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## Review of *American Indian Literary Nationalism* By Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior.

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*American Indian Literary Nationalism*. By Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Warrior. Foreword by Simon J. Ortiz. Afterword by Lisa Brooks. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. xxii + 272 pp. Appendix, index. \$19.95 paper.

Scholars of the American Indian experience should read this book. These three authors discuss more issues in American Indian Studies and American Indian literary criticism than you can shake a stick at, and, get this—you won't even chip any teeth trying to pronounce the words, although you might want to have a dictionary handy. Simon Ortiz provides the foundation for the conversation in his foreword, and the appendix includes his 1981 essay "Toward a National Indian Literature." Lisa Brooks provides a thoughtful afterword.

Warrior urges critics to focus on research and finding the ways that have brought the Native world to its place today; and, in his remembrance of Edward Said, he offers a comparative model that should remind all scholars of the value of

cross-cultural connections. In some ways this book is a kind of sermon. But what a sermon.

Early on Weaver points out the positive aspects of literary nationalism and then talks about the relevance of Native ways of thinking and values to life today. In this first chapter he quotes Kathie Irwin on power, defines sovereignty and self-determination, and discusses the backlash that occurs when sovereignty is lived. Weaver states clearly that the authors are hoping to spark a conversation about sovereignty. At some point, I began to believe that there is nothing the three authors have not read and considered.

Craig Womack composed—or perhaps sang between howls of laughter—chapter 2, which includes a lengthy response to Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003). Like Womack, I too worry about gatekeepers and pressures to conform. His essay addresses concerns that must occur to intellectuals: Is relationship to community important to a critic, to a writer? Like Womack, I wonder if I must confess my hybridity, and when did I become a piece of corn? What is authentic? Must we all conform? I agree that thinking people surely must wonder along with Womack about who made up the rules? Womack asks questions, and I like that. He makes it quite clear that he is not an essentialist, so everybody is invited to the party. By page 144 I began to laugh out loud.

Can you tell that I loved this book, even if I do not always agree with everything its authors say? But that is what real intellectual conversation is.

Who knew that literary theory could be so much fun?

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