address the deep myriad of American Indian history.

In the twenty-first century, after more than five hundred years of contact, America's scholars and mainstream society persist in largely ignoring the Indian view of the American experience. This is the paradox and a central part of the problem. Although Indians have recorded their own experiences in the oral tradition of myths, legends, and stories and in pictographs, etchings, and paintings, this information is not meaningfully incorporated into academic history. Ironically, this ethnocentrism on the part of American historians, anthropologists, and other experts who study the American experience prohibits a complete record of Indian-white relations. This unfortunate prejudice has produced a one-sided view from mainstream America (fig. 2, right to left), and the other side, from Indian America, still needs to be heard and included as a part of academic history. So rather than try to solve the entire problem of Native peoples in American history or the American experience, it is difficult enough to attempt to clarify the paradox and complexity of American Indian history.

The fiction of the conqueror's version, shrouded in optimistic glory, remained the prevailing narrative of the American experience and the textbook version introducing the American Indian experience for the first half of the twentieth century. Although this rhetorical mythologizing of the past influenced the popular readers of history, after 1970 historians and other scholars began to be more sensitive to including Indian voices in their work. Unfortunately the damage had already been done, as the public consciousness believed the conqueror's approach for most of the rest of the century.

Choosing one perspective permits only one half of the story about

America to be told, and it has caused critical mistakes in two major areas. First, a “single” version of what transpired in America prohibits the opportunity of a different viewpoint to corroborate or dispute the facts as white Americans interpreted them, or to evaluate which events were actually historically significant. As a result American textbooks and scholarly histories currently present an incomplete record of the American experience based on biased observations of the events that transpired. It is imperative to open minds to the major erroneous claims of the mainstream American version. The gross error is that Christopher Columbus “discovered” America.³

America was misrepresented as “free” land for the taking. It was not a “Garden of Eden” without an indigenous people, as historians have described this frontier experience while justifying the imperialistic expansionism promoted by Manifest Destiny. This is one point of view of an idealized America that most Americans believe. While scholars of the late twentieth century have produced a growing corpus of work to emphasize the importance of Native men and women as central players in Native history, much more needs to be done to change the public consciousness to include the truth that Native people participated in shaping the history of this country.

The rhetoric of the American myth taught in the classroom, using the slanted textbooks and mainstream optimism implanted in public historical consciousness, created an American selective memory. Furthermore, modern urban growth has enabled a “pervasive influence” to modify our environments and how we perceive regions and places.⁴ The majority of Americans seek to fulfill their individual needs while disregarding the views of others, and they are willing to accept textbook history rather than questioning it. More recent history has attempted to correct the old myths of American history. In the case of early history written about Native people, the public consciousness needs to be more informed about the recent scholarship since the late twentieth century putting Native people at center stage of Indian history as equal partners with white historical figures. In other words, this more recent scholarship is still filtering into the public mind; when Indians are the subject of conversations, most people remain most likely to know only the stereotypes about Indi-

ans. In this myopic way, perception and interpretation have advanced the public consciousness of history to the disadvantage of indigenous interpretation. This has created a “subaltern” that Gayatri Spivak has already addressed.⁵ In the process, public historian David Glassberg noted how Michael Frisch’s “shared authority” concept has had “profound implications for how all historians will do their work in the future, and the quality of the relationship that Americans will have with the past.”⁶ This authority establishes an ownership of history and how it should be interpreted by historians and presented to the public as participating partners. Each side should try to discover the truth rather than relying on what has been written as history, especially about Native people.

To buttress the point about misinformed Indian history, historian Warren Susman observed that Frederick Jackson Turner “took a major American myth and made from it effective history” that denied and suppressed the Medicine Way of Indian history.⁷ With his frontier thesis, Turner steered the intellectual consciousness of historians for the next half century and produced a school of like-minded scholars. Turner’s view became the driving force that influenced others, such as Charles Beard, Herbert Bolton, and Carl Becker. As a tool of social analysis, Turner’s interpretation of historical development led to American understanding of culture, enriched with symbols and a permeating “thickness,” according to Clifford Geertz.⁸ Geertz suggested that intensive studying of a tribal community would be a proper way to understand the thickness of the Native culture. I hope the Medicine Way can influence public consciousness of history by encouraging those within the western paradigm to rethink such views from the standpoint that this call for change maps out.

The consciousness of western-minded historians at various levels is what is addressed as one of the challenges of the Medicine Way of Native history. The Medicine Way consists of consciousness and sub-consciousness combined, whereby Native people include visions, dreams, and prophecies in accounting for their history. Hence the objectives of the present work are twofold: (1) to establish acknowledgment of the Medicine Way of Indian history, and (2) to influence scholars regarding the consciousness of historians at all levels, and

public consciousness as well, to balance the understanding of the American Indian past.

The Native view represents an entirely different understanding of Indian-white relations or the American experience, starting with the Great Encounter when the eastern hemisphere met the western hemisphere on October 12, 1492. This Native viewpoint is not found in historical documents produced by non-Indians; it must be searched for and reconstructed from such misleading documents and from other forms of evidence. Primarily the oral tradition accounts for much of the Indian version of history.

The lack of written Indian languages (in forms known to western civilization) offered no challenge to the historical narrative of America as portrayed by Columbus, other explorers, early travelers, and military personnel. In the emotional frenzy of “discovery,” “exploration,” and settlement of the “frontier,” these observers presumed false notions upon landing on the eastern shores. They presumed to have discovered the Americas, claiming the lands as part of their empire and ignoring the rights of the indigenous people. Their collected views became the European reality of America seen through the eyes of a non-Indian ethos; it was an incomplete truth. At best, their versions represented a true reality of America to them.

Such powerful themes as discovery, exploration, and Manifest Destiny have denied the full picture of the American experience. Artists paint the beauty they wish others to see; and like the hand holding the brush, in this case the newly arrived parties propounded a history of optimism, and good over evil, with religious justification codifying all actions. Thus reformative action needs to occur in all venues, including classrooms, textbooks, museums, historical societies, and academic circles.

Entertaining an Indian version of the American experience would present multiple versions from the numerous Indian nations. Yet a categorical “Indian” version of this historical experience does exist, and it needs to be widely acknowledged for a correction of the historical record. To illustrate this point, any two people are unable to recall the same incident in exactly the same way—and the difference is greater if the two observers were on opposite sides during the

course of events. The different versions vary further if the two observers are from different cultural backgrounds. Their viewpoints clash. A dualistic historical record results, as when American Indians and whites opposed each other in the struggle for the western hemisphere.

During contact and the establishment of relations between Europeans and Indians, land became the commodity of competition and conflict. As a result of continual friction, the American view of history has been one of military conquest, politics, scientific advancement, and economics, with lesser appreciation for the historical development of society, intellectualism, and cultural interaction. This limitation has validated the narrow view of the American experience through time. Textbooks perpetuate the view, teachers reinforce it, and ethnocentric Americans blindly accept it; or they simply do not care.

As a second area of critical mistakes, mainstream chroniclers had serious misconceptions about Indian people and their participation in the larger picture of United States history. The short-sightedness of the non-Indian chroniclers has caused negative stereotypes and harmful misunderstandings about American Indians. The “wild savage,” “drunken Indian,” and “dirty redskin” are but a few early stereotypes that written history upheld, causing irreparable and continued negative social and psychological repercussions for Indians. Columbus and others, who had limited knowledge about Indian people, failed to understand the complexities of Indian life, the depths of indigenous philosophies, and cultural differences. The academic discourse on Indians has evolved past this point, and yet much still needs to be done to reach the public consciousness to correct presumptions and misinformation about Native people.

Misnamed as “Indians,” Native people became subject to a generic racial view that all Indian people were alike, although belonging to more than five hundred different nations of various cultures, languages, and dialects. Living throughout the western hemisphere, Indians developed multiple philosophies, numerous religious beliefs, and significantly varied economic systems. In fact, each Indian nation had its own history and established relations with each newly

encountered European people. In essence, each Indian nation included in its stories the periods of European contacts, which initially were often secondary experiences, until the Europeans and Americans became the main threats. Indian-Indian relations—meaning Iroquois-Huron, Cherokee-Creek, and Ojibwe-Dakota relations, for example—were more important than Indian-white relations because much of the time, the nations were at war with other Indian nations. Obviously this relationship changed as Indians and whites waged wars. The various cultures of the Indian nations differed fundamentally from the Europeans' cultures, thus disallowing a mutual appreciation.

Europeans valued land as property to be owned and used in whatever profitable manner was desired. Land represented potential wealth to be exploited. In contrast, traditional Indian cultures believed that land could not be owned and that it represented a homeland for the tribal community. Logically, one could only put a handful of dirt in one's hand and carry it away; the rest remained. The homeland was the environment with space for humans, animals, plants, and all other things. This was the Circle of Life.

Black Elk described the importance of the circle as a part of nature:

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round . . . and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves.⁹

Like the Circle of Life, the Indians' records and the stories they maintained about themselves strive to come full circle. Buttressed with pictographs and drawings on hides, the oral tradition conveyed

Native stories about the hundreds of peoples. Then came the introduction of writings by soldiers, settlers, and officials about Indian-white relations from the perspective in the First Dimension. Next, the Second Dimension of studying the dynamics of Indian-white relations inspired new books and articles, encouraging a deeper understanding about American Indian history but still from the non-Indian point of view. At last the Third Dimension of Native scholars studying their peoples' past, and non-Indians becoming interested in the Native ethos and reality, have provoked a fresh approach in the literature and a different way of looking at American Indian history—the Medicine Way. To enable this awareness, we need to construct a cross-cultural bridge of understanding to permit people to cross back and forth between western-mindedness and the Natural Democracy of indigenous existence.

As I left on the last day of the OAH conference in Louisville in April 1991, I boarded the elevator with my luggage. The elevator stopped at another floor and one of my Indian friends got on with his suitcase to check out. I asked him how the blues had been the other night, and he replied that I had missed some great music. As we got off the elevator, the other Native historian was standing in line to check out of the hotel. We razzed each other one more time, tribe-about-tribe teasing. We said our goodbyes and told each other to take care as we headed back to our respective universities to teach and to try to bring our Indian perspectives to Indian history.