Blood and Scholarship: One Mixed-Blood's Story

Malea Powell

It is obvious that there is not a university in this country that is not built on what was once native land. We should reflect on this over and over, and understand this fact as one fundamental point about the relationship of Indians to academia.

Janice Gould
“The Problem of Being ‘Indian’: One Mixed-Blood’s Dilemma”

Just as a people who oppresses another cannot be free, so a culture that is mistaken about another must be mistaken about itself.

Jean Baudrillard
The Mirror of Production

My grandfather taught me that every good storyteller always acknowledges the place from which her story came—a friend, a gathering, an experience. This story begins not with my own “Indian-ness,” but rather with the beginnings of my scholarly interest in the phenomenon of “Indian-ness.” As an undergraduate, I took a course on “ethnic and minority women writers of the United States.” During the section on “Native Americans,” in a journal entry to my instructor, I “confessed” that I was Indian. I did so because some of the ways that the other students had been talking about Native Americans made me uneasy, and I often left class with my stomach churning. My teacher, of course, suggested that I tell the class. I declined. I knew that there was no way that I would live up to my classmates’ vision of “authentic Indian”—I wore no feathers or beads, lived in a “normal” house in the middle of an Indiana cornfield, and...
spoke with the same Midwestern twang as they did. Additionally, the Indians that they constructed through their responses to Leslie Silko’s stories and Wendy Rose’s and Joy Harjo’s poetry were fundamentally different than the Miami, Delaware, Shawnee, Ottawa, Pctawatomi, Anishinabe, Lakota, and Cherokee people that I knew. My classmates consistently spoke as if all the “real” Indians had disappeared long ago and all that was left of their culture was stockpiled in the Smithsonian. For them, contemporary Indians were merely sad remnants of a people whose time had passed. So it was here that my project of understanding and articulating American Indian rhetorics began.

What follows is a series of stories. There is a story about how the narratives that shape “America” and the “Academy” also shape what it can mean to be “Indian” and what it can mean to be an “Indian scholar.” There is a story about blood and seeing, and a speculative story about mixed-blood/trickster rhetoric. None of these are separate stories—they are all interdependent, all intertwined, all related. I tell these stories partially—I tell them as I hear them, and I recognize that my act of listening does not, cannot tell the whole story, nor would I want it to. These tellings, then, are part of a listening game, in the Lyotardian sense, “in which the important thing is to listen...” And in this game, one speaks only inasmuch as one listens; that is, one speaks as a listener, and not as an author” (Lyotard and Thebaud 1985, 71–72). I listen for unheard stories, counter-stories, which are usually silenced by the narratives that construct “life” in these United States.3 In telling these stories, I am attempting to ask Victor Villanueva’s question from “Rhetoric Is Politics”; that is, “How do nice people abide by and maintain not nice things, like a system in which certain groups are consistently relegated to the bottom of the structure in disproportionate numbers?” (1994, 332). I believe that taking Villanueva’s question seriously is part of following Beverly Moss’ advice to “take stock of where we [the discipline of rhetoric and composition] have come from, where we are, and where we think we are headed—especially before we get there” (1993, 347).

In positioning myself as a scholar who does American Indian rhetorics, I want consciously to mark both portions of that figuration. The rhetoric part emerges from Jim Berlin’s “social epistemic rhetoric” (107) in that it attempts to mediate and negotiate the material contradictions of multiply positioned and constructed subjects; the American Indian part is linked to my own perplexing experience as a mixed-blood. In this double-marking, I hope to initiate a mixed-blood methodology, one that mixes postcolonial theory with powwow observations, imperial agendas with indigenous resistance. To do so is to enact what Gerald Visner2 calls survival—a pose I interpret as survival plus resistance—and to call for the entrance of the trickster6 who lives in counter-stories (1994, 4). This mixed-blood pose is important because, as Jana Sequoya describes it, we (i.e., Indian scholars) are involved in a “contest of stories,” whose outcome will determine “the issue of viable material conditions for sustaining Indian identity” (1993, 469). As a scholar7 who is also an Indian, as a participant in this struggle, I am suspicious of my own imbrication, my own complicity, within the Academy,8 an institution-predicated on Western European ideas and values. Though I have questioned my own implicatedness at every stage of this project, I suspect that, in the end, I have not been suspicious enough. Additionally, I am obliged to tell a story that respects and aids the people whose voices and spirits construct a larger web of existence for me than ever can (or should) be explained in “scholarly” discourse. These stories that I tell are ones that I am not able to escape or ignore.

To begin this survivance story, I want to take up the question of what happens when we study Indians in any way within the Academy. In other words, what happens when we delve into that cacophony of narratives that shapes our scholarly understanding of “Indians”? We must recognize, as well, that the narratives of Indian and Academy are always already a part of an even larger story—the narrative that constructs America9 and American-ness.10 After all, it is because of how America—the ideological state and collective national culture—came into being that there is an “American” scholarly experience and a specific scholarly discourse about Native Americans at all. The stories that write this “American” narrative are familiar ones—“Christopher Columbus and the Discovery,” “Pioneers and Manifest Destiny.” Our familiarity with this “American” story is precisely the point here in relation to Indian peoples. Jimmie Durham, Cherokee poet/artist and American Indian Movement activist, claims that “America’s narrative about itself centers upon a hidden text concerning its relationship with American Indians” (1992, 425).

A central component of this “American tale” is the settlers’ vision of the frontier, a frontier that is “wilderness,” empty of all “civilized” life. The settler is a brave individual who sets forth to pit his (and I use the male pronoun here deliberately) skills of “civilization” against this vast wilderness; he tames the wilderness, domesticates it, and installs in it the icons of civilization—Euro-American town life, commerce, roads, railroads, churches, stores, and schools. The un-seeing of Indian peoples, nations, and civilizations is obvious here. For the colonizers, it is a necessary un-seeing; material Indian “bodies” are simply not seen so that the mutilations, rapes, and murders that characterized this first-wave genocide also simply are not seen. “Un-seeing” Indians gave (and still give) Euro-Americans a critical distance from materiality and responsibility, a displacement that is culturally valued and marked as “objectivity.” What is not so obvious is the correspondence of this frontier story to the stories that construct the Academy and its scholarly practices.

The “rules” of scholarly discourse—the legitimizing discourse of the discipline of rhetoric and composition—require us to write ourselves into this frontier story. Scholars are to set forth on the fringes of “the known” in order to stake out and define a piece of “unoccupied” scholarly territory that, through our skill at explicating and analyzing, will become our own scholarly homestead, our area of concentration. We are trained to identify our object of study in terms of its boundaries, its difference from other objects of study, and then to do everything within our power to bring that object into the realm of other
known” objects. In effect, we “civilize” unruly topics. And it is our distance from those topics, the fact of our displacement from the materiality of these areas of study, that lends legitimacy to our efforts. We must be objective scholars, fair in our assessments, detailed in our descriptions, and unfailingly unemotional if our work is to be taken seriously.

This scholarly homestead-plot is our price of admission into the Academy. However, these “rules,” when applied to the study of indigenous peoples, end up producing what I call second-wave genocide. Not only does the imperial power commit material acts meant to crush an unruly indigenous population, but also its institutions of intellectual and cultural exchange (i.e., universities) make the rules by which the first-wave genocide will be studied, and these same rules apply to the study of genocide survivors. Indians can be studied only within the terms of the oppressor; the Academy becomes just another powerful agent of imperialism.

I don’t mean to disable scholarly work here. On the contrary, I want to remind us all of the depth and breadth of the contaminated-ness of the so-called “tools” with which we go about our daily work. In his introduction to Black Athena, Martin Bernal reminds us that, while we ourselves may no longer be explicitly racist, we are often “still working with models set up by men who were cruelly . . . racist” (1987, 9). Like Bernal, I don’t believe that any scholarly work can be fully enabled until we see the entire web of narratives in which it exists and works to create meaning. We cannot separate scholarship in the United States from the “American tale.” We cannot separate the material exterminations of first-wave genocide in North America (beginning in 1492) from the intellectual and cultural exterminations of second-wave genocide, a process that has been ongoing since the Indian Removal Act of 1830.11 But we can begin, by consciously and explicitly positioning our work within this distasteful collection of narratives, to open space for the existing stories that might run counter to the imperial desires of traditional scholarship, stories that have been silenced by its hegemonic drone.

On Madison Avenue, the recognition factor of the “Indian” image “out-ranks, on a world scale, that of Santa Claus, Mickey Mouse, and Coca Cola combined” (Dorris 1987, 99). It is the very centrality of this image that complicates any scholarly work on Indian peoples. We are all, Indian and non-Indian alike, inscribed—written—by these narrative images. They tell a story that we have heard so loudly for so long that we have become numb to their presence.12 Scholars who concentrate on the study of Native American culture, history, and literature often, even as they attempt to disrupt this master narrative, create a kind of sympathetic echo behind it: a sort of popular scholarly narrative that is characterized by outrage and concern about the lack of Native American voices. Its resolution is twofold: a collective effort to re-create those voices, speaking for Native Americans directly or as an “authorizing” force for those voices, and as an effort to penetrate and thereby legitimate the counter-stories, seeing them as explicable objects of study. This need to control and legitimate (in scholarly terms) counter-stories is glaring in Arnold Krupat’s introduction to the Smithsonian-sponsored anthology New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism. Krupat13 writes:

I believe it is the case that in recent years some academic researchers have wanted very much to take seriously, even, indeed, to base their research upon not only Native experience but Native constructions of the category of knowledge. Still, as I have said, the question remains: How to do so? It is an urgent question, inasmuch as a good number of us are quite clear that we do not wish to “domesticate the savage mind,” or to engage in imperial acts of translation that simply override indigenous experiential and conceptual understandings. But, if, nonetheless, we are still unwilling to abandon some commitment to the scientific perspective as more than just the Western worldview universalized, we encounter problems that cannot simply be undone by good intentions. And, for now, such a perspective, while it must of course take into account “the reality” of . . . Native American “existence” as native people “experience it,” it still cannot, I think, base its explanations/interpretations on that experiential reality. (1993, xix–xx, emphasis mine)

When scholars convince themselves that they cannot study Indians (i.e., others) from the basis of Indian experience and existence, that they must make their efforts “scientific” and thus distance their work from Indian “reality,” they displace the very voices—those of Indian peoples—that they claim they want to hear. They convince themselves that they are no longer influenced by those imperial American narratives, those media (and mediated) images of “Indian-ness,” and that their work can be “scientific.” To assume that an admiration for Native American culture coupled with a position within the Academy will somehow offer protection from the “smariness” of American cultural imperialism is to open up room for Indian cultures to be appropriated, distorted, and objectified in increasingly new and approved “scholarly” terms.

In the United States, the scholarly legitimation narrative is predicated on a notion that “precludes those of that [Euro-derived] tradition from acknowledging either the fact or meaning of their own ethnicity” (Rose 1992, 410). It is this sublimation of ethnicity that leads to a kind of “we’re all the same inside” mentality that ultimately shuts down and erases difference. Materially, the imperial policies of the United States have erased, consumed, and imprisoned the “differences” of Indian peoples; now the Academy mirrors these policies by imprisoning indigenous experiences in a Euro-centered intellectual frame. As Hopi/Miwok poet and theorist Wendy Rose points out, “the inclusion of non-European intellectual content in the academy is absolutely predicated upon its conformity to sets of ‘standards’ conceived and administered by those adhering to the basic precepts of Euro-derivation” (1992, 407). Not only are Indians marginalized and “erased” as objects of study, the Indian scholar is often marginalized and overwritten by the rules of the Academy:

The basic “qualification” demanded by academe of those who would teach non-European content [and for those of non-European origin] is that they first
receive "advanced training" and "socialization" in doctoral programs steeped in the supposed universality of Euro-derivation. (1902, 407)

Native knowledge is eschewed for many American Indian scholars who must "prove" themselves on a frontier already "settled" and "civilized." As Dorris points out, the "conviction that the West holds a virtual monopoly on 'science,' logic, and clear-thinking" writes a specific narrative for the Indian scholar who studies some aspect of Indian culture (1987, 102), one in which said scholar is marked as "hopelessly subjective and biased, and much of their work is dismissed as self-serving" (104). This attitude toward Indian scholars is particularly odd in that "Euro-Americans have not felt shy in writing about their respective ancestors and are not automatically accused of aggrandizing them" (104).

Imagine this:

You are standing in a room. The walls of this room are covered in blood. All around you are corpses of varying vintage. They are bloody and putrid; they stink and their spirits howl. You must pick your way over these corpses as you go about your business in that room, whatever that may be, but there is no way to avoid them, no way to shut them out of your consciousness, no way to stop hearing and seeing and breathing their existence. Now imagine that in this room are other people—like you, but not quite like you—you see, they can't see or smell or hear these dead bodies. You keep telling them to be careful, not to step here or there. You keep asking, "Don't you see anything here? Don't you hear anything?" They smile and say, "Of course not, what's to see or hear?" They begin to think that you are crazy and maybe you begin to think so too. Worse yet, some of these people are willing to admit that you might just be seeing and hearing things that they cannot, or will not, allow themselves to see or hear, but that you should quit calling attention to yourself, that you should shut up, at least until you accrue enough power that people will listen to you—and that the only way for you to get any power is if you pretend that you aren't seeing what you are seeing, hearing what you are hearing. "Act like everybody else," they tell you. "Go along with the rules."

I want to move, now, to another story, this time one that is told by a Euro-American scholar who focuses his theoretical and critical work on American Indians. I offer this story as an example of the utter ease with which counter-stories are unseen and, ultimately, unheard by even the most well-intentioned scholar. At one point early in Ethnocriticism, Krupat tells a story that is meant to illustrate how completely ineffective "postmodernism" is as a material political strategy. It is a revealing story, so I will quote it at length:

As I have worked on this book over the past two years, I have many times taken a break by looking out the window, at Tomkins Square park. From perhaps the summer of 1989 until their removal on December 13, 1989, there were a great many speakers to be seen and heard in the park. Mostly black and Hispanic, mostly homeless, some down on their luck, some severely disturbed, or badly addicted, the park people audibly told stories to each other; to the working class cops who, for a while, at least, were gathered here thicker than thieves; to the Yuppie who, hurrying to their new renovations, didn't stop to listen. Until the 1988 police riot, the homeless most thickly congeated at the south end of the park, at Seventh Street; after, most of them moved their tarpaulin, box, and board shelters over to Tenth Street, the north end of the park, where I lived. The population density of the park people increased as the summer of 1989 ended. . . . Walking in the park (it is quite safe by day), having Rorty and Lyotard and Carroll in mind, I tried to listen to the stories being told; I tried, too, to see these petits récits, the wisps of narrative unquestionably produced by the people in the park as "dissident" in some meaningful way, a "challenge to the dominant metanarrative or state apparatus that would prohibit or discredit them." But it is their marginality and complete containment that most strike me. . . . (1992, 11-12)

Consider, for a moment, the position of Krupat in this story. He is a relentless observer, looking at "these" people first from his window and then as he walks among them, seeming to listen. From this story, we would have to gather that he never attempted to either talk to or interact with any of his subjects in any way—he only watched—a monologic positioning. Within this story, he recites how hard he tried to see their discourse as "dissident" in some meaningful way. Meaningful for whom—the speakers in the park, their dialogic listeners, himself (their monologic listener), New York City, New York State, the United States, the world, the Academy? His dismissal of their discourse, of their speech, as meaningless because of its marginality and seeming "containment" reveals much more about the scholar than it does about this discourse he is positing as "postmodernism."

What about this storytelling event? Significantly, Krupat chooses to tell a story in the midst of his argument against postmodernism. He's contributing his own petite récit, his own narrative wisp here, and he tries to use his story to subvert the credibility, the sense-ability, of his construction of postmodernism. It seems ironic that in order to subvert a narrative about how stories are subversive, he feels pressed to offer a subversive story himself. What Krupat leaves out of his story is revealing: He leaves out the voices of the people in the park. What were they saying? He just tells us about them, looks at them, a flaw that he readily acknowledges in most "traditional Western disciplinary theory and practice as these have operated in relation to Native American subjects in all senses of that word" (1992, 7), but a flaw that he doesn't seem willing, or able, to acknowledge as present in his own construction of these park people, these marginal others.

The precise effects of these speakers in this park, of their narrative wisps (i.e., counter-stories), and of other speakers in other parks, other places, can't be seen immediately, but to deny that they have any effect simply because they do not have an immediate and far-reaching effect that is visible to him seems
Krupat introduces this story with a challenge to postmodernism à la Jean-François Lyotard and David Carroll. He writes, “I would challenge them to name specifically not even hundreds, [or] thousands of [the] little dissident narratives they have in mind but even a couple of dozen that have had any social effectivity whatsoever” (1992, 11). If his “gripe” with postmodernism is that it is not an effective strategy for political change, then how does he characterize the material, political change that his own work “should” be doing? Beyond the walls of the Academy, who listens to Krupat’s stories? 

Krupat follows his “people in the park” story with an entreaty to engage in something more than a privileged language game, but never considers the privileged position of his own discourse. In Ethnocriticism, he is trying to construct a “rather less violent” (6) way to do Native studies:

An adequate ethnocriticism for Native American culture, history, and literature, so far as it may be established at all... will only be achieved by a means of complex interactions between a variety of Western discursive and analytic modes and a variety of non-Western modes of knowing and understanding. The Western modes are quite well known, and I continue to think that, in spite of some inevitable distortions, they are still, at least in some measure, useful for an encounter with native American literary materials... Native modes of knowing and understanding are not well known, and that is in large measure because they have not been formulated as analytic or critical modes apart from the verbal performance they would know and understand. (1992, 43–44)

What is missing here in this call for assimilation is an interrogation of who is directing this integration of Western and Native epistemology — the simple acknowledgment of who will do the “civilizing” and “expanding” to whom.

It would seem that an Indian scholar is in an impossible bind. Limited by the master narratives constructing her, the stories she can tell that will be heard are limited. What I am suggesting is that there are some stories that can be told and heard, like this story that I am telling, revelatory stories that open space for counter-stories and resistance, mixed-blood stories told from the borders of Indian-ness, American-ness, Scholarly-ness. Joseph Bruchac suggests that we think of the position of mixed-bloods as a kind of métis story, and he does so for a very particular reason. Métis is a Lakota word (derived from the French métis for cross-breed or hybrid) that “refers to a person of mixed blood,” but it translates literally into English as “translator’s son,” “It means that you are able to understand the language of both sides, to help them understand each other” (Bruchac 1993, 244–245). Gloria Anzaldúa calls this “a consciousness of the Borderlands,” the domain of the mestiza (1987, 77). In Anzaldúa’s configuration, the mestiza is presented with a sea of possibilities, “conflicting information and points of view” (79). The only way for the mixed-blood to survive is by “developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity,” and by turning those contradictions and ambiguities into “something else” (79).

Anishnabe writer and theorist Gerald Vizenor would have Indian scholars/mixed-bloods play trickster, to use our knowledge of the language and structure that compose the narratives that bind us as instruments to cut away those same oppressive stories.

Vizenor celebrates the humor and play room that are made available to crossbloods (what I’ve been calling mixed-bloods) in the simultaneity of our positions on the margins of American culture combined with our Iconographic centrality against which much “American-ness” is imagined. Sharp humor (yes, sharp like a weapon) and radical temporal figurations (we are always at the past and the future in the present, and vice versa) help Vizenor to posit the trickster as a space of liberation. He does so in Narrative Chance by textually refusing to participate in his own remaking. He will not become an “absolute fake,” a Native American constructed only for scholarly consumption (1989, 5). Instead, he invites us—the “participant audience” (196)—into a game of narrative chance, where meanings are pressed together from the very narrative wisps that Krupat discards. Vizenor would not disregard or discard the discourse of Krupat’s “park people.” To the contrary, he would cite Krupat’s disregard for their marginal narratives as proof of their subversive potential and of their political importance. The “park people” toss their words about like dice in a game of narrative chance. To listen and to hear them would make us participants; their words would be counter-stories, running against the current of Krupat’s disdain.

For me, the trickster is central to imagining a “mixed-blood rhetoric.” The trickster is many things, and is no thing as well. Ambivalent, androgyous, anti-definition, the trickster is slippery and constantly mutable. Vizenor finds the trickster everywhere, but particularly at work in communal “tribal” discourse. I find the trickster in every nook and cranny of daily life as a mixed-blood. But, more important, I see the trickster at work outside of Indian-ness as well, in the confronterasses that inhabit the stories that tell, and un-tell, America and the Academy. The trickster isn’t really a person, it is a “communal sign,” a “concordance of narrative voices” (1989, 12) that inhabits the “wild space over and between sounds, words, sentences, and narratives” (196). Trickster discourse does “play tricks,” but they aren’t malicious tricks, not the hurtful pranks of an angry child; instead, the tricks reveal the deep irony that is always present in whatever way we choose to construct reality. Trickster discourse is deftive; it exposes the lies we tell ourselves and, at the same time, exposes the necessity of those lies to our daily material existence. Trickster discourse asks “Isn’t the world a cack of shit?,” but also answers with “Well, if we didn’t have this cack of shit, what would we do for a world?” The trickster asks us to be fully conscious to the simple inconsistencies that inhabit our reality.

The version of trickster, or mixed-blood, rhetoric that I am offering here is not so much opposed to modernity or social science or postmodernity or frontiers or business as usual within the discipline of rhetoric and composition as it is related to them—a very different configuration in which it is the rhetor’s very relationship with oppressive discourses that opens a space of possibility.
Practicing this kind of relational mixed-blood rhetoric, then, means following the Academy's, the discipline's, "rules" by transgressing them, not just to oppose them but to transform them, to change utterly the grounds upon which our scholarship exists. This rhetoric, then, takes a kind of cross-blood understanding and materiality, a form of mixed-blood movement in theoretical space, that the Academy's legitimizing narrative is slow to acknowledge and value. Such a rhetoric is based on relationality and movement across cultural/institutional boundaries, and presupposes that those who enact it have an experiential understanding of the cultures/instiutions that they propose to transverse.

Recently, some intellectual friends of mine and I have tried to enact a sort of trickster rhetoric within our own scholarly practices. Because the trickster is "real in those who imagine the narrative" (Vizenor 1989, 190), we are trying to imagine ourselves differently as scholars. All we have begun with transgressions—counter-stories—that may appear, like those of Krupat's park people, to have little or no immediate effect. For example, take the formality of conference "rules" like those of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) that require proposal submissions to "fit" into particular group configurations—panels, roundtables, and forums—which seriously limit the possibilities for collective (not just collaborative) scholarship. The way to get around these rules, of course, is to lie—to propose a "panel," for example, and to submit the requisite number of abstracts and individual names with the explicit intent of turning the "position paper" format of a "panel" into a collectively delivered paper. This is just one small way that, as a collective, we try to put our politics into practice. It is our relationship to the CCCC that makes such transgressions possible, but it is our alliance as mixed-blood scholars that makes it necessary.

In many ways, this rhetoric, these trickster turns, has already been enacted by nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals like Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, and Charles Alexander Eastman, who simultaneously enacted compliance with and resistance to Euro-American culture in their written and oral texts. In doing so, they enacted a sort of "tactical authenticity," a move that established themselves as "real" Indians within the discourses of their historical moment and then used that "real-ness" as a space of privilege and possibility from which they could deliver a critique of Euro-American culture. In many ways these trickster stories have never stopped being told—around the dance circle, the campfire, at the powwow—have never stopped being listened to and heard by those of us who see and hear and live within tribal stories, the space that opens in a poem or short story or novel when the contradictory-ness of "Indian" is revealed and embraced. Some of us, after all, can't help but see the bodies, the blood, as we stand in that room... listening... hearing.

These stories, in large part, have all been leading up to this: I am at war with my rhetoric relations. Wendy Rose, in her poetry volume *Going to War with All My Relations*, explains that this is "a special kind of war—one in which struggle is honorable and just, but also one in which there are no mutilated soldiers or plundered villages" (1993, vii). This is not a war that requires a victor, but one in which my participation, through honorable struggle, is necessary. I believe that rhetoric as a discipline has been and continues to be complicit with the imperial project of scholarship in the United States. I believe that rhetoric as a discipline does not see the foundation of blood and bodies upon which it constitutes itself. I believe that many of us who work within this discipline participate daily in un-seeing, in denying, and, in doing so, perpetuate the myth of the empty continent. I believe that scholarship in America can never be staked forth on neutral ground. I believe that even the marginalized and radical "anti-disciplinary" and/or "cross-disciplinary" discipline, rhetorical takes for granted its originary relation to Greece and Europe—its fundamental relationship to imperialism—and gives little critical thought at all to the geographical space in which it now exists. I believe that rhetoric, as a discipline and as it is enacted by its scholars/teachers, merely tolerates "other" discourses at its margins. It does not take into account, for example, work on African American or American Indian discourse strategies as it constitutes itself as a "theoretical" discipline with the help of Foucault, Lyotard, Nietzsche, Kristeva, Cixous, et cetera. These "marginal" groups make no impact on the important project of gaining Academic power for the discipline, but are pointed to constantly as "proof" of the discipline's inclusiveness.

Those who doubt the existence of these "tolerated margins" need only look again at the 1997 "Call for Proposals" for the CCCC and see that the possible categories of submission—the "area clusters"—clearly separate histories (Area Cluster 103) and theories (Area Cluster 102) of rhetoric from "writing in a global context" (Area Cluster 108) and from "writing and difference" (Area Cluster 107) and from methodology (Area Cluster 109) and pedagogy (Area Cluster 101). The ghetto-ization present in the area clusters is rationalized as "practical," a way to apportion the large number of incoming proposals to "knowledgeable" reviewers. However, in praxis, these categories also are used to "group" items on the program so that it's possible to go to every section generically marked "methodology," for example, and never encounter a session in which issues of difference are being taken up by scholars of color. This "tolerated-margins" approach to dividing up disciplinary knowledge must change if the discipline of rhetoric and composition is ever to become more than just another site of academic imperialism.

My final story, then, is a call for a reimagining of this disciplinary space that is conscious of, and conceivable in relation to, the ideological position of the Academy within this continent—a reimagining that listens carefully to those bloody, invisible bodies—and not just to the bodies of American Indians, but also to the bodies of the African slaves and the Asian laborers, as well as to the bodies of their contemporary relations who continue to resist the advances of imperialism today. This reimagining doesn't always celebrate itself (as rhetoric and composition studies have been inclined to do in recent years) because
it recognizes that its celebratory status comes at the expense of other bodies, other ways of knowing. Because I am a rhetorician, I hope that these stories have been persuasive or at least provocative. Because I am an Indian, I hope these stories have urged you to listen and to hear. But because I am a mixed-blood, I am willing to accept that neither may have occurred, and that I will have to try again. The abiding quality of mixed-blood rhetoric is its persistence and patience, as well as its ambiguity and contradictions.

Notes, or Other Stories

1. This essay is dedicated to my mother, Nan Meiring, and to my daughter, Audrey Swartz, who are my immediate links in this spiral of life. I am deeply indebted to Michael Wojcik for his nurturing companionship, to my good friends Jill Swiencicki and Dominic Micer for their careful readings and productive commentary on earlier drafts of this essay, and to the members of the Crossblood Collective—Janice Gould, Scott Lyons, Ellen Cushman, and Terese McNerth for their generous intellectual and emotional support. Our collective discussions about mestiza/mixed-blood consciousness and methodology, dissent, war, resistance, and ghosts have enlivened and enriched any work that I will ever do, either as a member of the Collective or as an “individual” scholar. Although this essay was begun before this collective was constituted, it nevertheless bears more than the traces of all our voices and struggles.

2. I identify myself as an Eastern Miami, Shawnee, Welsh mixed-blood.

3. These imperial narratives are, of course, intimately connected with the construction of “race” as a category of imposed identity and as a theoretical trope for others that not only allows, but also enforces, hierarchical privileging of some “races” (Anglo and Euro-American) over others. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Franz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks (New York: Grove Weidenfield, 1967, trans. Markmann) and Homi Bhabha’s “The Other Question: The Stereotype and Colonial Discourse” (from The Sexual Subject, New York: Routledge, 1992, 312–331).

4. I want to be very specific about how I am using the term mixed-blood. Among many Indian peoples, a mixed-blood is literally a person whose blood-quantum is mixed, usually Indian and Euro-American. Mixed-bloods are sometimes seen as tainted, neither an “Indian” nor a “White.” Because of acculturation and assimilation, many Indians are legally mixed-bloods. I don’t use mixed-blood literally to refer to U.S.-government-enforced “pedigree.” I use mixed-blood as a figurative description for a person who “lives” between cultures that are epistemologically contradictory and that experience asymmetrical power relations. The particular example from which this text arises is that of an American Indian person who has been exposed—to one degree or another—to the culture of her particular nation as well as to the dominant (i.e., Euro-America) culture in this country. I use mixed-blood subversively, then, to designate a particular construction of subjectivity and as a reminder of how dominant cultural narratives “value” American Indian peoples according to their “pedigree.” For more information about legal definitions of “Indian,” see M. Annette Jaimes’ “Federal Indian Identification Policy” (The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance, M. Annette Jaimes, ed. Boston: South End Press, 1992) and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri’s “American Indian Policy” (American Indian Policy in the Twentieth Century, Vine Deloria, Jr., ed. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).

5. Gerald Vizenor is a mixed-blood Anishinabe critical theorist and writer who is known for scholarship that combines postmodern theory with “tribal” consciousness and for his trickster novels and short stories. His works include Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance (1994); Crossblows: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports (1990); Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures (1989); The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage (1988); and Grievers: An American Monkey in China (1990; winner of the American Book Award).


7. For the purpose of this study, I am assuming that a scholar is someone who “challenges or problematizes traditional assumptions and theories” (Sullivan 1992, 41).

8. By Academy I mean that site of institutionalized intellectual activity that is imagined to take place in the colleges and universities of the United States.

9. I use America in the imprecise ideological sense of that entity geographically located in North America that calls itself The United States of America. For a fuller discourse on “America,” see Benedict Andersen’s Imagined Communities (London: Verso, 1983) and Jack D. Forbes’ “What Do We Mean By America and American” (News from Indian Country, VIII.12, 1994, 15–17).

10. Again, imprecisely, I use American-ness to identify a sort of cultural ethos, founded in Western European values and belief systems, that is associated with the United States of America. This collective culture values all things European over all things indigenous, and is that sense of “patriotism” invoked in songs like “America the Beautiful” or “My Country ’Tis of Thee”; this ethos is strongly connected to the United States’ imperial identity.

11. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 was one of the first instances in which “friends” of the Indian joined forces with land speculators. The Act was signed by President Andrew Jackson and reserved land west of the Mississippi, erroneously called the “Great American Desert,” for Indian settlement. Eastern Indian nations, like the Cherokee, were “relocated” by the federal government to the West, primarily to Oklahoma and Kansas (Native Americans in the Twentieth Century, James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

12. I take this from Wendy Rose’s “Backlash” (The Halfbreed Chronicles, Minneapolis: West End, 1985). “It’s not that your songs / are so much stronger / or your feet more deeply / rooted, but that / there are many of you / shouting in a single voice / like a giant child” (38).


15. While this is a problematic predicament, it is not negotiable. Krupat and other Euro-American scholars could explicitly admit their privileged positions as part of their scholarship and could use the privilege they’ve gained to help the people that their scholarship often objectifies. Vine Deloria, Jr., has proposed such a reciprocal relationship (see “Research, Redskins, and Reality,” American Indian Quarterly, Fall 1991, 457–468). This, of course, would require that they be critical of their characterizations of Indian peoples as well. In the long quote that follows this note in my text, Krupat alludes that Native “modes of knowing” aren’t widely known or understood because Native peoples can only articulate their ways of knowing in verbal performance, not in the “analytic or critical” modes of the Academy. This simply does not correspond to the material presence of long-time scholars like Vine Deloria, Jr., and Simon Ortiz, nor does it acknowledge contemporary Indian scholarship.

16. Crossbreds are, according to Vizenor, “the agonistic survivors” of imperialism, “a postmodern tribal bloodline, an encounter with racialism, colonial duplicities, sentimental monogenism, and generic cultures”; “crossbreds are communal, and their stories are splendid considerations of survivance” (1990, vi–viii).

17. Gender is a category that goes unanalyzed due to the scope of this essay. However, the androgyne of the trickster offers compelling possibilities for unpacking gender binaries in feminist rhetorics. In stories, the trickster is often assigned gender, but frequently cross-dresses and mutates as well. Highly sexualized in many stories, the trickster is an “erotic shimmer in oral traditions” (Vizenor 1989, 188).

18. Although I find the word tribal problematic in the ways it has been used by the U.S. government as a way to construct Indian peoples as “uncivilized,” thus rationalizing colonial policies, Vizenor embraces the term as a way to “avoid the traps, the historical traps” implied by the word Indian (from Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets, Joseph Bruchac, Sun Tracks and University of Arizona Press, 1987). One of the pleasures of the Indian community in this country is the awareness of how words work to construct meaning, and how that meaning plays off of stereotypes and images. Implicit in that awareness is that colonized people should name themselves, and should feel comfortable with those names. Although I choose a different name to embrace, Indian, I understand Vizenor’s distaste for it as well.

19. Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, a Paiute, was a popular speaker on behalf of Indian rights during the late nineteenth century. She fought for her people’s right to live on their Humboldt River lands for most of her life and gained a powerful audience—Boston activist Elizabeth Peabody and Senator Henry Dawes. Winnemucca’s speeches were said to help bring about passage of the Dawes (Allotment) Act. She published one book, Life Among the Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims in 1891, shortly before her death. For more information, see Katherine Gehm’s Sarah Winnemucca: Most Extraordinary Woman of the Paiute Nation (Phoenix: O’Sullivan, Woodside & Co., 1975).

20. Charles Alexander Eastman, a Santee Sioux (Dakota), lived during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born on the reservation and educated in Euro-American schools (i.e., Beloit College Preparatory School, Knox College Preparatory School, Kimball Union Academy, Dartmouth College, and Boston University Medical School), Eastman became a doctor and was the agency physician at Pine Ridge during the massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890. Eastman became an activist and wrote several books, most notably From the Deep Woods to Civilization (Boston: Little, Brown, 1916) and The Soul of the Indian (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911). For more information on Eastman, see Raymond Wilson’s Ohiyesa, Charles Eastman, Santee Sioux (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

21. I use the word war here deliberately, not to construct the position of mixed-bloods, or mixed-blood methodology, as always and only embattled, nor to shut down the possibilities of friendly alliances or of some version of “peace.” I use war to emphasize the seriousness of my engagement with the issues, the depth of my commitment to a methodology that can change the way that scholarship is done in the discipline of rhetoric and composition.

Works Cited


News-Surfing the Race Question: Of Bell Curves, Words, and Rhetorical Metaphors

Meta G. Carstarphen

In late 1994, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* was published, provoking a media debate like few others about the role of race in our society. Divided into four parts, plus an extensive appendix, *The Bell Curve* sparked the strongest protest because of its third section, entitled “The National Context.” Here, the authors discussed ethnic differences, cognitive ability, IQ, and other variables associated with native intelligence. Throwing down the gauntlet at the section’s beginning, the authors asserted that “ethnic differences in cognitive ability . . . are real and have consequences” (Herrnstein and Murray, 269). Furthermore, they advanced definitions and premises about race that in and of themselves are arguable:

There are differences between races, and they are the rule, not the exception. That assertion may seem controversial to some readers, but it verges on tautology: Races are by definition groups of people who differ in characteristic ways. Intellectual fashion has dictated that all differences must be denied except the absolutely undeniable differences in appearance, but nothing in biology says this should be so. (272)

Responses to *The Bell Curve* were swift, energetic and, most importantly, pervasive in the media. In 1994, according to its own electronic database, the *New York Times* published forty-six items about *The Bell Curve* from October to December. The following year, the newspaper published fifty-four additional