

“Confusion of Mind”: Colonial and Post-Colonial Discourses about Frontier Encounters

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An interpretation of frontier texts must respond to the demand by Gesa Mackenthun and other scholars that “empire be added to the study of American culture.” As written by authors like Frederick Jackson Turner, who placed themselves on the colonizing side of the frontier, these texts described the frontier as “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” where European immigrants became “Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race.” Here was forged a “composite nationality for the American people.” Such texts with their understanding of the “Indian frontier” as a “consolidating agent in our history” which developed “the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman,” helped to construct the American identity as the “imperial self” with its implicitly patriarchal, Eurocentric, and colonial assumptions. Describing the frontier as a “military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression,” such texts failed to acknowledge the aggressive acts that seized the land from its original inhabitants.¹

Yet other frontier texts, produced by those who placed themselves in the middle ground between cultures or wrote from the other side of the frontier, can be seen as “post-colonial” in their critical analysis of the “democracy born of free land, strong in selfishness and individualism” which engulfed the North American continent. Imaginative acts of

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¹ Gesa Mackenthun, “Adding Empire to the Study of American Culture,” *Journal of American Studies*, 30 (1996) 263–69, 263–64; Peter Hulme, “Including America,” *Ariel*, 26 (1995), 117–23, as quoted in Mackenthun, 265, 266, 268; Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” American Historical Association, *Annual Report, 1894* (Washington, D.C., 1894), 199–227; repr. in Allen F. Davis and Harold D. Woodman, *Conflict or Consensus in American History* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1966), 421–41, 422, 423, 433, 438, 429; Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self: An Essay in American Literary and Cultural History* (New York: Knopf, 1971).

boundary-crossing can expose the patriarchal and white supremacist constructions of the “Imperial self” embodied in the frontier myth of rugged frontiersman articulated by Turner and other authors. The awareness of other cultural arrangements might elicit questions about the naturalness of “civilized” gender roles and assumptions of racial or cultural hierarchies. Frontier experiences provided empirical and theoretical support for unconventional answers to the “Indian” or, indeed, the “woman” questions. In place of Turner’s insistence on the evolutionary necessity that “primitive Indian life” must disappear before an advancing “civilization,” some frontier authors might valorize so-called primitive cultures and criticize those called civilized. By providing sites of imaginative resistance to Turnerian depictions of the frontier as the crucible of democracy and the birthplace of the quintessential American, some frontier texts provide a more complex and fluid notion of American identity as shaped by a national experience that was “post colonial and colonizing at the same time.”²

Alice Cunningham Fletcher, who journeyed west in 1881 to study the woman question, understood the frontier as a place where cultures met and where the indigenous, albeit reluctantly, became “citizens.” The rapidly changing environment “brought confusion of mind” because the “beliefs of the fathers no longer applied to the conditions which confronted the people” as “all that they formerly had relied on as stable had been swept away.”³ Fletcher referred to the experience of indigenous peoples like the Omaha and the Lakota, but the same confusion could be found in her writings about frontier encounters. Fletcher’s confusion was manifested in a series of shifts between discursive frameworks, a pattern that also shaped the texts authored by her successors. Watching as the “disintegrating forces of civilization entered the wilderness,” some frontier authors found it impossible to impose a unitary discursive order upon disorderly experiences which confounded rigid notions of culture and human relationships. Whether writing within a predominantly reformist, feminist, romantic, scientific, or exoticist discourse, authors

² Turner, “Significance of the Frontier,” 438, 428; Mackenthun, “Adding Empire to the Study of American Culture,” 264; See also, Arnold Krupat, *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

³ Alice C. Fletcher, “Foreword,” Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992, repr. of 1911 edition), 29; For a fuller description of Fletcher’s activities, see Dolores Janiewski, “Giving Women a Future: Alice Fletcher, the ‘Women Question,’ and ‘Indian Reform,’” in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebeck, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 325–44.

wrote in a discursive polyglot as they translated the complex interactions between frontier peoples into words and images.

Accepting Fletcher as a substitute for a recently deceased mother, Francis La Flesche, the son of an Omaha chief, created a niche for himself as a scholar studying the cultures he had left behind on the frontier. Living together in Washington, D.C., Fletcher and La Flesche confounded conventional views of gender, race, and kinship. E. Jane Gay, who accompanied Fletcher to allot the lands of the Nez Perce, wrote about her own “confusion of spirit” as she contemplated the likely consequences of the allotment process. Franz Boas, one of Fletcher’s younger colleagues, a refugee from European anti-Semitism, unsettled fixed notions of racial and cultural superiority through his exploration of Native American cultures. Margaret Mead, Boas’s most famous student, distastefully examined “the sorrows of a fading culture” as she studied the Omaha in a field trip in 1930, half a century after Fletcher’s initial visit to Nebraska. Mead’s indigenous contemporaries, Archie Phinney and Mourning Dove, wrote about the peoples of the frontier from Nez Perce and Colville perspectives. Accepting but also subverting the notions of the “savage” and the “civilized,” these authors contributed to the emergence of a post-colonialist discourse that valorized what had been denigrated as savage and criticized that which had been celebrated as civilized.⁴

Sometimes Fletcher wrote within a reformist or assimilationist discourse which advocated the disappearance of the “Indian” into the citizenry by turning Native American men into yeoman farmers and women into housewives. Counterpoising civilization against savagery, the speakers of the reformist tongue targeted “primitive” forms of gender and class relationships as the “object of its reforming zeal.” Fletcher, a prominent participant at reformist gatherings in the 1880s and 1890s, spoke the reformist tongue with a specifically maternal inflection of her own as she proposed to make the Indian “manly” by teaching him “the power which has made the white race the dominant people,” the power of “new and higher wants.” After contributing to the passage of a land allotment act for the Omaha in 1883 and a general act in 1887, popularly called the Dawes Act, Fletcher rejoiced at the ‘voluntary burial of the

⁴ Lawrence C. Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of Indian Policy Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983); Margaret Mead, *Letters from the Field: 1925–1975* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 95, 96; Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 8–9; Jay Miller, “Introduction to the Bison Book Edition,” Mourning Dove, *Coyote Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), v; Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 9.

tribal past” that would allow people “to enter into the new life of civilization.” She expressed delight that men “I feared would live and die Indians” were “now pushing out into better modes of living and thinking.” Fletcher praised the allotment legislation for bestowing “land, law, citizenship and manhood.” Although she sympathized with “the Indian” forced “to be recreated mentally,” she insisted that sentimental regrets could not “stop the rush that is engulfing the Indians.” Instead, reformers must try to “save hundreds of struggling individuals” by teaching them how to pass through “the childhood period, the adolescent period and the mature period,” that is, to make the transition from barbarism to civilization.⁵ Employed as an allotment agent to implement the legislation among the Omaha, the Winnebago, and the Nez Perce, Fletcher implemented the reformist laws she had helped to enact.

When Fletcher spoke to suffragists, however, she shifted from a reformist to a feminist discourse in which the plight of Indian woman was foregrounded. Lending support to a feminist interpretation of a matriarchal golden age, Fletcher questioned the notion of progress accepted by reformers. At the 1888 International Council of Women, Fletcher described the deterioration of women’s status as the Omaha became subject to United States law. According to Fletcher, an Omaha woman had said, “As an Indian woman I was free. I owned my home, my person, the work of my hands; and my children could never forget me. I was better as an Indian woman than under white law.” A prominent suffragist commented that Fletcher had shown that Native American law was “more just” than “the family laws of the white men for women.”⁶ Speaking to a sympathetic audience, Fletcher criticized a patriarchal civilization whose expansion she actively facilitated in her roles as reformist, lobbyist, and allotment agent to the Omaha, the Winnebago, and the Nez Perce.

⁵ Bill Ashcroft et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 3; See Francis Paul Prucha, ed., *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian,” 1880–1900* (Lincoln: Bison, 1978) for a fuller discussion of the reformers’ views; *Woman’s Journal*, 11 Feb. 1882; Alice C. Fletcher, “Tribal Life among the Omahas: Personal Stories of Indian Life,” *Century Magazine*, n.s., 29 (1896), 450–61; Alice C. Fletcher to J. E. Rhoads, President, Indian Rights Association, 7 April 1887, in Alice C. Fletcher–Francis La Flesche papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C. hereafter Fletcher/NAA; Alice Fletcher to Sara Kinney, *The Indian’s Friend*, Fletcher/NAA; Lake Mohonk conference, Proceedings of the *Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian* (1900).

⁶ Alice C. Fletcher to Lucian Cass, Peabody Museum, Cambridge, Mass., 3 Aug. 1881, Peabody Museum papers, Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; hereafter Peabody/HU; *Women’s Tribune*, 31 Mar. 1888.

Returning to Washington from her activities as an allotment agent, Fletcher criticized the Dawes Act from the feminist perspective she suppressed during her work. “Three years ago I thought that it was sufficient that the Indian woman should be united to her husband in property matters... [Now] I think it would be much better for the wife to be independent in a property point, of the husband. She would fare better and her children would fare better.” Such comments had elicited negative responses from more conventional reformers who told her that it was “quite enough to give the Indian woman what the white women have.” But feminist doubts made her question reformist assurances. She successfully lobbied for a revision of the act to grant women land in their own names as she insisted that “they are as truly heirs to the tribal heritage as the men.” Fletcher obtained for Native American women a recognition of their property rights which often eluded white women.⁷

Fletcher’s companion, E. Jane Gay, wrote a gender-sensitive critique of the reform project during their annual journeys to allot Nez Perce lands that began in 1889 while occasionally attempting to report events from a Nez Perce perspective. When Fletcher told the Nez Perce that she had brought them “manhood” along with individual titles to land, Gay imagined the perplexity of the men who listened to Fletcher’s reformist declarations. “They could scarcely be blamed for their incredulity that reasonable human beings thought worthy of having citizenship thrust upon them should have no say whatever in matters which so exclusively concerned themselves.” The anomalous position of a feminist occupying the position of the Great Father to impose citizenship, patriarchal authority, and private property upon men, who resisted the gift of manhood, provided scope for Gay’s comic talents even as doubt or tragedy sometimes darkened the tone of her commentary. Calling her friend “Her Majesty” for a fancied resemblance to Queen Victoria, Gay alternatively supported and criticized the power embodied by Fletcher that was imposing a new civilization upon the Nez Perce.⁸

Observing women’s lot among the white settlers, Gay contrasted the

⁷ US House of Representatives, 50th Congress, 2nd Session, Executive Documents, “18th Annual Conference with Representatives of Missionary Boards and Indian Rights Association,” 17 Jan. 1889, 840; Alice C. Fletcher to E. Whittlesey, 30 Oct. 1889, Fletcher/NAA; Alice C. Fletcher to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 4 Apr. 1889, Special Cases, Bureau of Indian Affairs Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; hereafter RG75/DC.

⁸ E. Jane Gay to Jean, 26 July 1889, E. Jane Gay to Captain P. (Richard H. Pratt) 29 June 1889, in E. Jane Gay, “Coup-nit-ki, With the Nez Perces,” unpublished manuscript, in Jane Gay Dodge papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.

“hopelessness upon the faces of the women” and the “lonesome life they led” with the freedoms enjoyed by Nez Perce women. Invoking the notion of Indian matriarchy that had been enthusiastically embraced by women’s rights advocates, Gay wrote, “The Indian woman can take down the tent, if she so pleases and depart with all her property, leaving the man to sit helpless upon the ground for her husband is only a guest in the lodge of the wife.” Drawing a pointed moral, she added, “Civilization has been built up largely upon the altruism of the woman, at the cost of her independence, and it is still an expensive luxury to her.” Observing the funeral of a woman “buried as white people are,” Gay wondered, “Were the white people’s ways better for the Indian than his own?” The “unmoved faces of the women” provided no clues to rescue her from perplexity.⁹ Neither the housebound pioneer woman nor the liberated, mobile Nez Perce woman, Gay criticized aspects of colonial discourse at the same time as she contributed to an enterprise that was undermining the freedom of women on the other side of the frontier.

Alternating between positions on both sides of the frontier, Gay described Fletcher as dealing with a set of “refractory sick children” who “*must* take the medicine that is best for them.” Her tone changed as she contemplated “the suffering which will follow this sort of opening up of the reservation” due to the “encroaching white man’s civilization.” Beside her sat a placid Fletcher “calmly writing” while Gay was “whirled by the endless revolution into confusion of spirit with no power to listen below the noise of the mechanism.” Occupying the feminine position in relation to her masculinized companion, Gay invented humorous arguments between a manly Photographer and a feminine Cook to epitomize her divided consciousness. Expressing respect for an “unsubjugated” Chief Joseph “who still stood firmly for his rights,” she simultaneously derided “old chiefs” who clung to their traditions even as she both mocked and endorsed Fletcher’s intentions. Aware of the issue of rights as it affected white women and Indian chiefs, Gay despaired at seeing “wrongs” for which there were only “*theoretical*” solutions “evolved in the brain of good, helpless people whose pure souls could never conceive of the extent of the evils.” As she left the reservation for the last time, she consigned her doubts about the success of their mission to the ranks of the “unsolvable” questions.¹⁰

⁹ E. Jane Gay to “E,” 15 July 1889, Kamiah, in Gay, “Choup-nit-ki, repr. in E. Jane Gay, *With the Nez Percés: Alice Fletcher in the Field, 1899–92*, eds. Frederick E. Hoxie and Joan T. Mark (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981), 108.

¹⁰ E. Jane Gay to “E,” 15 July 1889, Kamiah, in Gay, “Choup-nit-ki; E. Jane Gay to “B,” 11 May 1890, in Gay, *ibid.*; E. Jane Gay, “Letter Twenty-One,” Lapwai, 30 May 1891, in Gay, *ibid.*; Gay, *With the Nez Percés*, 90, 129–169.

Gay’s reformist and feminist “selves” continued their textual debate in a final testament to a contradictory journey into the “open free land of breath and sun” which would result in the land being “entered” by the “white man” armed with axe, plow, and pistols. Writing in 1904 at her new home in England, she noted that she continued to see “double pictures” as she assessed results of a four-year expedition to the Nez Perce. There was now no possibility of returning to the past. “Our old grazing grounds are tormented by harrow and spade” and the “unbroken peace of nature” was no more. Then, concluding that “pessimism” had no rights in “a moving world,” she concluded on a positive note. “With tribal bonds broken away and the individual man standing, more and more responsible for his own future, we may hopefully leave our Indian friends to work out their own salvation.” Accompanied by carefully posed pictures of an apron-clad “Cook” and a cross-dressed female identified as the “Photographer,” Gay’s double-voiced conclusion was an entirely appropriate accompaniment to the letters and the photographs enclosed in leather bindings.¹¹

In addition to her reformist and feminist commentary, Fletcher’s writings about the frontier also imparted a sense of romance and adventure. A personal sense of engagement with the peoples that she encounter would be consummated in her adoption of Francis La Flesche as her son. A retrospective account of her initial “journey into Indian country” described the “sense of loneliness” which “began to oppress me” as she rode across the desolate plains of Nebraska. “A sound fell upon my ear – a strange sound but with a human tone in it.” Shaw saw “an Indian on horseback.” Instantly she was struck by “the absence of all concern with time, of all knowledge of the teeming life out of which I had come, and which was even now surging toward him.” It was a moment of personal revelation. “I had crossed the line, another race had welcomed me with a song.” In another memoir she spoke about the same encounter. “Two races confronted each other and mine preeminently guilty.” Fletcher had found her life’s purpose which she embraced with the emotional fervor of a conversion experience. Referring to the Indian as a single individual rather than a race of people, she wrote about the relationship that began in 1881. “I have gone back with him into the distant past, have shared with him the changing present, have tried to forecast his future, have alternately hoped and despaired with him,

¹¹ Alice C. Fletcher, “The Indian Woman and Her Problem,” *Southern Workman*, 28 (1899), 172–76, 176; E. J. Gay, “At Home,” Hampstead, London, Jan. 1904, in Gay, *With the Nez Percés*, 172–74.

pressed always by the desire which is sure to arise in those who succeed in catching a glimpse of his real character – the intense desire to ‘do something’ for his betterment; his protection, if you will.” Mingling emotional intimacy with scholarly companionship, Fletcher’s relationship with her “heavy, hearty, twice-married ‘boy’” created an enduring bond about which her contemporaries would speculate because of its sentimentality and its intensity.¹²

Not content with her textual representation as a reformer, feminist, and romantic adventurer, Fletcher began to express herself as a scientist on the strength of her first encounters with the Omaha, the Ponca, and the Lakota. Writing to her mentor, Frederick Putnam at the Peabody Museum, Fletcher revelled in her newly acquired insider’s knowledge. In a letter to the man who had initiated her into ethnographic study at Harvard, she dared to criticize the so-called experts. She now found it “strange to read the books that have been written about the people. The white man sees only himself. I have taken much pains to get at the Indian sense of property and family relation and have sometimes succeeded in twisting around to the Indian view.” Assuming a suitably scholarly tone, she told Putnam’s assistant, “It is certainly a mistake to measure a race solely by the standard of Anglo-Saxon or Modern Western European types.”¹³ Without directly acknowledging the discrepancy between her reform activities intended to create indigenous replicas of the “white man” and her scientific critique of white male narcissism, Fletcher claimed scientific authority for her method of combining empathy and scientific objectivity. Fletcher increasingly donned the mantle of the scientific expert as she gained an audience for her scholarly endeavors in the emerging field of anthropology which ultimately culminated in her solution as president of the American Anthropological Association.

Of French, Ponca, and Omaha ancestry, Francis La Flesche confronted the problem of locating himself within a society that required that he choose between being a “savage” Indian or a “civilized” white man. A visit by inspectors to his reservation school presented him with the

¹² Alice C. Fletcher, “Tribal Life among the Omahas,” 450; Alice Fletcher, “Camping with the Sioux,” Fletcher/NAA; Joan Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land: Alice Fletcher and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 221; Fletcher, “Tribal Life among the Omahas,” 461; Martha L. B. Goddard to Herbert Welsh, Indian Rights Association, 2 Aug. 1886, Indian Rights Association papers, microfilm edition, Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, Washington, D.C.

¹³ Alice C. Fletcher to Frederick Putnam, 10 Aug. 1881, Peabody/HU; Alice C. Fletcher to Frederick Putnam, 4 Feb. 1882, Alice C. Fletcher to Jane Smith, 14 Nov. 1881, Peabody/HU.

cultural dilemma that would confront him all his life. Requested to sing an Omaha song by the school inspectors, La Flesche and the other Omaha complied, “We felt, as we sang, the patriotic thrill of a victorious people who had vanquished their enemies.” The visitors reacted disdainfully, “That’s savage, that’s savage. They must be taught music.” Unwilling to accept the denigration of his cultural heritage, La Flesche evolved from aiding white scholars to penetrate Omaha sacred mysteries to becoming the scholar himself. Warning a visiting linguist that it was sacrilegious to sing sacred Omaha songs outside of a ceremonial context, La Flesche admitted the irreverent thought, “I myself would like to know it all.” Gaining permission from his father to transport the Sacred Pole of the Omaha to the Peabody Museum, La Flesche noted that the chief’s death would be attributed to having given his consent for the removal. Despite his own willing complicity in the revelation of Omaha secrets, La Flesche acknowledged the Omaha view that such activities merited punishment. His meticulous ethnography displayed the same care in recording sacred mysteries that Omaha and Osage applied to their ritual enactment. Honouring ancestral traditions through acts that were seen as betrayal, La Flesche displayed the tensions of a man perpetually torn between two incompatible destinies.¹⁴

Le Flesche heard about Fletcher’s first visit to the Omaha from his father, Chief Iron Eye. Fletcher, according to the chief, was “remarkable” because “in thought and expression she is more like a man than a woman.” When La Flesche was appointed to assist Fletcher in carrying out the allotment of the Omaha lands in 1883, they grew closer after illness confined her to bed. Fletcher welcomed La Flesche’s support in the face of the taunts of “the refractory and troublesome element” who claimed that she had been “struck down and kept there by a spell thrown upon her by the ancient charms.” La Flesche began addressing Fletcher as “M” in place of the mother who had died only a month before they began their collaboration. La Flesche’s ill-fated third marriage did not survive the close bond between the two which endured until her death in 1923 despite the speculation about the nature of a relationship between a white mother only fourteen years older than her adopted Omaha son.¹⁵

¹⁴ Francis La Flesche, *The Middle Five: Indian Boys at School* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963, repr. of 1900 edn), 96, 100–01; Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land* 220, 219, 221.

¹⁵ Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*; Francis La Flesche, “Alice Fletcher’s Scientific Work,” in Fletcher/NAA; Robin Ridington, “Introduction” to Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln: University Nebraska Press, 1992), 2;

Fletcher and La Flesche's major ethnographic work, *The Omaha Tribe*, incorporated all the discourses that had previously shaped their writings. Fletcher used her reformist voice to introduce the joint ethnography, "The past is overlaid by a thriving present. The old Omaha men and women sleep peacefully on the hills while their grandchildren farm beside their white neighbours, send their children to school, speak English, and keep bank accounts." Yet, she also spoke as a scientist who respected the beliefs that "underlie the ceremonies and customs of the Omaha tribe." The authors praised traditional gender relations among those who had placed women "on a moral equality" with men in a tone that echoed Fletcher's appreciative retelling of the words of an Omaha woman to the audience at the International Congress of Women. The personal identification with the Omaha implicitly questioned the benefits of reform and governmental policy. The Omaha had become "less strong to resist the inroad and adverse influences which came with his closer contact with the white race." The authors clearly sympathized with the person "slow to change his native point of view of justice and of truth" and sometimes criticized the "new conditions imposed on them by the white race." Despite the assertion of a "thriving present," the careful detailing of the virtues of the past rendered the text riven with contradictions as befitted the work of two authors who simultaneously occupied both sides of the frontier and the ground between.¹⁶

As the *Omaha Tribe* appeared in print, a new generation of anthropologists distanced the discipline of anthropology from the "subjective" perspectives that permeated Fletcher's and La Flesche's work. Franz Boas disparaged Fletcher's work as marred by a sentimental devotion to uplift that prevented her from rigorously pursuing knowledge. Boas boasted of his ability to examine unflinchingly the seamy side of the "primitive" without the urge to sanitize that prevented Fletcher from accurately describing her subjects. University-trained anthropologists proclaimed their field a scientific discipline whose focus was culture rather than the salvation of a dying race. Their "scientific" or "realistic" approach rejected the "impressionism" of the "romantic lover of primitive things." Fletcher's and La Flesche's ethnography, un-

Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 88, 91, 92, 93; A. C. Fletcher to Caroline Dall, 20 Jan. 1884, Caroline Dall papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.; A. C. Fletcher to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 11 Mar. 1884, RG75/DC; Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 151.

¹⁶ Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, *The Omaha Tribe*, 30, 323, 615, 628, 629, 641.

mistakably marked by its personal attachment to reformist enthusiasms, did not meet the requirements of a rigorously “scientific” discourse that rejected amateur, reformer, and romantic approaches to scholarship.¹⁷

Yet the very attempt to claim scientific objectivity was itself notoriously difficult to sustain. In the era haunted by the Great War and influenced by Freudian theory and Einstein’s theory of relativity, intellectual complacency had been shaken by the undermining of the belief in the very rationality to which anthropologists appealed as the source of their authority. Simultaneously gathering sufficient facts to discover the laws of human culture and yet describing himself as a “connoisseur of chaos,” Boas’s substitution of irony for Fletcher’s romantic enthusiasms gave tacit acknowledgement that his project would be prone to internal contradiction. He encouraged his students to foster the development of a scientific anthropology while nursing the suspicion that “the phenomena of our science are so individualized, so exposed to outer accident that no set of laws could explain” them. Sending disciples on quixotic quests to build “a new science” by amassing information about “new, unheard-of, unthought-of ways or organizing human behavior,” Boas advised Margaret Mead and other students that they should “take nothing for granted” even as he instilled in them the desire to claim scholarly expertise and cultural authority.¹⁸

Mead, who believed “that women should keep their own identity and not be submerged,” felt herself liberated from the restraints that had forced Fletcher “to bargain and hedge” for the economic security usually denied a single, self-supporting woman. A product of the sexually liberated feminism that was emerging in cultural enclaves like Greenwich Village, Mead pursued erotic freedom in addition to the political and intellectual freedoms sought by an earlier generation. Aspiring to be “scientific” and to “clear one’s mind of presuppositions,” Mead revealed the difficulties of honouring those principles when she arrived in Samoa to study the “tremendous role played in an individual’s life by the social environment in which each is born and reared.” Disregarding her own warning that the “terms in which others had written about the culture were anything but fresh and uncontaminated,” she presented her study as

¹⁷ Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land* 231, 344, 308; Ridington, “Introduction,” 4–5; Mark, *A Stranger in Her Native Land*, 337–39, 346; Krupat, “Modernism, Irony, Anthropology: The Work of Franz Boas,” in Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 84; Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 808–11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85–86; Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 83, 92, 98; Margaret Mead, *Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years* (New York: Morrow & Co., 1972), 140, 15; 158.

based on a “painstaking investigation” despite reliance upon the work of other scholars to support her claim that Samoa was “an uncomplex, uniform culture.” Studying “only fifty girls in three small neighboring villages,” Mead alchemized a short field trip into a rigorously scientific enterprise that could be used as a scholarly platform to criticize the repressive nature of civilized society. Summoning the power of “scientific” discourse to her aid, Mead displayed the contradictory tendencies of the self-described “connoisseur of chaos” who had sent her to Samoa to study scientifically the adolescent girl in a relatively safe environment that could simultaneously be described as “primitive” and “Americanized.”¹⁹

Concealed within the scientific guise in which Mead wrote about Samoa could be found contradictory discursive strands that undermined its claims to “objectivity.” Seeking evidence to support her criticisms of the “restraints put upon us by our civilization,” Mead substituted the goal of transforming the civilized into the savage for Fletcher’s opposite form of alchemy even as she continued to think in categories like “primitive” and “civilized.” Neurosis offered a dimension along which societies could be ranked that reversed the valorization of the savage and the civilized in Fletcher’s version of colonial discourse. Contrasting sexual tolerance and “free experimentation” in Samoa to a repressive “civilization recognizing only one narrow form of sex activity,” Mead blamed “unsatisfactory marriages,” “impotence,” “frigidity,” and “casual homosexuality and prostitution” upon civilization and its discontents in a pioneering version of post-colonial discourse. Searching for a “new formulation of the relationships between sex, temperament, and culturally expected behavior,” Mead valorized the erotic, the exotic, and the primitive. Enmeshed in an erotic triangle during her field work in New Guinea, Mead sublimated “the intensity of our feelings into better and more perceptive field work.”²⁰ Mead’s ethnographic descriptions mingled an exoticist discourse that celebrated the primitive with a scientific discourse of objectivity and personal desires for erotic freedom.

Returning from Samoa she met the New Zealander, Reo Fortune, who would become her second husband. A shipboard romance turned into a decision that Fortune would be more suitable for “a professional

¹⁹ Ibid., 126, 113, 118, 155, 159, 168; Franz Boas, “Foreword,” Margaret Mead, “Introduction,” *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Society* (New York: Mentor, 1950, repr. of 1928 edn), 12, 17.

²⁰ Mead, *Blackberry Winter*, 155–56, 255; Lake Mohonk Conference, *Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian* (1900), 73; Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa*, 102–03.

partnership of field work” than her first husband. Returning to Columbia to complete her doctoral studies, Mead set up housekeeping with Fortune, who was also completing his anthropological training at Columbia along with Archie Phinney and other aspiring anthropologists who would be nurtured by Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict. Sent by Benedict to do field work among the Omaha to fill out a lacunae in Fletcher’s and La Flesche’s work in 1930, Mead and Fortune found the experience dispiriting and anything but exotic as they confronted the results of the reformist project among the people to whom Fletcher had ministered fifty years earlier. Mead wrote, “My task was to look at the women, and I had the unrewarding task of discussing a long history of mistakes in American policy toward the Indians and of prophesying a still more disastrous fate for them in the future.” Echoing Gay at her most pessimistic, Mead described her summer as “staring disaster in the face every day.” She saw “a culture so shrunk from its earlier style ... that there was very little out of the past that was recognizable and still less in the present that was aesthetically satisfying.” Housed in “ramshackle” cabins that dated from the allotment era, the Omaha “lived on their rents, drove around in battered old cars,” and gambled for “nickels and dimes.” Using a sardonic irony, she added, “They had met anthropologists before whom they had come to regard primarily as a source of revenue.” Nothing substantiated Fletcher’s description of a “thriving present” in Mead’s depiction of a culture “going backward.”²¹

Fletcher’s memory lingered only in an altered version of the tale of cultural retribution that Francis La Flesche had once discovered. Chief La Flesche’s death was remembered as a punishment for his having given “the sacred White Buffalo” to Alice Fletcher. As in the earlier version, the responsibility of the still living Francis La Flesche for the removal of the Sacred Pole had been erased from the oral record. Mead discovered few hopeful aspects except that the Omaha woman had fared better than the man because “it is impossible to strip her life of meaning as completely as the life of the man was stripped.” Obviously analysing the Omaha by categories that privileged the exotic and the primitive – the “strange, unaccountable, and bizarre” and the “aesthetically satisfying” – Mead desired only to escape the banality of a decadent culture whose destruction dated back to the betrayal of sacred mysteries to a white woman who had journeyed west to study the “woman question” five decades earlier.²²

²¹ Mead, *Blackberry Winter*, 220–23.

²² Mead, *Letters from the Field*, 95, 96; Margaret Mead, *The Changing Culture of an Indian Tribe* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 134.

Implicitly contrasting her own respectful appreciation of other cultures to the negative attitudes of her predecessors, Mead continued her quest to interrogate her culture's beliefs about the "differences between the two sexes" by demonstrating the "great variety of ways, often flatly contradictory one to the other, in which the roles of the two sexes have been patterned." Contrasting the "known, the familiar, and the concretely pressing" in contemporary American culture against the "seven South Sea cultures" she had explored in her own exploration of the Pacific frontier, Mead constructed a "provocative analysis of the sexual patterns at work in the United States" from her frontier narratives.²³ Simultaneously writing within feminist, reformist, scientific, exoticist, and romantic discourses with somewhat different emphases than those in texts authored by Alice Fletcher, Mead was the lineal descendant of Alice Fletcher despite her attempts to stress their differences in method, generation, impact, and attitude.

Born in the same decade that Fletcher, La Flesche, and Gay began their mutual enterprise, Hum-Ishu-Ma of Colville, Okanagan, and Nicola descent would make her debut as a writer in the 1920s and 1930s when Mead and Phinney would also make their textual appearance. The distance of several hundred miles that separated the Colville reservation from the Nez Perce did not provide protection from the effects of the same cultural processes Fletcher had helped to precipitate by her reformist and allotment activities. The exiled chief Joseph of the Nez Perce would pass his final days near Hum-Ishu-Ma's birthplace on the same reservation as a tangible symbol of the fate that awaited those who resisted the assimilationist tide. As a young woman intent on creating her own image of the "Indian" in contrast to white-authored representations, Hum-Ishu-Ma assumed the pen-name Morning Dove, the English translation of a character associated with the dawn or new beginnings. Later, perhaps in recognition of the situation of her people, she altered the spelling to Mourning Dove. An aspiring novelist, ethnographer, and opponent of assimilation, Mourning Dove wrote within but also against the discourses that shaped the writings of her predecessors. An amateur ethnographer, like Fletcher and La Flesche, but without their access to patronage, education, and mutual support, Mourning Dove struggled to construct an appropriate form of textual self-expression and collective representation. Encouraged by Lucullus McWhorter, a local businessman, she completed

²³ Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: William Morrow and Co, 1949), repr. (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1968), 38, 39, 37, 36, back jacket copy.

a novel, *Cogewea*. The same mentor, fearing that Salishan culture was disappearing, persuaded her “to perpetuate the story of her people” as a duty to those “whose only history has been written by the destroyers of their race.” Mourning Dove began to collect folktales, and, after her marriage to Fred Galler in 1919, returned to the Colville reservation where she became increasingly involved in reservation politics aimed at reversing the cultural destruction that had flowed from the Dawes Act and assimilationist policies.²⁴

Finally published in 1928 at the same year that *Coming of Age in Samoa*, appeared in print, *Cogewea* features a “half-blood” heroine, a woman torn between the “Indian and white worlds, tradition and change.” The heroine is “own-headed and at times wilful” having “passed through the mill of social refinement” but remaining “whole hearted and a lover of nature.” Cogewea asks her white lover, “What has our race gained by contact with yours? When have you considered our rights – our ideals?” During their long and conflicted courtship, she compares the two races, telling her lover, “Of the two, I prefer the one of the highest honor, the Indian!” Yet romantic illusions lead her to disregard her grandmother’s warnings that white men were “all false to our race.” When she discovers that her white lover has betrayed her, Cogewea returns to her faithful half-blood lover. Written after ten-hour days working in the orchards and fields as a farm laborer, the novel combines Mourning Dove’s knowledge of her people’s history with fictionalized rendering of internal conflicts between her identity as a “woman” and an “Indian” living in a white-dominated world. Her “half-breed” heroine, the literary equivalent of Turner’s depiction of a “mixed race,” occupies the “middle ground” between the “Indian and white worlds” using the words taken from “other people’s mouths” and turning them into her own in a form of autoethnography.²⁵

Following the appearance of her novel, Mourning Dove published *Coyote Stories* in 1933 about a trickster-transformer character, who embodies “all the human traits,” including the “incomplete and the imperfect.” Introduced as tales from the “days of tribal life before our destruction began,” the stories contain “the essence of things that cannot

²⁴ Dexter Fisher, “Introduction” to Mourning Dove; *Cogewea: The Half-Blood, a Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981; repr. of 1972 edn), ix, viii; Jay Miller, “Introduction,” to Mourning Dove, *Coyote Stories* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, repr. of 1933 edn), v–viii.

²⁵ Mourning Dove, *Cogewea*, xviii, 16, 17, 135, 232, 226; Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 19; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.

grow old.” Protecting her people against the form of cultural suicide that came from forgetting their narrative legacy, fulfilled a “duty to her forefathers.” Describing story-tellers as “tribal historians,” she concludes her introduction by acknowledging the “blue-eyed ‘Indian’” McWhorter as a “true friend” of her people. Unsettling the categories of “Indian” and “white” and blurring the distinction between history and folklore, Mourning Dove reconstructs the stories of a trickster Coyote who relies upon the wisdom of five turds living in his intestine to help him get out of difficulties.²⁶ Undoubtedly a potent symbol of those who had nothing but their wits to aim them in the battle against circumstance, the Coyote, like Mourning Dove herself, is an artful survivor.

Mourning Dove used her married name of Christine Galler in her public life while remaining Christine Quintasket to her kinfolk as she acquired names appropriate to her separate identities and activities. She joined with other women to criticize abuses by the Indian Bureau and the local agency against the Colville and the other confederated tribes. In 1930, she participated in the formation of the Colville Indian Association to resolve land claims, protect the tribe against the misuse of funds, and force companies leasing reservation land to meet their commitments. As the only woman attending an intertribal conference held in April 1934 to discuss the legislation intended to reverse the Dawes Act, Christine Galler understood the dangers of her anomalous position. She prefaced her discussion of the merits of the Wheeler–Howard bill by saying, “I am a woman and you might think it funny that the Colvilles elect a woman for a delegate.” Denying that she was “like Emma Goldman or any other woman,” she assured the male delegates that she spoke “as an Indian, my heart is with the Indian.” Defending herself against suspicions that a outspoken woman might be a feminist, she revealed her knowledge of the contaminating discourse which she publicly disavowed. Forced to choose between representing “the Indian” or being disregarded as a “woman,” Galler pronounced herself “the Indian” despite the grammatical convention that masculinized that identity. A year later she became the first woman elected to the Colville Tribal Council as the members of her tribe honoured her with their support just before her untimely death in 1936.²⁷

²⁶ Chief Standing Bear, “Foreword,” Mourning Dove, “Preface,” to Mourning Dove, *Coyote Stories*, 5, 6, 8–9, 10, 12; Miller, “Introduction,” *Coyote Stories*, xvi, xii.

²⁷ Proceedings of the Conference at Chemawa, Oregon, 8 and 9 Apr. 1934, to discuss with the Indians the Wheeler-Howard Act,” William J. Borah papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Fisher, “Introduction,” ix.

Mourning Dove’s autobiography, left unpublished at her death, was intended to refute the accusation that she had not written *Cogewea*. Expressing her pride that “I was born a descendant of the genuine Americans, the Indians,” it also revealed the feminist inclinations publicly disavowed. Like her fictional counterpart, she endowed herself with a white ancestor on the paternal side. Whether literally or only figuratively of hybrid racial ancestry, Mourning Dove conveyed her sense of being “in between” by assigning a “half-breed” status to her father.²⁸ As an inhabitant of a white world, forced to use English in her efforts to communicate, even when she retold her tribal legends, Mourning Dove was a linguistic “half-breed” whatever her antecedents. Simultaneously combining overlapping identities as woman, Indian, scholar, novelist, folklorist, and political activist, and yet often forced to justify her claims to some and deny or suppress others depending upon the context, her use of different names gave recognition to a fluid and evolving self-representation that placed her within but also outside her culture.

Mourning Dove’s autobiography recounts her grandmother’s epic struggle with a grizzly bear. Her maternal grandmother defied gender conventions as she girded herself for battle. “He is a mean animal and I am a mean woman. We will see who is the strongest and conqueror in this battle.” The grandmother, a “guardian spirit” like the fictional grandmother in *Cogewea*, emerged victorious. Modelling herself after her grandmother’s stalwart qualities, Mourning Dove reported that she had acted “more like a boy, a tomboy, who liked to play more with the boys than with the girls.” As she traced her growth into adulthood, she wrote about the “trauma” of “my own introduction to womanhood.” When her parents quarrelled over her need to seek a vision at puberty, her mother won the argument by insisting that Mourning Dove have the same opportunity to discover her guardian spirit. She insisted that “women are known to make good doctors. We need them every bit as much as warriors.”²⁹ Whenever conflict erupted between her “Indian” and “half-breed” parents, the victory went to the “Indian” who was also the “woman” whose spiritual gifts had been valorized.

Continuing her personal rejection of conventional gender assumptions, Mourning Dove expressed her desire to avoid the “life of drudgery” of the newly married woman who assumed “all the hard work of the tipi” until “she herself became a mother-in-law.” Yet, she tempered her

²⁸ Miller, “Introduction,” Jay Miller, ed. *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), xvi; Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 17.

²⁹ Miller, *Mourning Dove*, 3, 5, 10, 45.

critique by references to the “Indian theory of existence” which gave “every person” a “mission” in a phrase that echoed her mother’s notion of gender complementarity rather than her grandmother’s choice of masculine endeavours. Women’s “mission” was the work of sustenance in which they worked “hard and diligently out of love for their families and relatives.”³⁰ The autobiography reveals a layered subjectivity that moves between identifications of its subject as an Indian, a half-breed, a woman, a tribal historian, a wife, and an author who alternates between fictional and factual portrayals of herself and her people.

Mourning Dove discusses “the vast difference between white and native cultures” and expresses her fear of “the inevitable destruction of my own.” She concludes with a history of her people’s struggle against the allotment policy forced upon them by the Dawes Act. The conflict became the cause of a quarrel between her “Indian” mother who “held with the older Indians” and her “half-breed” father who resolved to “take allotments for himself and all of us children.” Concluding with her people waiting “in a humane and patient fashion for promises to be honored and justice done,” Mourning Dove favoured her mother’s loyalty to the “older Indians” in contrast to her father’s assimilationist desires.³¹ Identifying her mother and grandmother with “the Indians,” and her father with the “half-breed,” Mourning Dove’s autobiography contributed to the creation of a post-colonialist discourse characterized by hybridity and inconclusiveness rather than the coherent unfolding of a unified subjectivity. Gendering the conflicts between “white” and “Indian,” Mourning Dove rewrote the circumstances which had forced herself to deny her womanhood in order to claim Indian status. Alternatively called by five different names during her lifetime and eventually buried under a sixth appellation on her grave where she was identified as “Mrs. Fred Galler,” Mourning Dove liberated herself from a fixed identity and portrayed herself as a fluctuating mixture of genders, races, and cultures.

While Mourning Dove was laboriously constructing her fictional, folkloric, political, and autobiographical selves, Archie Phinney of Nez Perce and Euro-American ancestry began a similar process of unravelling and rewriting Fletcher’s material and discursive legacy. Like Mead, he retraced a part of Fletcher’s journey as he went east for education at Haskell Institute and Columbia University before being dispatched by Boas to the Nez Perce reservation to do field work. At the same time that

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65, 56, 41, 69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 81, 183, 157.

Fortune and Mead visited the Omaha. Phinney compiled a report which argues that the Nez Perce must counteract “the drift of reservation life” by reclaiming tribal governance and traditions. He advocated the creation of a “new consciousness” nurtured by a tribal center under the direction of “an Indian holding the confidence and support of his people” shortly after the Nez Perce had formed a tribal council as an attempt to reconstruct their tribal identity. Moderating the assimilationist paradigm, he advocated the “enlargement of native, traditional associations, beliefs and customs by accretions of the elements of civilized culture” rather than the eradication of tradition. Only by rediscovering their “transcendent community spirit” could the Nez Perce “find themselves anew ... on the basis, not of submission, but complete expression.” Such a policy would restore the “effete and expatriated spirit of this people ... to its former virility.” Equating the revitalization of traditional culture with the renewal of masculinity, Phinney insisted upon the return of the “Indian” and the “tribe” in a reversal of Fletcher’s argument that assimilation would bestow manhood on Nez Perce men. His report to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs was only one of many criticisms of the legacy of the Dawes Act which would lead to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the legislation which Mourning Dove endorsed. Phinney may have imaginatively cast himself in the role of “an Indian holding the confidence and support of his people,” but, for more than a decade, his destiny, like Francis La Flesche’s, led him away from his people as he, like Fletcher, returned to the East.³²

After completing a collection of Nez Perce narratives which included Coyote stories that appeared as *Nez Perce Texts*, Phinney, encouraged by Franz Boas, travelled to the Soviet Union to study at the Leningrad Academy of Sciences. During three years’ observing tribal peoples in Siberia and Soviet minority policy, he wrote “Numipu among the White Settlers” which was sent to John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, in apparent support of an application for employment in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Phinney described the Nez Perce as having been “crushed materially and spiritually.” No doubt aware of Collier’s determination to restore religious freedom to Native Americans, Phinney objected to “the christianizing, civilizing and citizenizing machinations of the whites”

³² Archie Phinney, “Paper on the Nez Percés, prepared by Mr. Archie Phinney, at the request of Professor Franz Boas...submitted to the Hon. Charles J. Rhoads, Commissioner of Indian Affairs,” 16 Feb. 1932, Archie Phinney papers, Bureau of Indian Affairs, RG 75; Seattle Branch; hereafter Phinney/SB; Hoxie and Mark, “Preface,” *With the Nez Percés*, xxv.

which had produced “a new ‘Indian,’ the imitation of the whiteman, who turns back upon his traditional life, language and culture.” Without identifying Alice Fletcher by name, Phinney’s attack clearly took aim at the project to which Fletcher had devoted her energies for a decade as it endorsed Collier’s plan to restore tribal sovereignty and resources, and to revitalize cultural practices.³³

Criticizing the results of the reformist project in language redolent of his immersion in Soviet discourse, Phinney presented himself as a “red” Indian in opposition to the imitation white man of the reformist imagination. The allotment policy had been an “ideological” mask for settler greed for Indian land. The Nez Perce had been “despoiled, bereft of all vitality. To them the individualism of the whites had come not as a challenge, but only as a denial, a denial of time honored forms of collective participation, of a traditional communal life.” Phinney believed that “the moribund culture of the Numipu stands on the verge of complete extinction” and predicted that “the processes of social assimilation and blood amalgamation... will have, in another generation, disposed of the Indian question not by solving it but by liquidating it.” Predicting that his own mixed ancestry would become the dominant reality unless policies were altered, he insisted that only the “new Indian policy” advocated by the John Collier and the Roosevelt administration would allow “Indians” to “participate in American life as alert, modern communities struggling for their own interests.”³⁴ Securing an appointment in the Indian Bureau, Phinney returned to the United States in 1937 to become an agent of the same government organization which had employed Alice Fletcher and Francis La Flesche in the mid-1880s to dissolve tribal bonds, allot lands, and transform Indians into citizens.

Although his analysis revealed the imprint of a “scientific” discourse as mediated through a Marxist formulation, Phinney’s writings can be read for clues to personal and cultural dilemmas. Having been educated at institutions dominated by whites, he had been taught to become the “white man’s Indian.” White ancestry complicated the question of his allegiances as his references to the “processes of social assimilation and blood amalgamation” suggested.³⁵ His years away from the reservation made him a partial stranger to the Nez Perce and the complicated internal

³³ Archie Phinney, “Numipu among the White Settlers,” Phinney/SB.

³⁴ Phinney, “Numipu among the White Settlers,” Archie Phinney, untitled essay, Phinney/SB; A. Grenfell Price, *White Settlers and Native Peoples* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1949), 44–56.

³⁵ Phinney, “Numipu among the White Settlers,” Phinney/SB.

divisions that made it difficult to restore political unity to a factionalized group. Becoming an employee of the Indian Bureau could be a Faustian bargain. The epitome of the “new Indian” and the “imitation whiteman,” Phinney would find it difficult to convince those who had stayed on the reservation that he had earned the right to aspire to tribal leadership.

Frustrated by the resistance to Native American revival, Phinney attempted to develop a pan-Indian movement to encourage leadership outside of tribal conflicts. Objecting to the dominance of white missionaries and anthropologists at a 1939 North American Indian conference, Phinney formed an Indian caucus which endorsed a new conference “limited to bona fide Indian leaders.” Ironically jabbing at white pretensions, the caucus pledged to welcome whites to any conference “we Indians may call for the purpose of finding solutions to the white man’s dilemma in a social and economic order that, during the past decade, has gone on the rocks.” Phinney sent his criticisms of failures of the Indian Reorganization Act to John Collier. He evaluated the results of six years as “superficial and overly couched, from the beginning, in the rigid guardianship of the government.” Continuing with his efforts to develop a pan-Indian alliance, Phinney helped to found the National Congress of American Indians in 1944. In place of Mourning Dove’s exploration of “divergent, at times conflicting narratives and imagery,” he attempted to construct a unified, collective identity through an organization which would defend the “common interests of Indians without giving offense to particular tribal sensitivities.” But those “sensitivities” thwarted his efforts to convince the Nez Perce and other peoples to coalesce under a collective identity as “Indian people.”³⁶

In 1943 Phinney returned to the Nez Perce reservation as the newly appointed Indian agent. Divisions between traditionalists and assimilationists, religious conflicts, and political differences made it difficult to establish new forms of tribal governance or reclaim resources lost through the forced opening of the reservation. Congress never appropriated the essential resources to reverse the economic and cultural trends of over a half century of assimilationist policy. Collier’s idealistic notion of Native American culture based upon his experience with the Pueblos did not equip him for the faction-ridden politics of diverse cultures. His

³⁶ Archie Phinney to Joe Jennings, 22 Sept. 1939, Phinney/SB.; Archie Phinney to John Collier, 1 Sept. 1943, Special Agents File, RG 75/DC; National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Hazel W. Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 291.

resignation in 1945 marked the ebbing of an attempted revolution in Indian policy as the beginnings of the Cold War imposed a new, more coercive form of ideological and cultural conformity that militated against support for tribal sovereignty and communal cultures. Phinney's death in 1949 may have saved him from the ravages of an anti-Communist crusade that would have shown little tolerance towards a radical critic of American policy.³⁷

Writing within but also against a colonizing process, these authors contributed to the construction of a post-colonial literature that incorporated the perspectives of indigenous peoples and sympathetic allies who analogized colonialism to their own experiences as women. Like other forms of post-colonial writing, the frontier texts authored by Fletcher, La Flesche, Gay, Mead, Mourning Dove, and Phinney were subject to "the political, imaginative, and social control involved in the relationship between colonizer and colonized." Yet the control manifested in government policy, legislation, economic exploitation, and cultural coercion could not entirely suppress the emergence of texts that resisted colonization in the name of alternative possibilities. Unable to escape the encroaching "white culture" either literally or figuratively, these authors nevertheless developed new forms of self- and collective expression which undermined the dualistic notions of savage and civilized that had permeated Turner's depiction of the frontier.³⁸

To a greater or lesser extent, these authors engaged in the sort of cultural politics by which new identities are produced. Subject to the "alienation of vision and the crisis in self-image" which displacement often produces, these authors created discordant, fluid, and contradictory narratives about an experience that created doubts about cultural absolutes. Each author used the "products of particular power structures" to "critique and challenge those structures." Collectively they challenged the naive form of patriotism that obscured a colonizing enterprise that continued long after the American Revolution. They wrote about the creation of peoples and about themselves. Simultaneously "Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race" as Turner had claimed, they also represented themselves and their subjects as colonized products of different ancestral traditions and national identities. The frontier's capacity to engender "perennial rebirth," perpetuate the "fluidity of American

³⁷ As revealed in the Phinney papers, Phinney/sb.

³⁸ Robert A. Williams, Jr., "Documents of Barbarism: The Contemporary Legacy of European Racism and Colonialism in the Narrative Traditions of Federal Indian Law," *Arizona Law Review*, 31 (1989), 231–78; Ashcroft, et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 6.

life,” and provide contact “with the simplicity of primitive society” undermined the cultural certainties of the people who lived on Turner’s side of the frontier fully as much as they “brought confusion of mind” to the inhabitants who lived on the other side.³⁹

³⁹ Ashcroft, et al., *Empire Writes Back*, 9, 11; Louise M. Newman, “Critical Theory and the History of Women: What’s at Stake in Deconstructing Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 2: 3 (Winter 1991), 63; Mary Poovey, “Feminism and Deconstruction,” *Feminist Studies*, 14: 1 (Spring 1980), 53; Turner, “Significance of the Frontier,” 433, 422; Fletcher, “Foreword,” *The Omaha Tribe*, 29.