

# INTRODUCTION



## IMAGINING AN AMERICAN INDIAN CENTER

For the sake of our children, for the sake of the spiritual and material well-being of our total community we must be able to demonstrate competence to ourselves. For the sake of our psychic stability as well as our physical well-being we must be free men and exercise free choices. We must make decisions about our own destinies. We must be able to learn and profit by our own mistakes. Only then can we become competent and prosperous communities. We must be free in the most literal sense of the word.

—Clyde Warrior, February 1967

Do you see what happens when the imagination is superimposed upon the historical event? It becomes a story. The whole piece becomes more deeply invested with meaning. The terrified Kiowas, when they had regained possession of themselves, did indeed imagine that the falling stars were symbolic of their being and their destiny. They accounted for themselves with reference to that awful memory. They appropriated it, recreated it, fashioned it into an image of themselves—imagined it.

—N. Scott Momaday, March 1970

On 9 November 1969, a young American Indian student dove from a borrowed sailboat into the frigid waters of San Francisco Bay and swam 250 yards against swift currents to reclaim Alcatraz Island as Indian land. Richard Oakes, a Mohawk man from the St. Regis reservation in upstate New York, had migrated to San Francisco to join a community of Indigenous people “relocated” to urban areas during the 1950s

era of federal tribal termination.<sup>1</sup> By the 1960s, generations of Indian people in the Bay Area had grown restless about their displacement and poverty, and young people responded by organizing across tribal groups and raising their voices in public protest.<sup>2</sup> While attending San Francisco State College, Oakes worked to organize members of the Indian student group who shared a similar vision of renewal for American Indians. The San Francisco State College group soon reached out to bring its dream of change to Indian student organizations at the University of California at Berkeley and at Los Angeles. Among Native students, the Red Power Indian movement had begun.<sup>3</sup>

This book concerns the writing that began around 1969 and grew into an inspiring decade for American Indian people. During the era of Red Power, Native writers imagined a new narrative for Indian Country, and they did so neither by longing for an impossibly timeless past nor by disconnecting Indians' stories from the political realities of their lives. Instead, writers of the era struggled to better interpret a colonized world and then offered this new knowledge to empower the people. In this introductory chapter, I begin to chart the development of that liberating theoretical vision in the literature of Red Power.

Oakes's courageous leap into dangerous waters remains a fitting image of political change in Indian Country. Initially a defensive rampart during the Civil War, Alcatraz Island later became a prison for American Indian military leaders during the so-called Indian Wars of the nineteenth century. Reclaiming Alcatraz, the Red Power leaders believed, would lay bare one of the most glaring ironies of colonialism: Indigenous people imprisoned in their own lands.<sup>4</sup> Oakes's plunge heralded a new form of Indian activism, shaped by those who had grown tired of the slow machinery of the federal government and who were deeply suspicious of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Red Power was as much physical as intellectual; Indian organizers drove the movement with the bodily momentum of drumming, singing, dancing, marching, and even swimming. Though the federal policies of termination and relocation unraveled entire communities, urban Indians were especially prepared to contend with the particular racial oppression they encountered in cities. In urban centers such as Minneapolis, Denver, and San Francisco, young Indian people came together to imagine a collective future free of U.S. government control. Urban displacement thus helped to create a startlingly new form of political activity in Indian Country: Red Power was young, urban, intertribal, and ready to confront an imperialist world with a full range of spiritual,

physical, and intellectual weapons. Red Power protesters were angry, but their anger was justified in the countless public disclosures of their colonial experiences in Native America. In this way, the movement grew not out of romantic claims to a pure Indian past and culture, as often characterized in the mainstream, but rather through an ongoing encounter with the world as members sought to produce more enabling accounts of American Indian lives. As Ponca activist Clyde Warrior describes it, Natives were prepared to “learn and profit” from their mistakes.

Aware of the unpredictable shifts in American attitudes, American Indian scholars and activists living in the midst of Red Power took advantage of an upsurge of interest in Indians to publish the crucial texts defining Red Power. In 1969, the young Sioux legal scholar Vine Deloria Jr. composed his “Indian manifesto” under the provocative title *Custer Died for Your Sins*. He chided U.S. culture for its fickle relationship to American Indians: “Indians laugh themselves sick when they hear these statements [that the United States must remain in Vietnam to keep its promises]. America has yet to keep one Indian treaty or agreement despite the fact that the United States government signed over four hundred such treaties and agreements with Indian tribes” (1988, 28). For many, the most exciting aspect of Deloria’s book was its vision of a liberated Indigenous future. His final chapter, “A Redefinition of Indian Affairs,” reads at times like the Ghost Dance prophecy of the nineteenth-century Paiute visionary Wovoka, in which industrialized America recedes, the bison repopulate the Plains, and Native people return to their ancestral homelands: “The eventual movement among American Indians will be the ‘recolonization’ of the unsettled areas of the nation by groups of Indian colonists” (263). Deloria recognizes the connection between Red Power and the African American freedom movement, but cautions that specific cultural groups must pursue specific goals: “Civil Rights is a function of man’s desire for self-respect, not of his desire for equality. The dilemma is not one of tolerance or intolerance but one of respect or contempt. The tragedy of the early days of the Civil Rights movement is that many people, black, white, red, and yellow, were sold a bill of goods which said that equality was the eventual goal of the movement. But no one had considered the implications of so simple a slogan. Equality became sameness. Nobody noticed it, but everyone was trained to expect it. When equality did not come, black power did come and everybody began to climb the walls in despair” (179). In 1969, Deloria was alerting Indian leaders that Red Power militancy risked attracting the same government-sponsored assassinations perpe-

trated by the FBI's COINTELPRO against the Black Power movement.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing Black Power's tendencies toward romantic posturing, Deloria stressed the need for self-criticism that would allow the diversity within Indian Country to fuel but not burn out Red Power.

Ironically, the FBI would ultimately crush the militancy of Red Power only to see it reemerge in the form of a powerful revival of traditional spirituality in Indian communities. In his 1973 book *God Is Red*, Deloria summarized the surprising outcome of the year's occupations: "[A] result of the Indian activist movement was the tremendous surge of interest in traditional religions and customs. At the BIA occupation and again during the Wounded Knee confrontation, medicine men had been prominent in performing ceremonies for the activists" (1994, 23). Added to these cultural strides were material developments; the movement drove the passing in 1978 of new legislation such as the Indian Child Welfare Act and the American Indian Religious Freedom Act to protect Indigenous lives and customs. The revived interest in the recovery of Indian cultural identity and homelands, which consumes contemporary Native culture, derives directly from the intellectual and political vision of Red Power. Though it raises questions that I address below, the very presence of Native scholars in U.S. universities attests to the success of the movement and thus gives credence to Deloria's vision of a reflowering Indian America. Even more promising is that Indian communities may be carrying out the recolonization that Deloria hoped for decades ago. A front-page article in the *New York Times* in 2001 announced that for the first time in a century Natives comprised the fastest-growing population in North Dakota.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Indian scholars of Red Power build on the foundation laid by Deloria with research that traces the creative origins of Native cultural revival and that confronts some of the internal tensions within the Indian movement. Robert Warrior returns to the era: "By the late 1960s and early 1970s the diversity of the viewpoints among North American Natives had become so pronounced that no group was able to unify all the various elements" (1995, 34). Reservation Natives went west to add their voices to those of the protestors, though the struggles faced in rural places differed significantly from the problems faced by Bay Area Indian urbanites. Protestors disagreed on whether similar Indian rights struggles or different tribal beliefs, for example, should form the basis of the movement. Various tribal beliefs themselves differed significantly, ultimately underscoring the multiculturalism of twentieth-century Indian Country. Regretfully, activists often allowed their different experiences to divide

them and thus undermine Red Power philosophically. Because many of today's Indigenous scholars and activists consider the location of a shared experience a major goal of Red Power, they seek to balance tribal unity and tribal autonomy. For the new Native scholars, then, one central challenge is to reconsider the theoretical grounds for experience as in American Indian tribalism. To serve this need, I develop a more expansive concept of Native experience to better support an Indian liberation movement.

In fact, the search for common ground involving tribes with specific experiences has been a central political issue for centuries. Before Europeans arrived, tribal peoples began organizing across cultural and geographical boundaries in such powerful confederacies as the League of the Iroquois, which was formed at least as early as the sixteenth century. In 1763, the Ottawa leader Pontiac organized his so-called rebellion across Ottawa, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Huron, and several other tribal groups. In 1806, the Shawnee leader Tecumseh gathered in solidarity the Shawnee, Kickapoo, Winnebago, Menominee, Ottawa, Wyandot, and dozens of other tribal nations to halt the further encroachment of the United States into American Indian homelands.<sup>7</sup> Aware of this history of pan-tribal alliances, Red Power activists developed a new, more sophisticated form of resistance to American imperialism. Boldly intellectual, they were better trained than their forebears to translate their culture-specific tribal values to European Americans.

Upon reclaiming Alcatraz for Native people, the Indians of All Tribes read their proclamation to the press. With bitter irony, they announced their discovery of a new uninhabited land and declared their right to remain by a treaty delineating a fair purchase of the tiny, worthless island: "We, the native Americans, re-claim the land known as Alcatraz Island in the name of all American Indians by right of discovery" (Josephy, Nagel, and Johnson 1999, 40). The protest statement exuded a new intellectual rigor that would characterize the Red Power movement. Red Power Indians presented a darkly humorous inversion of the deplorable state of Indian Country to encourage white Americans to view Native life more as Native people did. Movement organizers began by interpreting their experiences of colonialism on reservations, which they represented as thinly disguised prison camps designed to confine and control Indigenous people. As they looked around their world, they began to see their poverty not as the fitting consequence of their hapless lives, but as political subjugation enforced by an occupying power. In their proclamation, the Indians of All Tribes made explicit their formerly vague feelings of

hopelessness—their “imprisonment”—by audaciously declaring Alcatraz prison an appropriate site for a future Indian reservation:

We feel that this so-called Alcatraz Island is more than suitable for an Indian Reservation, as determined by the white man’s own standards. By this we mean that this place resembles most Indian reservations, in that:

1. It is isolated from modern facilities, and without adequate means of transportation.
2. It has no fresh running water.
3. It has inadequate sanitation facilities.
4. There are no oil or mineral rights.
5. There is no industry so unemployment is great.
6. There are no health care facilities.
7. The soil is rocky and non-productive; and the land does not support game.
8. There are no educational facilities.
9. The population has always exceeded the land base.
10. The population has always been held as prisoners and kept dependent upon others.

Further, it would be fitting and symbolic that ships from all over the world, entering the Golden Gate, would first see Indian land, and thus be reminded of the true history of this nation. This tiny island would be a symbol of the great lands once ruled by free and noble Indians. (41)

The document was a watershed for American Indians. With humor and irony, it expressed a clear analysis of colonialism. The colonizer comes to control tribal nations methodically so that, after the initial military conquest, the slow destruction of an entire culture is hardly noticed. Nations are brutally conquered, but the domination of a people occurs within the person, in a slow erosion of one’s sense of self-worth.

Following the occupation of Alcatraz in 1969, a decade-long flurry of events would define the time of Red Power. The era is now proudly remembered among seasoned organizers and continues to inspire a growing number of Indigenous scholars. Driven by Red Power, American Indian intellectuals recall the great moments of the Indian movement for Native liberation: the 1972 march on Washington for the Trail of Broken Treaties; the 1973 takeover of Wounded Knee; the 1975 intervention of the American Indian Movement on the Pine Ridge reservation; the 1978 Longest Walk on Washington to reenact the displacement of Indian peoples from

their homelands. Between these touchstone events, elders, faith keepers, students, scholars, and activists organized dozens of occupations of stolen American Indian territories, staged takeovers of corrupt BIA offices, and filed multiple legal claims demanding the return of stolen lands and property, as well as compensation for centuries of cultural destruction.<sup>8</sup>

During Red Power, Indigenous writers such as Kiowa intellectual N. Scott Momaday began to explore in the Native novel this process of political awakening as a moment of insight to understand oneself in relation to a dominant nation. Contrary to many current conceptions of culture, which assume that identity is largely externally imposed and therefore restrictive, Momaday and others harnessed Indian identity to serve their artistic vision and cultural renewal. Cultural identity during Red Power became a rich form of inquiry into one's past and cultural world. As a founding Indian voice at the rise of Red Power, Momaday declares his identity to be an inroad to a massive resource of tribal knowledge. In a well-known statement from a 1971 lecture, he explains how an encounter with his ancestral history granted him greater access to a more nuanced, more encompassing Native self-conception: "I think of myself as an Indian because at one time in my life I suddenly realized that my father had grown up speaking a language that I didn't grow up speaking, that my forebears on his side had made a migration from Canada . . . along with Athapaskan peoples that I knew nothing about, and so I determined to find out something about these things and in the process I acquired an identity" (quoted in Schubnell 1985, 141). Momaday does not present American Indian identity as self-contained or unchanging but rather embraces the complexity of tribal knowledge in which tribal identity is flexible and developing. He achieves identity through insight and hard work, in an interpretive process engaged with his own self-conception and a tribal world.

Like Momaday, we require a reasonable means of evaluating different kinds of tribal and self-knowledge. This book studies a process similar to that which Momaday describes in his journey to Kiowa personhood. Momaday trained himself in his own cultural knowledge in a project of social and historical inquiry, through which he discerned a fuller account of his social and cultural situation. His new understanding of himself as a Kiowa man with a specific tribal history better explains his cultural background and present world: why his father spoke Kiowa but he himself did not, for instance. The author discovered his present Indian life to be hardly accidental but in part the product of a colonial history that system-

atically silenced Indigenous languages. From this realization, Momaday was led further to theorize his Native self, in what we might consider a moment of political awakening. What I will call the Red Power novel often presents a similar empirical process of decolonization, in which the interaction between the concepts of identity and experience drives a dynamic of political awakening and cultural recovery. To articulate this process, I engage identity not as a self-evident fact of birth but as a philosophical issue that can support and be supported by a more defensible and useful epistemological position. Ultimately, I target concepts such as identity and experience in order to investigate and build a strong position on Indigenous knowledge. Native cultural identities and tribal experiences can help us to understand how domination shapes the Indian world today. In turn, these new understandings transform American Indian identity. Momaday's corrected vision of a tribal past, land, and self, however, calls for a supple means of evaluating categories of culturally produced knowledge. For not all theoretical claims are equally justified. That is, we need to be able to deliberate among claims to knowledge not only in Indian America but also across national borders, where Indian-U.S. colonial relations frequently present competing histories. To illustrate, let me provide an anecdote from *Red Power* in which such contentious claims to identity and history likely precipitated a hate crime.

On 20 February 1972, the Yellow Thunder family found Raymond beaten to death in his pickup truck in Gordon, Nebraska, a small border town whose economy relied, in part, on the sale of liquor to the Oglala people of Pine Ridge, the neighboring Sioux reservation. Raymond Yellow Thunder was a middle-aged ranch hand who sought off-reservation work but returned home regularly. When he did not arrive one weekend, his family knew that something was wrong. An investigation revealed that four white men had grabbed Yellow Thunder while he was standing in front of a bar. They stripped him, beat him, and put him in the trunk of their car, then drove around for a while. Eventually, they took him to the American Legion hall, where a dance was underway. There, the abductors forced Yellow Thunder to dance for the crowd, and later beat him again. He escaped to his truck, there only to die. In response to this case of sadistic brutality came the emergence of the American Indian Movement (AIM), which arrived in Gordon to demand redress. Comanche intellectual Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Warrior introduce the incident: "It was a tremendous and unexpected response to the death of a rather ordinary man. Raymond Yellow Thunder's story reached out to every Indian person who

could see in him not just another Indian drunk, but a brother, a father, an uncle, or a cousin” (1996, 117). For many Indigenous people, Yellow Thunder’s death served as an emblem of colonial oppression. In an era of growing Native consciousness, that beating emboldened American Indians to recover alternative histories and make evaluative claims against the dominant narratives that reproduced their subjugation.

Many citizens of Gordon, however, responded differently to Yellow Thunder’s death. Suspiciously, local police and courts refused to allow the Yellow Thunder family to view the body. We can imagine the underlying racism that reproduces cultural and historical distortions to justify such a crime. A local rancher might have understood Yellow Thunder’s presence, and that of other Natives from the nearby reservation, as an invasion of his town by an inferior people rather than as the result of his own country’s treaty breaking and land theft. On hearing his claim, though, a historically informed person would likely conclude as erroneous the rancher’s account of how European Americans came to possess Sioux territories. The rancher might even declare an inherent right to confiscate American Indian homelands based on a colonialist assumption that Indians comprise an inferior and thus doomed race that should make way for his civilization. On this manifest destiny, he would be obligated to colonize Indian lands and force Native people to surrender their “savage” ways. Like Indigenous peoples’ own claim to history, this rancher’s cultural narrative is clearly socially constructed, but to a large U.S. population a colonialist history and a white supremacist identity would seem flawed because such notions inaccurately account for our colonial past and attempt to justify the denial of human worth. They do not describe the world that all of us, white or Indian, know. I argue that, whether culturally inherited or politically chosen, our claims to knowledge can—indeed, must—be evaluated. We need a way to distinguish between cultural narratives that provide assessments of colonialism or protect human worth and narratives that condone imperialism or allow racist domination. To make these distinctions, we can engage concepts such as experience and identity as theoretical tools to produce knowledge of our shared world. Simply put, it is unacceptable to say that all knowledge is constructed and to leave it at that. How people explain themselves in the world entails real political consequences for which all of us must be accountable.

During Red Power, Indians offered public reevaluations of competing histories. In reclaiming Alcatraz Island for Native people, they reclaimed and revalued the lives of American Indians like Raymond Yellow Thun-

der. They began to recover the “true history of this nation” in the suppressed history of American lands “once ruled by free and noble Indians.” The growth of Red Power thus describes what I find to be a practical implementation of an alternative, historically grounded theory. I read Red Power as a materialist, political, and artistic vision that informs today’s Native writers and scholars. In the midst of the Indian movement, vaguely felt experiences of colonialism were made explicit and were evaluated for accuracy in explaining Indigenous lives and their relationship with the United States. Red Power leaders gleaned new social knowledge through their political work, knowledge that was verified or revised as the movement grew: “If Oklahoma Indians realized the repressive conditions under which they lived, many simply accepted that Indians’ fortunes were supposed to be harder than whites because Indians were stupid. However, most of the Oklahoma tribes maintained their own societies and ceremonies belying the myth of inferiority that kept them in social and economic bondage” (V. Deloria 1994, 7). With the inspiration of Red Power, American Indians began to ask why mainstream stories of Indian degradation contradicted their own experiences of a rich cultural life. In declaring and sharing their right and capacity to express themselves culturally, many Natives began to recover their tribal knowledge and to strengthen their identities as they elaborated new, more enabling accounts of Indian domination and resistance.

While they practiced their new theoretical vision of justice for Indian peoples, Oakes and other American Indian students were refining this vision in American universities. Native students brought their identities and experiences to college campuses, creating “Native American studies.” Pressuring universities to accept a more diverse student body, American Indian students and professors demanded a place in the university for the production of Native ideas in a body of knowledge produced by and for American Indian people. Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn recalls participating in this exciting moment for Indigenous people: “For four days in March 1970, American Indian scholars met at the First Convocation of American Indian Scholars at Princeton University. . . . This milestone event set the agenda for strategy discussions that would bring about a change in the way Native life in America was studied. The main aim of these discussions was to assert that Indians were not just the inheritors of trauma but were also the heirs to vast legacies of knowledge about this continent and the universe that had been ignored in the larger picture of European invasion and education” (1997, 9). Departing

from the ingrained anthropological approach to studying Native peoples, American Indian scholars announced that the study of a people is likely to improve when the people themselves contribute to it. Most importantly, notice the scholars' imaginative shift in self-conception: Natives are not helpless victims of colonial devastation, but instead the shrewd protectors of Indigenous thought. Like the Red Power activists on Alcatraz, like the Indians of Oklahoma, these Native intellectuals underwent a moment of creative realization. For decades, mainstream academics had said that Native people were spiraling in decline: depressed by their cultural loss they continued to lose their culture. But this assumption failed to explain why Native people were still dancing and still practicing the old ways, as well as continually inventing new ones—on Alcatraz, on reservations, in cities, in universities. If American Indians were hopelessly conquered, how could they be sharing tribal knowledge at Princeton? At the close of the decade, Native scholars and organizers had built from the ground up a process-oriented view of Indigenous knowledge and a vision of cultural renewal to inform the criticism, politics, and art of American Indians. I now introduce these interrelated theoretical issues as they inform the Red Power movement, the growth of Native studies, and the organization of this book.

### American Indian Studies Today

Into the 1980s, the production of American Indian cultural knowledge as a discipline remained a site for imagining a Native emergence. Yet, despite Red Power's historicist beginnings, Native scholars such as Paula Gunn Allen, Ward Churchill, and Annette Jaimes began to espouse what many today might call essentialist conceptions of American Indian life.<sup>9</sup> In their stance on Indigenous nationhood, such scholars and organizers often did not consider more complex accounts of the diverse and changing tribal consciousness in North America. In forceful, exhortative tones, such intellectuals frequently drew on a collection of idealist notions about Indian history, culture, and identity. In advancing such a critical discourse, they hoped to establish a clearly defined infrastructure from which to resist the intellectual and material invasions of the U.S. mainstream. Of the many issues they addressed, the concept of identity was the most contentious. To build an anticolonial movement, these scholars argued, Natives must have a clear understanding of the contemporary tribal self. American Indian scholars composed an often essentialist program

not only to benefit Indigenous people but also to edify those who had been defining—indeed, naming—tribal peoples for centuries.

Of course, the essentialist formulation preserves but also limits Native knowledge. From this approach to Indigenous inquiry, Native people become restricted in their capacity to know the world. Each tribal person, on this view, possesses an unchanging, self-evident tribal understanding. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Laguna and Sioux scholar Paula Gunn Allen famously describes this perspective as “a solid, impregnable, and ineradicable orientation toward a spirit-formed view of the universe, which provides an internal structure to both our consciousness and our art, . . . [and is] shared by all members of tribal psychic reality” (1992, 165). Note the rigid language of Allen’s declaration: a single worldview held by “all” Native people is provided intact, in advance, and cannot be revoked, for it is an “internal” and “ineradicable” essence. In this restrictive view of tribal awareness, Native people have little room to develop. Allen’s essentialism might have led the Lakota people to refuse the entrance of the horse, which was to become central to their culture. In Indian Country, tribal people looking to their own cultural histories might question Allen’s generalization. Like the leaders of Red Power, they might also seek cultural improvement, an achievement that her essentialist views often disallow. Beyond Indian Country, in the universities where many American Indian intellectuals work, one comes to understand the charge of essentialism that Allen’s declaration invites. The category of Indian is, in fact, not homogeneous across space and time but rather responds to the contingencies of history. Accepting this fact in the scholarly work of Native studies, Muskogee scholar Craig Womack writes: “To be sure, there is no one pure or authoritative act that constitutes Native literary criticism” (1999, 5). When struggling, however, to support our claims regarding tribal origins, homelands, nationhood, and spirituality, some Native scholars today unnecessarily rely on various forms of essentialism. Such claims do require defense, but they need not be essentialist. To serve this need, in this study I introduce the concept of an Indigenous “center” of Native thought to develop a theory of Indian identity, tribal experience, and social transformation. Employing Indigenous and Western philosophical notions of evaluation and knowledge, thereby avoiding essentialism, I propose an epistemological view of communally conferred objectivity, which I call *tribal realism*. I define and elaborate this position in the pages ahead.

Today, most Indian scholars, in some way, respond to the above question of change in tribal knowledge, and so their work might be loosely

characterized in relation to three intellectual attitudes toward essentialism: some scholars defend essentialism as a necessary political strategy; others reject it by exposing its fixed claims to knowledge; still others resolve it by historicizing their ideas. Of course, these theoretical views often converge, diverge, or entangle, sometimes within a single scholar's argument. Native intellectuals who take the second path often turn to various forms of poststructuralism in order to liberate static views of knowledge regarding American Indian history, experience, and identity.<sup>10</sup> In the 1990s, American Indian scholars such as Kimberly Blaeser, Louis Owens, and Gerald Vizenor began this dismantling of such supposed cultural foundations. Building on Anishinaabe theorist Vizenor's notions of "trickster discourse" and "mixedblood" or "crossblood" identity,<sup>11</sup> such scholars have sought to correct the essentialist insistence that Native culture remains immutable despite external social and historical influences. Anishinaabe critic Kimberly Blaeser discusses Vizenor's introduction of the oral traditional trickster conception of identity to American Indian studies: "In Vizenor's writing the trickster figure becomes nearly synonymous with and a metaphor for the tribal mixedblood, whose symbolic role is to subvert the artificial distinctions of society. Like the trickster, whose very identity reflects all duality and contradiction, the mixedblood is a marginal character, one who exists on the border of two worlds, two cultures, the white and the Indian. In fact, the existence of the mixedblood resists even that definitiveness" (1996, 155). While an era might be behind us, some Native scholars and most non-Native scholars still accept Vizenor's view of tribal knowledge, perhaps because, as Blaeser describes, the trickster either promises to liberate Indigenous identity, or, more modestly, helps to challenge colonialist stereotypes. Yet perhaps most attractively, the trickster provides a model to survive a capitalist world at war with tribalism. I imagine that this hope underlies the late Choctaw-Cherokee scholar Louis Owens's interest in this position on Indian selfhood and, more deeply, on knowledge. Indeed, Owens appears to choose a mixedblood trickster identity as the only perceived alternative to essentialism: "For those of us who, like most of the authors we recognize as Native American, are mixedbloods, the hybridized, polyglot, transcultural frontier is quite clearly internalized. For all of us, however, territory remains a constant threat, an essential fiction of the colonial mind" (1998, 27). Beneath such claims seems a view of knowledge as necessarily unstable, yet purportedly liberating in its very instability: "Frontier, I would suggest, is the zone of the trickster, a shimmering, always changing zone

of multifaceted contact within which every utterance is challenged and interrogated, all referents put into question” (26).

For Owens, Indigenous people, since the arrival of Europeans, are now immersed in at least two cultures. Now, albeit culturally, mixedbloods all, Indians inhabit the interstitial space between the American colonies and the Indian territories, without being fully determined by either. Convinced that all identity categories rely on an unacceptable essence, such trickster critics have traded these supposedly failed categories for indeterminacy. This position, however, has led to a few theoretical limitations. First, no Native person would deny that American Indians bear the influence of European Americans, but so do European Americans of American Indians, as do other groups of other groups. Indeed, if all of us, red, white, black, or otherwise, display this influence of other cultures in our lives, this trickster theory works less to appreciate than to undermine cultural difference. In this trickster space, where race and colonialism continue to operate but have been rendered invisible, scholars, in the end, cannot explain crucial differences in social and political power, nor lay claim to a distinct tribal history and hold it up to the world. As tricksters, moreover, Native scholars have cast the focus of their studies away from the production of ideas to serve Indigenous lives into the margins of cultural interaction, where things Indian are often valued only insofar as they are indebted to U.S. culture.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, self-identified mixedblood critics, writing in this zone of the trickster, have been left with little theoretical recourse but subversion. Indeed, they can deconstruct the Western image of the Indian, but, to remain epistemologically consistent, they cannot justify their own normative claims to American Indian identity or history. This trickster position thus has promised to liberate Native people from essentialist definitions of Indians, but, disconnected from a distinct culture and land, it ultimately cannot support a coherent Native identity nor protect actual Native territories. I argue, however, that theoretical categories, foremost identity, need not rely on essentialism. As sound scientific theories rely not on eternal truths but empirical evidence, good social concepts rely not on absolutes but coherent explanations of the self in society. Identities enable us to read the world, and can be revised better to do so. The trickster critique notwithstanding, as long as tribal people are colonized, concepts such as identity and nation will be indispensable tools of political resistance, and even on decolonization, such open-ended constructs will remain valuable modes of interpretation. Responsible Indian scholars

should recognize that views of knowledge underlie social concepts such as identity or experience. In neglecting to consider the implications of our theories—theories with real-world political consequences—Native scholars undermine the very claims on which American Indians make their best appeals for justice.

More recently, Indigenous intellectuals such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Robert Warrior, and Jace Weaver have shifted the focus of the critical conversation to the real lives of Indian people,<sup>13</sup> and in effecting this shift, they have returned the field to the process-driven mode of social transformation that defined Red Power. Such scholars have begun to root our studies in land, community, and the past. In so doing, they are empowered to make evaluative claims to normative knowledge, which, in turn, better support the philosophical and actual recovery of Indian lands, histories, and identities. Their call to rematriate the discourse, however, is hardly a new development in the American Indian history of ideas, but rather responds to a longstanding commitment to critical accountability in Native history and society. Such Native intellectuals continue to produce work that neither relies on reductive essentialism nor resorts to trickster indeterminacy. Instead, such Indian scholars compose convincing accounts of American Indian life by consistently training a critical eye on history. Here, I write of history as an epistemological challenge: the claim of the material world on ideas, and the claim of intellectuals to history. Like these scholars, I am committed to historicism as a methodological approach dedicated to refining our ideas in the world, as they refer to a social context to ground the crucial political contentions of our times.

With the 1995 publication of *Tribal Secrets*, Robert Warrior took Indigenous studies by surprise, though his assertion of “intellectual sovereignty” amounts to nothing more audacious than a reasonable request to recognize a colonized intellectual history: “A guiding principle of my work . . . has been to produce a book that explores [how,] after more than two centuries of impressive literary and cultural production, critical interpretation of those writings can proceed primarily from Indian sources. . . . [For in practicing intellectual sovereignty], we stand on firmer ground in our interlocutorial role with Eurocentric scholarly theories and categories, whose methodologies and disciplinary traditions too often become monoliths to be either copied uncritically or made into bugbears that are engaged in an endless dance of criticism and dependence” (1995, xvi, 2). If we are to seek justice, we must begin by recognizing this history of repressive colonial relations. European imperialism has silenced

resistant voices—voices without which we are denied a full account of American Indian life. Understood in this light, the plea for scholarly self-determination to end critical “dependence” is not only ethically just but also intellectually necessary. Indian scholars using Warrior’s approach are extending intellectual traditions with deep roots in North American history. Such work is “counterhistorical” for it not only exposes but also corrects inaccurate constructions of American Indian culture neither by appealing to essentialism nor by resorting to deconstruction, but by presenting alternative knowledge built on accounts that adhere to the social facts of Native life.

Native intellectuals developing this historicist approach write of Indian Country as comprised of certain social facts that define American Indian existence. A study shows that Native people today are far more likely to be subject to a violent crime committed by European Americans than are any other racial group in the United States (Southern Poverty Law Center 1990, 3). Of course, the researchers’ work with the data, as well as our explanations of “the facts of life” in Native America, will certainly be socially mediated. But if, judging by the facts, our material account of American Indian life is convincing, then that explanation is, from a theoretical perspective, normative. No doubt such facts are imperative to decision making, though our interpretations of social facts may change as we grow and our world changes. In recognizing the necessity of historical ground for a theoretical construct like Indian Country, these intellectuals proffer a world that is constructed yet nonetheless “real” because that world exists independent of our theories. It is through our theories, however, that we can gain access to it. Implementing what I describe as an emergent tribal realist theoretical framework, Indigenous scholars place concepts such as knowledge, experience, and identity at the center of their arguments for national liberation and social justice.

In spite of the fundamental importance of identity to Indigenous social struggles, the humanities field in the United States continues to question the necessity of the concept. American Indian scholars who thus pursue a philosophically grounded politics of identity must contend with the concerns that critique raises. Some theorists conclude that, because the concept of identity requires some level of intellectual violence to be maintained, it is theoretically untenable, even harmful. Other concerned critics, indeed, declare identity to be politically dangerous in a world fractured by nationalism and racial tension. In turn, the concept of experience

has weathered less critique; if human experience is unavoidably mediated, theorists argue, it cannot be known or owned. Whether a tribe works to retain a collective understanding as a distinct people from a specific place with a unique history, or whether a Native woman struggles to protect her personal self-understanding as a tribal person, it is through identity that Indian people, defying this critique at play in books, schools, and the media, continue to develop their cultures.

Whenever I must present my “CDIB” identification card from the Department of the Interior in order to authorize my identity biologically in terms of racial purity—my “certified degree of Indian blood”—I am reminded that the United States polices my Native identity. So despite the warnings from within and beyond Indigenous studies, in this book I attempt to reclaim American Indian identity in an utmost urgent response to the ongoing colonial relations between Native nations and the United States. For if we simply abandon this theoretical issue, U.S. institutions will continue to restrict Indigenous identity. As we well know, the North American history of empire building underwrites the destruction of Indian cultural identity with its policies moored to manifest destiny—policies which insist that Indians relinquish their identification with their cultures and especially with their resource-rich ancestral homelands. To resist U.S. imperialism invested in erasing the Native presence, identity is quite probably *the* central site for the preservation of tribal culture, history, and nationhood.

For a theory of identity to serve either cause, we require a means to determine which conceptions of identity best guide this process of decolonization and cultural renewal. What is more, colonial relations yearn for an understanding of the unique histories and legal entitlements of Indigenous peoples, an assessment that requires an account of Native identities different from those of North American settlers. To meet these practical demands, we must be able to distinguish among identities and evaluate them. From a practical view of American Indian identity, we value a claim on its ability to explain one’s world. On this basis of epistemic reliability, Native identity may be reconceived to better produce cultural knowledge. In so doing, we transform politically, mobilizing the Fourth World.<sup>14</sup> Looking back on the past two decades in Native studies, I find that neither position on cultural identity—the essentialist retreat or the trickster dislocation—provides a philosophical discourse to adjudicate our various claims. During the Indian movement, organizers, scholars, and writers engaged

the very process described above. The theoretical alternative that I offer is drawn from and redraws the political awakening and cultural growth experienced by characters in the Red Power novel.

In working to ground American Indian discourses, Native scholars participate in a tradition of tribal intellectualism that considers American Indian art and thought as a response to the experience of being Native in the world. Although Indigenous intellectuals such as William Apess, Charles Eastman, and Ella Deloria wrote within quite different historical, social, and political climates, whether during eras of colonial invasion, removal, allotment, termination, or relocation, they share a concern with locating American Indian ideas in Native experience and tribal history. For the moment, we might consider such Indian figures as models for a historicist mode in Native critical thought, which I seek to theorize in this work. Organizing this legacy, Robert Warrior reshapes Native canons in terms not of great works but of “great ideas” to better discern the continuity in tribal intellectual consciousness: “When we take that tradition seriously, . . . we empower our work. . . . We see that, far from engaging in some new and novel practice that belongs necessarily to the process of assimilating and enculturating non-Native values, we are doing something that Natives have done for hundreds of years—something that can be and has been an important part of resistance to assimilation and survival” (1995, 2). Warrior is able to establish our intellectual tradition through his process of “cross reading,” in which Indian scholars put Native texts in conversation with those beyond Native America, to develop a “cultural criticism that is grounded in American Indian experiences but which can draw on the insights and experiences of others who have faced similar struggles” (xxiii). He holds Indian self-understanding and tribal history as primary concepts through which to pursue Native independence, cultural recovery, and artistic flourishing.

This materialist intellectual tradition in English reaches back to the colonial period when American Indians struggled against invasion, the dissipation of alcohol, the cessation of tribalism, and the assimilation into Christian and capitalist culture. Immersed in this struggle throughout his work, the Pequot minister William Apess pursues the social facts of his existence, thereby relentlessly linking his Native identity to his experience of the world. Born in 1798, a survivor of outrageous attacks on his community, Apess writes in testimonial fervor to reconcile the historical memory of these acts of genocide with his commitment to Christianity,

both derived from European culture: “Can you charge the Indians with robbing a nation almost of their whole continent, and murdering their women and children, and then depriving the remainder of their lawful rights, that nature and God require them to have?” (1992 [1829], 13). In his brazen reversal, Apess preempts any charge of Indian moral degradation. His historical claim to high crimes of conquest and genocide, though, is more than a rhetorical indictment of hypocritical Christians—it is also a disclosure of colonial experience. Apess exhorts Indigenous people, on the one hand, to draw on this experience to reclaim and resist attacks on their moral lives, and charges European Americans, on the other, to account for their colonial history as invaders. Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver explains that Apess works within a tradition of community-based intellectualism, in which Natives write to preserve American Indian well-being, recover culture, and promote tribal autonomy: “[Apess] uses Christianity to break through his alienation. He employs it to claim the full humanity of Indians and his own Indianness in particular. In his writings he increasingly reaches for an Indian Christian nationalism that aims at separatism” (1997, 59).

In placing Native studies within a tradition of expanding Indigenous selfhood and tribal experience, we discover a shared critical concern in the writings of early-twentieth-century American Indian intellectuals such as the Sioux writer Charles Eastman, who, though criticized for his assimilationist views, firmly grounds us in Indian land and history, and even lashes out against white hypocrisy. Eastman can speak with a sharp tongue on the historical responsibility of U.S. citizens. Consider his recollection of one morning in 1887 during a stroll with his European American benefactor, Mr. Moody. Stopping at a marker, Moody declares: “Eastman, this stone is a reminder of the cruelty of your countrymen two centuries ago. Here they murdered an innocent Christian.” Eastman calmly replies, “Mr. Moody, it might have been better if they had killed them all. Then you would not have had to work so hard to save the souls of their descendants” (1977 [1916], 74). The subtle ambiguity in pronouns tempts Western readers to designate “they” the Christians and “them” the Indians, whom Eastman, in his own purported self-hatred, wishes destroyed. Semantically, however, Eastman empowers “they” as his Native countrymen, and indicts “them” as the European Christian conquerors, whose souls need saving for their brutal treatment of Eastman’s people. Such textual moments in which identity, land, history, and language intersect

call Indian scholars to locate and reclaim Native voices. So doing, readers might discover their interpretive error and come to view the world more as do American Indians.

In a final example of historicist writing, I turn to the Sioux scholar Ella Deloria. Born in 1889 and a protégé of Franz Boaz, she considers colonial change among her Dakota people. During a somewhat arid period for Native intellectuals, in 1944 Deloria published *Speaking of Indians*. Writing for a largely Christian audience, Deloria's account of her people's transformation is measured yet moving, because she lets her views of changing Native identity take shape in real-world experiences: "But they were a people used to accepting fate with fortitude and dignity. They still repeated their favorite adage, 'Since it must be so, it is so,' and they turned to the white man's way with remarkably little bitterness. Had they better understood what fundamentally must be done to make the change, they might have made better headway than they did. In retrospect we can see the mistakes, the stupidities, the indignities that made the going rough. At that they started out well enough, almost too well, with proverbial beginner's luck. The thoughtful and the objective were anxious for the future. The rank and file took each day as it came, preoccupied with the mere business of keeping alive under strange conditions" (1998 [1944], 84). Written over two decades before Red Power, Deloria's portrait of personal dignity and quiet negotiation in a conscious cultural transformation anticipates the literary craft of N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko: the "long outwaiting" of the Jemez people in *House Made of Dawn*; the test of Yellow Calf and his band in *Winter in the Blood*; the patient words of Josiah about precious water in *Ceremony*. Only through rooting her views in the lives of Dakota people, reflecting on their social meanings, is Deloria able to provide a convincing account of colonial depression and a vision of renewal. With striking perception, she performs the very process of creative self-reflection she illustrates, and even models for future American Indian intellectuals of Red Power and today a process of remembering and reimagining a more enriched Indian past for a more enabling Indian future. Despite or through their association with Christianity or capitalist culture, these writers maintain an Indigenous viewpoint because they speak from experience and to history. In rooting our ideas in a community of experience, contemporary Native critics place themselves in a tribal realist intellectual tradition. Thus proceeding, historically focused American Indian scholars follow the words of Womack, who declares: "I will seek a literary criticism that emphasizes

Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture” (1999, 11).

Because I feel the necessity of working within, and philosophically deepening, the American Indian critical tradition described above, in this book I plan to clarify some of the claims made lately among Native scholars who I find share elements of this tribal realist standpoint. I thus offer an alternative theoretical position to American Indian knowledge, identity, land, and experience. Native scholars implicitly use this approach when they say the world out there is real because it affects us in a very real way. For it would be dangerous for American Indians to enter ancestral places of worship while dismissing the historical fact that these stolen lands are now patrolled by the U.S. military. Because they must encounter and explain these social facts, those who implement tribal realism are committed to evaluating and improving their interpretations of a shared world. Such interpretations are certainly socially mediated, but, unlike those critics influenced by trickster discourse, tribal realist intellectuals deal with theoretical dependence as an opportunity to modify their views as they compose more normative social knowledge.

The discussion above thus evokes the sensitive issues of social power in our interpretation of Indigenous literature and culture. Of course, identity plays a significant part in any cross-cultural literary and social analysis. Add to this interpretive challenge the ideological workings of colonial modernity, and we only further distort, through our identities, our knowledge of another world. The United States boasts of being the wealthiest nation in the world, yet many of its citizens remain drastically impoverished and are denied their rights to meaningful work, affordable housing, and health care. Reared in extreme colonial circumstances and within institutions that reproduce colonialist values regarding non-Western peoples, it is not surprising that scholars often inherit a view of the world informed by this imperialist cultural narrative. To correct this vision, scholars can interrogate the legacy of U.S. domination and its often-sublimated involvement in research on Native literature.

To do so, we can begin developing a more workable view of social mediation. Though our theoretical attachments cannot be avoided, some might be more useful than others, some hindering us to appreciate tribal cultures, others actually preparing us to read Indian texts. Scholars of Native texts might adapt an approach similar to that of today’s progressive

social analysts. This new vision of cultural interpretation, one that moves beyond the objectivist dream of disinterested observation, informs the work of the acclaimed anthropologist Renato Rosaldo. He was challenged to explain death and mourning among the Ilongot people until his wife's untimely passing: "The ethnographer, as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomena better than others. He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision. Consider, for example, how age, gender, being an outsider, and association with a neocolonial regime influence what the ethnographer learns. The notion of position also refers to how life experiences both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight. In the case at hand, nothing in my own experience equipped me even to imagine the anger possible in bereavement until after Michelle Rosaldo's death in 1981. Only then was I in a position to grasp the force of what Ilongots had repeatedly told me about grief, rage, and headhunting" (1989, 19). As Rosaldo carefully explains, one's social location of reading need not be always restrictive; some theoretical mediation might grant insight to Native life and art. With this view in mind, I propose a literary anthropology fundamentally committed to interrogating and benefiting from the role of identity in the practice of Indigenous criticism. If the goal of our research is to produce more conclusive scholarship on Native literature and culture, then I suggest we begin to question and produce helpful background knowledge, examining how personal location influences (impedes or assists) cultural and literary analysis. In what I introduce as a "normativist" reading methodology, inquiry is not a search for disinterested knowledge but a process of refining one's theoretical perspective by becoming self-critical.<sup>15</sup> Such an interpretive approach thus accepts and benefits from the constructivist critique, for, on this alternative view, one can read through one's location to correct and construct a more comprehensive account of an Indian world, because that new account now better explains the surrounding social facts that make up that world. In the following pages, I test and elaborate this approach by focusing on several concepts central to American Indian social transformation and national liberation: homelands, in chapter 1; identity, in chapter 2; experience, in chapter 3; praxis, in chapter 4; and social interaction, in my concluding chapter.

As an emergent Indigenous scholar, I feel a responsibility to present some challenging claims, but I strongly believe such claims must be substantiated in our texts. Liberating ideas rely on liberating readings of liberating literature. To demonstrate my alternative approach, I focus on three

widely read novels written by American Indians during the Red Power movement of the 1960s and 1970s: N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977).<sup>16</sup> I use these works to explain how tribal realism might better account for changes in Native life brought about through political awakening and the characters' and the community's engagement with their tribal land, oral traditions, culture, and history growing from and fueling the consciousness of the period. I consciously select three works that Native and mainstream scholars and readers know well, and I read them critically to show that they present indispensably valuable ideas to serve Native intellects. Then, in my concluding chapter, I explore how a number of today's Indian writers further develop the claims of Red Power by attending to its legacy in the lives of Native people today. In the spirit of Alcatraz, I propose that we consider our identification with tribal lands (part 1: Red Land) as the umbilicus of American Indian studies and as the epistemological grounds prepared for the growth of Native identity and Native political consciousness (part 2: Red Power). For I believe that Indian scholars today face a decisive moment in the field, in which we are challenged to test and defend our ideas not only in our literatures but also in the world—where, few would disagree, our ideas refer to actual political realities.

### Normativity and the Oral Tradition

“Objectivity,” the production of reliable knowledge, is the underlying pivotal point on which a growing number of scholars in and beyond Native studies disagree. Indian scholars influenced by trickster theory tend to define objectivity in positivist terms, as the achievement of pure knowledge absolutely free of theoretical mediation. This book, however, redefines the pursuit of objectivity as a mediated process that recognizes and corrects error in the search for more accurate accounts of the world. I call this goal of inquiry “normativity,” in tribal realist terms. Though analytic philosophers today have moved beyond positivism, critics in Indigenous studies employing the trickster still assume that all claims to knowledge necessarily involve this Enlightenment-era model of objectivity, in which knowledge must be achieved free of theoretical attachments to history, society, or culture. Of course, the subjective nature of all inquiry precludes ultimate certainty in our observations of the world. Scholars nonetheless continue to set their terms of inquiry to attain a positivist “view

from nowhere.”<sup>17</sup> Convinced that “knowledge” must assume a reliance on these unmediated foundations—what the literary profession associates with essentialism—Native cultural critics supporting tricksterism have thus often ruled out the possibility of achieving any reliable knowledge at all. Faced with the undesirable situation in which inquiry is an unavoidably tainted process and value-free objectivity is impossible to achieve, scholars relying on this position tend to turn away from the production of knowledge. Instead, scholars continue to investigate this problem. In their most progressive mode, such American Indian critics pursue further critiques of knowledge as an irreversible tangle of ideology.

In an alternative to such Western positivist views of knowledge, I turn to an epistemological understanding held among tribal peoples of North America, articulated and negotiated in Indigenous oral philosophy.<sup>18</sup> With an impressive reserve of research, Native philosophers, linguistic anthropologists, and folklore experts study how people of oral cultures manage their knowledge by collaborating on an intellectual body of stories wholly adequate to their moral lives and social world. Contrary to the popular view that American Indian cultures remain in an unchanging past, Native cultures survive and indeed flourish through this ongoing production of knowledge maintained in the oral tradition. To serve tribal change, Indian storytelling must remain a dynamic, continuous site of theoretical investigation, evaluation, and revision.

As an ever-changing body of tribal philosophy, the oral tradition thus accepts and negotiates challenges to tradition. Even the old ways and values vital to a Native community at times require reflection and revision to ensure that tribal people adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world. To practice this open-ended philosophical evaluation, tribal members must hold a view of knowledge and experience that overcomes the Western tendency to demand a verifiable reality in mutually exclusive categories, such as either authentic or inauthentic, either oral or written, either dream or reality. In this regard, written forms of American Indian tellings, whether modifications of traditional stories or adaptations of foreign genres, can be oral yet written, new yet authentic. Tribal people can transform the novel into a unique Indigenous literary form. Choctaw scholar Michael Wilson explains this different conception of knowledge in a reading of Leslie Marmon Silko: “In contrast to the scientific methods of Tedlock and others, Leslie Marmon Silko, Laguna Pueblo novelist and essayist, challenges the distinctions crucial to the sciences: pure/impure, past/present, orality/writing. Instead, Silko suggests a much different approach to represent-

ing the oral tradition, conceiving of it not as an artifact for study, but . . . as a living tradition whose value and power expand and continue to have relevance for the present. Consequently (and ironically), the oral tradition itself has, as Silko demonstrates, a fundamentally different way of conceptualizing itself than do the scientists who seek to represent it" (1997, 133). I hope to deepen our understanding of this "fundamentally different way" by reframing this distinction in epistemological terms. Wilson suggests that European American researchers cannot explain a tribal view of oral knowledge within a traditionally Western model of inquiry. To clarify this difference, we might organize these divergent cultural views of knowledge in terms of objectivity. For Wilson, Western epistemologies tend to hold a positivist conception of knowledge as absolute certainty that cannot be obtained, while tribal philosophies tend to view knowledge in more normative terms. To Indians, what one knows of the world may be altered but steadily endures: "The ancient Pueblo people sought a communal truth, not an absolute," writes Silko (1996b, 269).

For this reason, "new" knowledge may enter a tribal community to be incorporated within an Indigenous worldview. In an influential essay, "Toward a National Indian Literature," Acoma writer Simon Ortiz explains that this adaptive process is not simply artistic but indeed political. Indian people consciously shape their bodies of knowledge with new practices, values, and even languages to resist domination and build nations: "This is the crucial item that has to be understood, that it is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through the use of any language. There is no question of authenticity here; rather it is the way Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance" (1981b, 10). Because Native community members maintain a more flexible model of knowledge, they can assimilate new values, practices, and views into tribal consciousness. American Indians become not mixedbloods caught between two worlds but simply Indians, refining their cultures through time. Wilson continues his discussion of the Pueblo epistemology: "Thus, a Pueblo perspective suggests that literature is a normative process—continually re-creating meaning in the present, seeking a 'communal truth' that is a changing but stable center of value. Furthermore, a storytelling culture constantly moves toward integrating its individual elements—points of view, old and new stories—into a complex, changing community. It does so not only in spite of conflicting points of view but also *because* of these different points of view, for they

provide valuable correction and supplemental information” (1997, 135). Notice that the Pueblo people understand knowledge as the practice of meaning gathering: not as the final identification of an unmediated truth, but as an ongoing process in which community members offer multiple perspectives. In a social process that employs the localizing force of language, tribal members are drawn into a culturally regulated center of knowledge.

In a tribal model of normativity, knowledge is challenged and maintained through a sophisticated understanding of error. Rather than seek merely to eliminate error, as do positivists, people of storytelling cultures tend to value error as fundamental to inquiry. An inaccurate claim to knowledge presents an opportunity for participants to locate such an error, to seek out the views or values that might have led to this incomplete understanding of a tribal world. In this manner, the oral tradition describes a dialectic in which error interacts with objectivity as tribal theorists move toward a more complete picture of Indigenous life. Wilson explains the role of error in Native inquiry: “In this conception of the oral tradition, and of the creation of meaning in general, conflict is not inherently negative and in fact can be seen as having positive influences if it is conceived within the context of a dialogic philosophy that accepts truth as provisional rather than absolute” (1997, 135). We might now see the theoretical implications of a tribal view of normative knowledge and fallibility. Because theory dependence is not shunned but indeed embraced, intellectuals eagerly contribute to the production of knowledge as an energetic process. This is why Indigenous philosophy is deeply creative. Writing on the function of “myths” in tribal life, Christopher Vecsey suggests that the performative context of community encourages an oral philosopher to produce collective knowledge without diminishing his or her own unique aesthetic: “The most central motifs are present in all versions of the same story. Thus a single story exists, but with no absolutely fixed text from which others vary. On the contrary, all variants are equally valid, each a new performance reflecting the storyteller’s style, talent, and interest” (1991, 21). Contributors to the body of knowledge that constitutes the oral tradition present new narratives that may contradict or modify it, so the limits of what we can know are always being challenged and reaffirmed, tested and extended. Cree philosopher Neal McLeod discusses the political implications of this view of tribal knowledge that can imagine and accommodate new patterns of life: “It seems that open-endedness with discursive space and action of a community is desirable and necessary

to maintain a vital life-world, with the provision that it does not threaten the destruction of a community. . . . If Indian women get more political power, Indian communities will remain intact. And if some Pueblo Indians are atheists, the whole community is not going to collapse” (1998, 66–67).

Because these alternative accounts must be consciously created, the oral tradition is predicated on a specifically tribal conception of the imagination. Among many Native peoples, to imagine is not to see an illusion; it is to manifest that which once did not exist, to order the world in the way Momaday describes in the epigraph to this introduction. This Indigenous understanding of the imagination thus might be distinguished from narrower, Western notions of imagining. Karl Kroeber describes this difference:

I find that most useful definitions of imagination are those in common usage, in which “to imagine” ordinarily means two different but related processes linked by a conception of “fantasy.” When someone says, “Ah, you’re just imagining that,” you are accused of “fantasizing” in its most usual sense: inventing mentally what has never existed and presumably never can, or willfully ignoring physical actualities for psychically engendered “unrealities.” When, however, you are urged to “use your imagination, stupid,” there is a positive appeal to fantasy: a demand that you employ your psychic capacities to reach beyond what is immediately present here and now and beyond routinized rational patterns toward some novel possibility. The injunction to “use your imagination” urges you to allow your mind to move toward something not yet realized but realizable. Imagination in this sense underlies every kind of planning, every purposeful human accomplishment; it is in fact the primary power that *constitutes* culture. (1998, 64)

Kroeber beseeches mainstream students of American Indian oral literature to consider this difference in definitions of the imagination.<sup>19</sup> Paul Tidwell suggests that he and other European Americans may negotiate their cultural distance from Native literature and even develop morally by engaging a tribal model of the imagination: “If imagination functions within stories to remind us of the tragicomic aspects of experience . . . , then stories—those we hear about others and those we remember—can act as agents of change” (1997, 626). When a tribal people tell their story of their collective emergence, they are not unconsciously rehearsing a concretized narrative. To the contrary, they willfully reinvent their world in

a profound act of the imagination. Through this oral enactment, Natives confirm and expand their relationships with each other, with other creatures, and with the land. Kroeber and other oral literature specialists explain this Native practice as “world renewal”: “American Indian ideas of ‘renewal’ as restoration of traditional ways are misunderstood if regarded as mere exercises in repetition. Indian imaginings that revitalize their culture and its relation to the environment never exclude the possibility (even the desirability) of transformation through reassessment of tradition” (1998, 66). Though not assuming a seamless oral tradition leading up to Red Power, this book places Indian oral philosophies of normative knowledge production at the center of plans for world renewal during Red Power and in its writings.

### Trade Languages and the Realist Theory

To travel in the colonial Southeast was to master “trade languages.” At one time, any European or Indian trader had to know at least one such language to travel beyond the boundaries of his nation, engage in diplomacy, or exchange trade items and knowledge. Then or now, were I to refer to myself as one of “Ani Yunwiya” or as a “Tsalagi” person, many probably would not understand that I am a member of an Indigenous group of the Smoky Mountains. But were I to say that I am from the Cherokee Nation, they would probably understand. The term “Cherokee,” however, is actually derived from a Choctaw word to describe those people of the cave country, a name applied to my people through the Choctaw Indigenous trade language of the Native Southeast. As an Indian scholar, I still rely on trade languages. Like the currency attending wampum or treaties, trade languages enable us to communicate across cultural differences and to trade in intellectual capital, without diminishing our cultural autonomy or “authenticity.” The English language has become a trade language, adapted by a vast number of people who wish to trade items and ideas—with no concomitant reduction in their cultural viability. In this book, I draw on a theoretical trade language called “realist theory” in order to exchange ideas with other scholars. My adaptation of this alternative theoretical position, however, does not weaken my tribal viewpoint; in fact, realism might even help expand my intellectual views to strengthen Native critical practice.

In the late 1980s, women, minority, and Third World scholars began to consider the importance of producing knowledge to benefit not only

suppressed groups but also a world all of us inhabit. Though members of the dominant culture were asked to form a distant appreciation of the knowledge produced within a subjugated group, minority scholars were finding that such cultural relativism ultimately confined their knowledge to the local. For on that position, rarely did mainstream scholars take minority struggles earnestly enough to be changed by them. In a 1989 essay, “Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism,” Satya Mohanty made explicit this gathering sense among minority scholars, when he explained that relativism as an interpretive position or political practice is strikingly limited: merely to appreciate difference “leads . . . to a sentimental charity, for there is nothing in its logic that necessitates our attention to the other” (1989, 23). Instead, Mohanty argued, our expansion of human knowledge requires not only the local but also the global, a recognition of the most basic capacity as humans, despite differences, to evaluate moral action and make decisions. Questioning the relativization of cultural knowledge, Mohanty called for a more universal basis for analysis across cultures, in a view of human agency as “not merely the capacity to act purposefully but also to *evaluate* actions and purposes in terms of larger ideas we might hold about, say, our political and moral world” (1989, 22). This necessarily broad category of *universal moral agency* was found better to serve the collective production of knowledge as well as anticolonial struggles. Movements for national liberation and human emancipation, after all, have often relied on similar, broad-based Kantian claims to the intrinsic worth and rights of humanity: “If I see someone in danger of drowning I will not need to satisfy myself about his moral character before going to his aid. I owe assistance to any man in such circumstances, not merely good men,” writes Gregory Vlastos in his famous civil-rights-era essay “Justice and Equality” (1962, 47).

In the 1990s, feminist philosophers such as Linda Martín Alcoff began to confront “the problem of speaking for others” as a serious theoretical issue of power closely tied to a person’s *objective social location*, the register of social factors that constitute a person’s daily life: “There is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus one cannot assume an ability to transcend one’s location. . . . Thus, the work of privileged authors who speak on behalf of the oppressed is coming more and more under criticism from members of those oppressed groups themselves” (1991, 7). From this concern for the affirmation of universal moral agency, on the one hand, and the recognition of objective social location, on the other, minority scholars began to

seek a view of identity and culture that not only attributed special knowledge or *epistemic privilege* to persons experiencing the world through oppressed social locations, but also made this knowledge incumbent on a general society.

With these challenges to cultural relativism, minority intellectuals were now able to assert the importance of including suppressed voices, not to repair disadvantaged groups, but to produce more objective knowledge. Scholars in women's studies began formulating an approach to knowledge that resisted the essentialist impulse, yet also avoided the total destabilization of concepts fundamental to subjugated groups, such as "women's lives." Scholars began to confront the problem of essentializing the category of woman as part of a deeper issue regarding the very production of objective knowledge, as in the sciences. In a 1991 book, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*, feminist philosopher Sandra Harding began with the now-familiar critique of power in society and, in her study, the sciences, asserting that "science is politics by other means" (10). Like many other scholars, Harding is critical of the way our views of the world are situated, and shares with these scholars the conclusion that inquiry is always socially and historically mediated. She argues, in fact, that this disclosure often comes from those who do not benefit from but are dominated by the production and application of power-driven knowledge: "For those who have suffered from what seem to be the consequences of the sciences, their technologies, and their forms of rationality, it appears absurd to regard science as the value-free, disinterested, impartial, Archimedean *arbiter* of conflicting agendas, as conventional mythology holds" (10).

Yet Harding was able to reach beyond the oppositional critiques of masculinist discourses and technology led by, for example, Judith Butler or Donna Haraway.<sup>20</sup> The critical framework for her "feminist standpoint epistemology" does not attempt to overcome the social location of women's lives. Rather, Harding accepts and values that very situation as productive of a different yet broadly binding form of knowledge, what she calls "strong objectivity": "A feminist standpoint epistemology requires strengthened standards of objectivity. . . . They call for the acknowledgment that all human beliefs—including our best scientific beliefs—are socially situated, but they also require a critical evaluation to determine which social situations tend to generate the most objective knowledge claims. They require, as judgmental relativism does not, a scientific account of the relationships between historically located belief and maxi-

mally objective belief. So they demand what I shall call *strong objectivity* in contrast to the weak objectivity of objectivism and its mirror-like twin, judgmental relativism” (142). Feminist standpoint theorists such as Harding then shared with others this view of knowledge as a process engaged with historical location, experience, and error as we move toward a “maximally objective belief.” In his 1997 *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, Mohanty thus employed this revised model of objectivity. Presenting a cultural materialist approach influenced by Marxism,<sup>21</sup> in that book he foregrounds the *social facts* that comprise one’s world to develop a more thorough account of identity in the pursuit of social justice, a theory of knowledge Mohanty introduces as “postpositivist realism.”

By the end of the decade, dissatisfied with the theoretical positions available to understand minority literatures and serve political action, and inspired by these progressive theorists, some forward-looking minority intellectuals began to flesh out the realist approach to knowledge, identity, and experience. Drawing on the philosophy of science and the works of Charles Sanders Peirce, W. V. O. Quine, Hilary Putnam, and Donald Davidson, realism acknowledges that identities, for example, are socially constructed, but also claims that we can nonetheless evaluate various identity constructions according to their comparative ability to interpret our experiences, thereby producing reliable knowledge of the world. Many scholars and community organizers became drawn to realism as a theoretical position because it values experience and identity as legitimate social and philosophical issues at home and in anticolonial studies of culture and literature. In 2000, an interdisciplinary group of scholars produced a collection of essays entitled *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism* (edited by Paula Moya and Michael Hames-García) where they elaborate the realist approach to identity and experience in readings of minority and postcolonial literatures and cultures.

In *Reclaiming Identity*, scholars working within a realist framework offer a richly detailed view of knowledge because they redefine objectivity not as an absolute from which inquiry must depart, but rather as an ideal toward which it attempts to move. Recognizing the constructivist claim that our views of literature or the world are unavoidably mediated, realists counteract positivism so that mediation itself undergoes scrutiny as scholars work to evaluate and identify harmful ideology, while acknowledging useful forms of mediation. Realist theorists thus argue that the situatedness of inquiry not only cannot be avoided but also *should* not be avoided—some theoretical dependence might even serve our inquiries.

Michael Hames-García presents this realist notion of *fallibility* in seeking knowledge: “In contrast to the foundationalist approach, postpositivist realism puts us in the world with nothing but our theories to make sense of things. There is thus an element of contingency and uncertainty in a postpositivist realist approach. However, unlike the conceptual-scheme relativism that characterizes some other reactions to positivism, postpositivist realism considers a theory-independent reality to exist and assumes that our theories of the (social) world can help us to understand it and are, to some extent, dependent on it” (2000, 108). A realist theory of knowledge thus holds that social identities, for example, function like theories, processing data as they appear, and, like theories, they are capable of producing normative knowledge of the world. Built on our experiences, our identities are clearly constructed, but the fact that they are theory mediated is not peculiar to identities; in fact, all inquiry—scientific and otherwise—proceeds with inherent historical and social attachments. In this study, then, the theoretical position I draw on relies on this more attainable notion of *theory-mediated objectivity*, in which a value-free social location or a pure subject is no longer a theoretical goal. We now know of its impossibility. Instead, as these realists show, a more reasonable form of objectivity can be pursued by revising the binary of certainty versus uncertainty. Realists account for error—for we do make mistakes and learn from them—by building error into our dialectical inquiries: error converses with objectivity as we move closer to a better understanding of the world.

Realists provide a theoretical trade language for a genuine anticolonial criticism that scholars in American Indian studies might be seeking, especially because this position asserts that international diplomacy and social justice are not goals for which only the colonized or oppressed must work. In her 2002 study, *Learning from Experience*, Paula Moya explains this realist implication that political awareness supports our collective knowledge production: “Realists contend humans’ subjective and evaluative judgments are neither fundamentally ‘arbitrary’ nor merely ‘conventional.’ Rather, they are based on structures of belief that can be justified (or not) with reference to their own and others’ well-being. These judgments and beliefs, thus, have the potential to contribute to objective knowledge about the world” (2002, 16). In American Indian studies, the theoretical availability of either essentialist or trickster conceptions of Native knowledge has kept Indigenous scholars working within a binary leading to cultural ossification or political apathy. Until recently, there

have been few convincing philosophical alternatives to these two opposed theoretical positions. As a practical approach to philosophical issues regarding knowledge, culture, identity, and experience, realism holds that such concepts can be constructed but nonetheless capable of producing stable accounts of the world. Identities can be politically and epistemically significant and still not essentialist. The realist model of objectivity thus might provide us with an opportunity to explain in Western philosophical terms the process of knowledge gathering practiced among North American Indigenous peoples. In other words, I find realism a helpful means of articulating and sharing a tribal epistemology. Elaborating this theory to accommodate Indian experience, I develop tribal realism in the following chapters.

### The Red Power Novel

Such a theoretical position might help to explain the political emergence of a new tribal national consciousness in Red Power. Writing during this period, N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, and Leslie Marmon Silko adopt what I see as a tribal realist approach to identity, experience, and politics in their novels: the protagonists cannot recover their lands, their pasts, and their lives until they reconnect with the elders, healers, and other members of their communities. In so doing, they undergo a process of remembering and reinterpreting experiences of colonialism and related feelings of self-hatred. Upon achieving a more enabling picture of themselves in the Indian world, they are transformed. American Indians writing during the Indian movement, and those influenced by it, understand the crucial place of tribal knowledge, identity, and experience in the decolonization of Indigenous peoples. Such authors respect the role of identity in explaining the rich realities of Native life—both the everyday stress of colonialist subjugation and the affirmation of Indian stories that engender cultural growth. Red Power writers situate American Indian identity as a concept central to forging knowledge of ancestral lifeways and homelands. In recognizing that the recovery of Native knowledge entails a complex process of interpretation, these authors elucidate just how American Indian people can awaken politically, reclaim a history, and build a community.

This book studies the outpouring of fiction produced during and inspired by Red Power. A full year prior to the 1969 occupation of Alcatraz, Momaday prophetically anticipated this era with *House Made of Dawn*, in

which Indians gather under the stars on a mountain above Los Angeles to drum and sing and imagine a new life. From the spray paintings on the walls of Alcatraz to the revolution-inciting folk music of Buffy Saint-Marie, American Indians sought through art a vision of cultural renewal. With its narrative scope and character development, the novel was especially equipped to support this emerging consciousness in Native America. The young and nameless narrator of Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, for example, comes home to heal his wounded knee, a reference to the 1973 defense of the Wounded Knee battleground of the Great Sioux Nation. To express their political and cultural hopes, Indigenous writers opened the European novel, breathed into it an Indian voice, and created not a literary form caught between cultures, but the Red Power novel.

Some critics of Native literature are often curious about the great attraction of American Indian writers to the novel as the chosen form for their creative work, while others have come to question how these writers can implement a nontribal form to represent an authentic Native voice. Of course, this concern regarding the question of authenticity reveals a general desire within the dominant European American culture that Native peoples remain unchanged. I am thus grateful to those theorists who, in studies of the postcolonial novel, have quelled the demand for purity in Indigenous cultures.<sup>22</sup> Critics often study the Native novel as a type of *bildungsroman*. According to M. H. Abrams, "the subject of these [bildungsroman] novels is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, as he passes from childhood through varied experiences—and usually through a spiritual crisis—into maturity and the recognition of his identity and role in the world" (1971, 113). Any reader of the Red Power novel will recognize in these "novels of formation" that protagonists do invariably face some sort of challenge and experience a spiritual crisis, and, upon its resolution, they better understand themselves and the world. In *Winter in the Blood*, a young and nameless Blackfeet man wanders home, where he investigates his familial and tribal history and discovers his own place in these. Noticing the resemblance of these Red Power narratives to the European "novel of education," critics like Alan Velie and Shamoon Zamir declare that they have discovered the origin of the Native novel, when they overlay European forms on American Indian narratives to show how Indigenous writers imitate the genre.

We might, however, be wary of Eurocentric premises concerning the source of non-Western cultural practices.<sup>23</sup> We must ask why critics as-

sume that American Indians are incapable of inventing and preserving their own literary genres or that their art must be made more sophisticated by borrowing from the colonial culture. I offer a different explanation for the rise of the Red Power novel: in times of crisis, Indigenous people draw on traditional tribal narratives of quest, feat, return, and regeneration. Such Culture Hero stories are ushered out when flood, famine, or war threaten to destroy the people's ways of life. Cherokee people possess story cycles of a young person who, instructed by elders to wander from his troubled community, quests to retrieve new knowledge to solve the crisis and thus remake the world. Susan Scarsberry-García explains how Momaday's novel draws on such life-giving narratives: "Navajo story patterns reveal a hero or heroes (or occasionally heroines as in *Mountain-way* or *Beautyway*), often 'outsiders' from birth, forced by circumstances to leave home and combat numerous terrifying obstacles that confront them for reasons unknown. After undergoing a symbolic death experience and being reborn through the aid of the Holy People or spirit helpers, the heroes return home to their people to teach the healing ceremonial that remade them" (1990, 8–19). We might better understand the Red Power novel by recognizing that the era's writers explored these Indigenous stories of trial and renewal not only in the novel but also in poetry. Writing during this period, Simon Ortiz tells of his personal, as well as collective, journey to knowledge and rebirth in *Going for the Rain* (1992 [1976]). During desperate times of drought, a person from the pueblo is sent to bring back the rain. Ortiz sees his people facing a similar crisis, only now it is a cultural drought, enforced by a colonialist nation, that threatens to dry up the Indian way of life. Ortiz begins with an old Acoma song:

Let us go again, brother; let us go for the shiwana.  
 Let us make our prayer songs.  
 We will go now. Now we are going.  
 We will bring back the shiwana.  
 They are coming now. Now, they are coming.  
 It is flowing. The plants are growing.  
 Let us go again, brother; let us go for the shiwana. (37)

In at least two significant ways, the Red Power novel tends to differ from the American novel; both ways concern the implementation of Indigenous storytelling practices. First, while the American novel tends to

celebrate leaving home to develop one's character, the Native novel often relies on the opposite movement. In the Red Power novel, American Indians have already left home, and their stories begin on their return, a return that marks the actual growth and the collective moment of cultural regeneration. William Bevis even argues that underlying the American novel is a U.S. tradition of escaping family and "lighting out for the territories," an ethic he claims is fueled by the frontier myth of manifest destiny and westward expansion.<sup>24</sup> Whether it is *Huckleberry Finn* or *The Great Gatsby*, the American novel is a special kind of bildungsroman that often bolsters the building of empire, claims Bevis. He explains this distinction: "The Bildungsroman, or story of a young man's personal growth, became in America, especially, the story of a young man or woman leaving home for better opportunities in a newer land" (1987, 581). Most novels written during Red Power, however, exude a yearning to return to the homeland from which protagonists have become estranged. All three central Native novels in this study present young American Indians coming home to their communities after battling with the imperialist world beyond. Their recovery and healing can take place only at home, through a process of self-reflection and reinterpretation of their past and present relationships, among trustworthy members of the tribal community. In fact, according to Bevis, "homing" in the Native novel demonstrates an Indigenous moral value: "In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place, a past where one has been before, is not only the primary story, it is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good" (582).

When American Indians return with their discoveries, they must present this new knowledge to members of the tribal community. Novels responding to Red Power also tend to differ from the American novel in this important respect. As Native storytelling is an intrinsically collective practice, so are the travels of the protagonists interpreted collectively, in the presence of elders, healers, and other listeners. According to Lawrence Evers, tribal peoples practice storytelling to reintegrate the individual with the community and the people with the land: "Through the emergence journey, a collective imaginative endeavor, the Navajos determined who and what they were in relation to the land" (1985a, 212). So many travelers in American novels set out to fulfill an expressly individual quest; their experiences and insights are rarely shared. In the Indian novel, however, those who return from their journeys must offer their new knowledge

of a strange world to those who have remained. These travelers are then cleansed and reintegrated. In *Ceremony*, Tayo must tell the medicine person Ku'oosh all he has learned so that Ku'oosh can protect not only Tayo but also the entire community.

Among American Indian people, personal growth is closely tied to the growth of one's tribal community. For this reason, the confused Tayo must reintegrate with his tribal community if he and his community are to awaken politically and decolonize. Returning to the community and continuing to reinterpret his experiences, this wounded and isolated individual ridden with personal guilt is transformed into a moral leader of his people. The community, in turn, devises new ways of contending with colonial loss by reinterpreting its experiences of oppression. In *Ceremony*, as in other Red Power writing, healing and strengthening Indigenous cultural knowledge involves building a community for its production through ongoing emotional and cognitive work. The Red Power novel thus explores how we can decolonize our nations by growing politically and culturally in a process that values the continuity of identity and experience in the production of normative knowledge.

To some extent, the terms we use as scholars cannot help but affect the reception of our ideas, especially over time. While the term "Indian" is an arbitrary term recklessly applied to hundreds of distinct Indigenous peoples when errant Europeans invaded North America, the history of the term "American" is even more interesting. In later accounts of European invasions of the New World, explorers came to call the original inhabitants of the "Americas" "Americans." Inventing the myth of the Vanishing American destined to disappear in the march to civilization, while dispossessing tribal people of lands and resources, by the close of the nineteenth century Europeans finally came to be called the Americans. Today, if we refer to Indigenous people as "First Americans" or "Native Americans," Native peoples appear to be not Indigenous but an immigrated group. In this work, then, I identify a specific tribal people whenever possible, using the name they publicly call themselves, in order not to generalize across often extreme differences.<sup>25</sup> Of course, tribal people do share a land and a history, and certainly a history of conquest. Long before Europeans arrived, Native peoples were traveling the continent, trading goods as well as ideas. For this reason, I also use the terms "Indigenous," "Native," "American Indian," "Indian," and "tribal" interchangeably. With the same caution, I use the terms "European American," "North Ameri-

can,” “white American” and “Western” interchangeably. Finally, to abbreviate the United States of America, I use the term “United States” to account for our shared place in this American hemisphere.

This study begins with land, in part 1: “Red Land.” In chapter 1, I consider various views of the Indian relationship to homelands. I then provide an alternative approach to “embodying lands,” through what I call “somatic place,” in a reading of N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* (1968). The title of this novel refers to a Navajo healing ceremony meant to reintegrate tribal members as dwellers in the land. Momaday’s protagonist, Abel, home from World War II and distanced from his land, cannot recover his tie to homeland until he comes to terms with his own bodily sense of self. Through a process that accommodates the recovery of physical, social, and cultural wellness, Abel reattaches himself to his Native land and puts to rest his inchoate experiences of colonialism.

The second chapter extends this theory of American Indian cultural growth from the individual to the Native community, moving from a consideration of the land to a discussion of tribal historical identifications with land. I begin with an examination in American Indian studies of theories of selfhood, which I find impoverished to account for the ongoing decolonization of Native communities. In a reading of James Welch’s *Winter in the Blood* (1974), I present an alternative view of Indigenous “historical identity” to explore how a young Blackfeet man experiences a political awakening and, by “placing the ancestors,” recovers his masculinity and cultural identity. Through a process of remembering and reinterpreting colonial experiences of displacement and cultural destruction, Welch’s narrator finally grows closer to a land and history from which he has been painfully distanced.

From the ground of part 1, in part 2: “Red Power” I engage the political struggles that grow from and protect Native lands. Chapter 3 opens with a critical assessment of skeptical strains in Native theory, which often undervalue Indian experience. In a discussion of the variety of tribal experiences, I show how American Indian experience, though mediated, can be nonetheless reliable. I explore how a clearly theory-dependent form of personal experience, the emotions, not only can provide knowledge of the tribal social world, but indeed is fundamental to the political awakening and cultural growth that drive anticolonial efforts. In a reading of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony* (1977), I illustrate how insights gleaned from personal as well as religious experience can produce knowledge of the world that all of us can use, in a process that aids human consciousness.

In “learning to feel,” the protagonist Tayo recovers from a war that has damaged his ability to experience the world as a spiritually gifted Laguna man.

The fourth chapter addresses a growing awareness that American Indian cultural and literary theory should be accountable to material social concerns and movements for anticolonial resistance. The chapter begins with a critical analysis of the tradition of historically grounded Native political thought that led to the Red Power movement. So doing, I ask scholars to respond to the political urgency in Native studies by historicizing their work, by “hearing the callout” of subjugated Indians such as Native prisoners. In an analysis of written statements made by the imprisoned Indigenous men I worked with at Auburn prison in western New York, I theorize the place of the oral tradition in political resistance to show how the interaction between prison work and scholarship can be a form of intervention, in an explanation of praxis in Indian studies.

My concluding chapter extends some of the tribal realist claims of the preceding chapters to offer a social vision of Indian Country in the years ahead. In response to the increased cultural interaction in urban and off-reservation communities, contemporary tribal writers have begun to explore in the novel a more expansive account of the social world in Indian Country. In a cluster of readings from more recent Native literature—Sherman Alexie’s *Reservation Blues* (1995); Betty Louise Bell’s *Faces in the Moon* (1994); Robert Conley’s *War Woman* (1997); Janet Campbell Hale’s *Jailing of Cecelia Capture* (1985); Irvin Morris’s *From the Glittering World* (2000); Greg Sarris’s *Watermelon Nights* (1998); Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991); Gerald Vizenor’s *Bearheart* (1978); James Welch’s *Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000); Craig Womack’s *Drowning in Fire* (2001); and Ray Young Bear’s *Remnants of the First Earth* (1996)—I consider how the social categories of class, gender, and sexuality complicate and enrich our vision of Indian lives. This final chapter argues for a more comprehensive account of tribal social experience as a goal of normative cultural knowledge.

The title of this book came to me while sitting for hours in the mid-summer sun of Oklahoma. From our clan arbor, I looked out on the ceremonial grounds and suddenly realized that tribal knowledge grows from the land and the people, and the people meet to renew this relationship. In the dances, the songs, the fire, the medicine, tribal knowledge changes yet endures. I approach the history, culture, and writing of the Indian movement with the above issues and inspirations in mind. I believe literature

can represent reality, and, so doing, gives us a place in which to imagine what kind of social vision it would take for Indian Country to flourish. Though I offer here my own best attempt to organize a Native view of knowledge to support that vision, such work must be not an individual but rather a collective process. So I ask other scholars, students, and community organizers in Native America and beyond to challenge each other and work together to build from the ground up a theory of intellectual and national liberation. From this exploration of the Red Power novel, I hope to craft and share a few practical tools to serve and defend American Indian life and art.