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Review of Cultural Representation in Native America

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edited by Guiyou Huang, covers Canadian and US writers, marking this as an editorial choice.)

The extraordinary acumen evident in Cheyfitz's introduction is, unfortunately, undercut by the overly prescriptive tenor of his criticism. His command of legal studies and its relationship to the primary literature is remarkably astute, but his review of American Indian literary criticism tends to undervalue other critics' contributions and overstate their weaknesses. Few could (or should) argue that an understanding of US federal Indian law is necessary to students of American Indian literature, but at times Cheyfitz implies that anything other than a postcolonial approach informed by legal studies is misguided or misinformed. By contrast, the other contributions, for example Elliott and Krupat's section on fiction, manage to explore the political dimensions without slighting the material's cultural or aesthetic aspects.

Any specialist in Native literature knows that persons who lack an adequate background not only in Native American cultures and history but also in the literature frequently teach it. This volume will be most useful to those who need that grounding—if they will pick it up and use it. Cheyfitz has assembled a well-informed, albeit small, group of critics, Native and non-Native (although the latter predominate), to produce a richly textured survey of the field.

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Cultural Representation in Native America. Edited by Andrew Jolivette. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006. 192 pages. \$72.00 cloth; \$26.95 paper.

What do Barbie, beer, nuclear bombs, New Age shamans, and Creole identity have in common? The authors of this anthology address each of these topics to illuminate cultural representation both of and by American Indian communities. This collection consists of articles from scholars and community activists that draw on provocative contemporary issues to suggest new directions for the study of cultural representation. The introduction asserts that the anthology attempts to move away from the static representations and the essentialized discourse on American Indian people within the academy and in larger societal contexts (6). These articles strive to move beyond the scholarly discourse on representation of American Indian peoples that critiques stereotypic representations, particularly in literature, film, and popular culture, detailing the inaccurate and often harmful repercussions of these representations. Although the prevailing discourse has addressed how Indian people resisted the representations encompassed by images, the authors of this anthology redefine representation by opening the category up to include identity, political representation, religion, and oral and literary traditions, in addition to imagery.

The anthology makes a valuable contribution to American Indian Studies, not only because it redefines representation, but also because it sees

the discourse surrounding representation within and outside the academy as a space for resistance, persistence, reimagining identity, and the assertion of sovereignty. Although some articles focus on stereotyped images of American Indian people—Indian mascots, the Native American Barbie, Crazy Horse Beer, and New Age practitioners—they explore deeper issues as well. For example, Sara C. Sutler-Cohen demonstrates the colonizing affects of neoshamanism as it robs Native people of their internal sovereignty (56). Even so, it is the articles on mixed-blood or interethnic identity and on American Indian self-representation through political action and oral and literary traditions that blow open previous conceptions of representation of American Indian peoples. American Indian literature scholars have discussed self-representation as a sovereign act, but this project establishes the full interdisciplinary potential of representation as a category of inquiry.

Norma Alarcon, Sutler-Cohen, and Andrew Jolivette directly address the complexities of hybrid heritage and the negotiations of identity it entails. They each posit identity as an act of representation on the part of the individual, his or her immediate community, and the wider world and show that it is not simply cultural but political as well. Their articles, discussing Chicana feminism, mixed-blood identity, and Creole identity, move beyond conflicted identity as a reflection of representation of the wider world imposed on the individual and reveal the interior processes of self-representation connected to it. These authors present a picture of interethnic identity that encompasses more than just Indian and white, exposing the simplistic understandings of both indigenous and white identity, in favor of a more complex view.

Most importantly, this anthology provides new ideas for theorizing representation by demonstrating how Native people control their own representation. Each article supports Carolyn Dunn's point that "identity is formed within societal structures, rather than by an outside colonizing power" (144). Dunn points to literature as Native self-representation, leading to a persistence of an indigenous identity grounded in a specific cultural community. Melissa Nelson demonstrates that persistence also occurs in the telling and singing of ancient songs and stories, another example of self-representation. Many of the authors view political action as a path, not only to asserting sovereign rights but also to self-representation and, therefore, as a way to subvert negative images and understandings. For example, in her article detailing the legal battle over Crazy Horse Beer, Winona LaDuke notes that the Lakota took back the representation of Crazy Horse not only through the US legal system but also by asserting tribal law and enforcing it among non-Lakota. Self-representation through oral tradition, literature, genealogy, and political action then becomes not only an act of resistance but also of persistence. Paula Gunn Allen underscores this point in the first article when she states, "I believe that persistence, and not resistance, is what kept us ourselves over these dreadful centuries" (26).

This anthology provides one of the first steps toward a fruitful exploration of cultural representation not just of but also by Native peoples; however, I encourage the authors to take their scholarship further. There are moments in the collection that point to a direction for additional exploration. At the

end of her article on Native American Barbie and the doll's misrepresentation of Native peoples, Kim Shuck describes the efforts of her children to redefine the image of one of these Barbie dolls, when they prepare it for the powwow circuit. Her son put Shuck's doll in an old toy truck with a tiny mug and coffee thermos, while her daughter brought her a tiny shawl they had made to convert her into a fancy shawl dancer. Shuck states, "My kids were unwilling to let Native Barbie exist outside our community if she was going to live inside of our house" (37). Shuck describes a moment of incorporation and redefinition that she does not explore. Several of the articles mention such moments, but the authors do not examine them. These moments deserve a more in-depth exploration because they reveal the agency of indigenous people, their ability both to represent themselves and to shape dominant discourse. This anthology provides an opening for scholars of Native communities to begin exploring not only resistance to stereotyped forms of representation, or even persistence through self-representation, but also presentations of representations that American Indian people have created for the consumption of the dominant society.

As is apparent from Shuck's telling of her children's moment with Barbie, representations created by the colonizers to bind and control indigenous people lose their power as they become reappropriated, incorporated, and redefined into something that can be used for self-representation and the assertion of a unique indigenous identity. Just as non-Natives have usurped and redefined Native representations to claim a certain identity, Native peoples take them back and redefine these very representations for their own purposes. The question for these scholars and others writing about Native America is how are the people involved in the active reshaping of the representations that have originated among non-Natives. In the introduction, Jolivéte states that "the 'Indian Nations Strike Back' by articulating new frameworks for understanding the impact of social, legal, economic, literary, and cultural representations on Indian people's well-being" (6). As scholars, we should explore how Native people strike back, not only by reframing the impact of Euro-American representations but also by reframing the representations and sending them back with a new articulation of American Indian identity. Like the Barbie doll that Shuck's children created, these new articulations critique and complicate the stereotyped representations that attempt to rob Native people of voice, self-representation, and distinct identity. Because the articles in this anthology describe many moments like this, it can be the stepping-stone for a more developed articulation of the dynamics of representation in Native America.

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