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COMMENTARY
And
DEBATE

**Sam Gill's *Mother Earth*:
Colonialism, Genocide and the
Expropriation of Indigenous Spiritual
Tradition in Contemporary Academia**

WARD CHURCHILL

The distortion and misrepresentation of Native American spiritual tradition is nothing new. In many ways the process has been ongoing since the first moment of European arrival, and it has been functioning in an increasingly systematic fashion, under rationales ranging from sheer commercial speculation to that of "pure scholarship," ever since. During the last twenty years, the list of those lining up to share in the supposed prestige of American Indian Religious Studies" has come to include a whole bevy of "New Age" personalities as well as a significant sector of the nation's academic elite. This is true to the extent that the two

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(Editor's Note: The opinions and statements made within the Commentary and Debate section are not necessarily those of the editors, the Editorial Board, or the University of California.)

groups have become inseparable in some ways, in terms of both outlook and "methodology."

Perhaps the most blatant example is Carlos Castaneda, who managed to maneuver his fabricated "Yaqui way of knowledge" into not only a highly lucrative string of best-sellers, but also into a Ph.D. in anthropology from UCLA and a place on college reading lists everywhere. But there are many others. Take, for instance, "Dr. Jamake Highwater," a supposed Cherokee/Blackfoot—in an earlier incarnation he appeared as J. Marks, a non-Indian modern dance promoter in San Francisco—who has made himself rich (and a classroom staple) publishing a series of books on "Indian spirituality" which have far more to do with primal therapy and Greek mythology than with anything indigenous to the Americas.

Then there is Ruth Beebe Hill, whose tome-like epic, *Hanta Yo*, set numerous sales records over the last decade while portraying the collectivist spirituality inherent in the nineteenth-century Sioux as a sort of weird prefiguration of her friend Ayn Rand's grossly individualistic "objectivism." And, to cap it all off, we are presently confronted with the likes of Lynn Andrews, who claims to have discovered the secrets of "jaguar women" and kachinas on the Arctic Circle, all while sitting for a couple of weekends at the feet of some indistinctly Canadian group of Indian elders who seem to have spent the entirety of their lives doing nothing so much as waiting for the author to come along and serve as "messenger" to their "truths." One is tempted to call Castaneda a model of propriety compared to those who have followed in his footsteps.

The fact that the works of all of these authors and others—such as "Sun Bear" and his sidekick "Wabun"—are currently carried on academic reading lists in colleges and universities across the country is hardly a neutral matter. As the Sioux scholar Vine Deloria, Jr., put it in 1982:

The realities of Indian belief and existence have become so misunderstood and distorted at this point that when a real Indian stands up and speaks the truth at any given moment, he or she is not only unlikely to be believed, but will probably be publicly contradicted and "corrected" by the citation of some non-Indian and totally inaccurate "expert." More, young Indians in universities are now being trained to view themselves and their cultures in the terms prescribed by such experts

rather than in the traditional terms of the tribal elders. The process automatically sets the members of Indian communities at odds with one another, while outsiders run around picking up the pieces for themselves. In this way, the experts are perfecting a system of self-invalidation in which all semblance of honesty and accuracy are lost. This is not only a travesty of scholarship, but it is absolutely devastating to Indian societies.¹

Pam Colorado, an Oneida scholar at the University of Calgary, follows the same logic:

The process is ultimately intended to supplant Indians, even in areas of their own customs and spirituality. In the end, non-Indians will have complete power to define what is and is not Indian, even for Indians. We are talking here about an absolute ideological/conceptual subordination of Indian people in addition to the total physical subordination they already experience. When this happens, the last vestiges of real Indian society and Indian rights will disappear. Non-Indians will then "own" our heritage and ideas as thoroughly as they now claim to own our land and resources.²

Former American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means not only agrees with Deloria and Colorado, but pushes their insights into the arena of terminological clarity:

What's at issue here is the same old question that Europeans have always posed with regard to American Indians, whether what's ours isn't somehow theirs. And of course, they've always answered the question in the affirmative. When they wanted our land they just announced that they had a right to it and therefore owned it. When we resisted their taking of our land they claimed we were being unreasonable and committed physical genocide upon us in order to convince us to see things their way. Now, being spiritually bankrupt themselves, they want our spirituality as well. So they're making up rationalizations to explain why they're entitled to it.³

"We are resisting this," Means goes on, "because spirituality is the basis of our culture; if it is stolen, our culture will be dissolved. If our culture is dissolved, Indian people *as such* will cease to exist. By definition, the causing of any culture to cease to exist

is an act of genocide. That's a matter of international law; look it up in the *1948 Genocide Convention*. So, maybe this'll give you another way of looking at these culture vultures who are ripping off Indian tradition. It's not an amusing or trivial matter, and it's not innocent or innocuous. And those who engage in this are not cute, groovy, hip, enlightened, or any of the rest of the things they want to project themselves as being. No, what they're about is cultural genocide. And genocide is genocide, regardless of how you want to 'qualify' it. So some of us are starting to react to these folks accordingly."⁴ Should anyone care to question the validity of Means's notion of genocide, Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, Canadian researchers on the topic, offer a succinctly confirming analysis:

If people suddenly lose their "prime symbol," the basis of their culture, their lives lose meaning. They become disoriented, with no hope. A social disorganization often follows such a loss, they are often unable to insure their own survival . . . The loss and human suffering of those whose culture has been healthy and is suddenly attacked and disintegrated are incalculable.⁵

Therefore, Davis and Zannis conclude, "One should not speak lightly of 'cultural genocide' as if it were a fanciful invention. The consequence in real life is far too grim to speak of cultural genocide as if it were a rhetorical device to beat the drums for 'human rights.' The cultural mode of group extermination is genocide, a crime. Nor should 'cultural genocide' be used in the game: 'Which is more horrible, to kill and torture; or remove [the prime cultural symbol which is] the will and reason to live?' Both are horrible."⁶

Enter *Mother Earth*

The analysis advanced by Means, Pam Colorado and other American Indians is substantially borne out by developments during the second half of the 1980s, as the line separating appropriation of the forms of indigenous spiritual tradition from the outright expropriation of that tradition has evaporated. Over the past few years, a major intellectual enterprise among New Age adherents has been the "demystification" of pre-contact Native

America. Although the variants of this effort vary widely, they take as a common objective the "reinterpretation" of one or more positive aspects and attainments of autonomous indigenous society, "proving" that they never existed. Inevitably, the conclusion is reached that whatever is under discussion was "actually" introduced to the hemisphere by European invaders at some point after 1500.

Hence, we find "radical ecologists" such as George Weurthner arguing in the pages of the supposedly progressive journal *Earth First!* that, far from having achieved spiritual traditions predicated in an understanding of natural harmony and balance, ancient American Indians were really the "first environmental pillagers." This flat reversal of even the most elementary meanings of Native tradition is then "explained" as Weurthner wanders through a consistently self-contradictory and wildly convoluted monologue in which he saddles North American indigenous societies with everything from the extinction of the woolly mammoth to desertification of the Sonora.⁷ That he deviates radically from logic, known fact and even plain common sense while making his "case" does nothing to deter his stream of bald assertion.

Predictably, from this contrived springboard he is able to contend with superficial plausibility that the conceptualization now termed "ecology" did not—as is popularly imagined—spring from traditional Native American practice. Rather, in Weurthner's more "informed" view, it stems from the fertility of advanced brains such as his own. It follows that he feels compelled to demand that American Indians abandon the "myth and falsity" of their own belief structures in favor of the outlook he and his colleagues have expropriated from them.

In a more public vein, the thinly-veiled racism of Weurthner's sort of theorizing has set the stage for the celebrated environmentalist author (and *Earth First!* guru) Edward Abbey to launch himself full-tilt into avowals of an imagined "superiority of northern European culture" worthy of Joseph Goebbels and Alfred Rosenberg.⁸ Perhaps more pragmatically, it has simultaneously laid the basis for *Earth First!* political leader Dave Foreman to declare Indian peoples a "threat to the habitat" and urge both ecologists and New Agers to actively resist their land and water rights claims.⁹ All of this might be to some extent dismissible as the ravings of an irrelevant lunatic fringe were it not for the fact that,

as usual, such ideas are finding their way into the realm of mainstream academia, where they are being sanctioned and codified as "knowledge, truth and scholarship." The interlock and continuity between the expropriation of the physical resources of Native America on the one hand, and the expropriation of its spiritual/conceptual traditions on the other, could not be more clearly revealed.

Comes now Sam D. Gill, a non-Indian professor of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado/Boulder, and an alleged specialist in Native American spirituality. In all fairness, it should be noted that Gill heretofore has been known primarily not so much for his theses on Indian religion as for his advocacy of a rather novel approach to teaching. In essence, this approach seems to be that the crucial qualification for achieving university-level faculty status is admittedly to know little or nothing of the subject matter one is supposed to teach. As he himself put it in an essay contained in *On Teaching*, a 1987 anthology of "teaching excellence":

In my classes on Native American religions I found I could not adequately describe the roles of women in Native American cultures and religions. . . . To begin to resolve my *ignorance* about Native American women . . . I finally offered a senior-level course on Native American women and religions. . . . This course formally *initiated* my long-term research on Mother Earth [emphasis added].

One might have been under the impression that filling a seat as a professor at a major institution of higher learning would imply not "ignorance," but rather the mastery of some pre-existing body of knowledge about which one is prepared to profess. Similarly, it might be thought that offering an advanced course in a particular content area might imply some sort of relationship to the *results* of research, rather than the "initiation" of research. At the very least, one might expect that if a course needs to be taught for canonical reasons, and the instructor of record finds him/herself lacking in the knowledge required to teach it, he or she might retain the services of someone who *does* have such knowledge. Not so within the preferred pedagogy of Dr. Gill. Instead, he posits that "student questions and con-

cerns" are most important in "shaping" what he does. Another way of saying this might be: "pitch your performance to the crowd."

In any event, it was in this interesting commentary on the application of UCLA anthropology professor Harold Garfinkle's (Carlos Castaneda's mentor) ethnomethodological principles of attaining "pure knowledge" that Gill announced that he had "a book in the process of being published by the University of Chicago Press. It is entitled *Mother Earth: An American Story*." He had thus assigned himself the task of articulating the "truth" of what is possibly the most central of all Native American spiritual concepts. Worse, he went on to remark that in order to "encourage my expeditious writing of the book, I committed myself to a presentation of it as a portion of a summer course entitled 'Native American Goddesses' to be offered the second five-week summer session. With that incentive I completed the writing by July 15 and was able to present the manuscript to this senior and graduate-level class. The manuscript was quickly revised based in part upon student responses and sent off to press." Again, Gill's students (the vast bulk of whom are non-Indian) inform the teacher (also a non-Indian) what they want to hear, he responds by accommodating their desires, and the result becomes the stuff which passes as "proper understanding" of Indians in academe.

News of this incipient text induced a certain rumbling among Denver-area Indians, complete with letters of outrage from community leaders. The institutional response was that Gill, regardless of the merits of anything he may have said or written, was protected within the rubric of "academic freedom." Wallace Coffey, a Comanche who directs the Denver Indian Center, summed up community feeling at the time by observing that while the university was no doubt correct in claiming Gill's activities should be covered by academic freedom guarantees, "It's funny that every time a non-Indian wants to say something about Indians, no matter how outlandish or inaccurate, they start to talk about academic freedom. But every time an Indian applies for a faculty job, all they can talk about are 'academic standards.' I guess I'll be forgiven for saying it seems to me somebody's talking out of both sides of their mouth here. And I don't mind saying that I think this situation has a lot to do with why so few Indians ever get to teach in the universities in this state [*Editor's*

Note: As we go to press, only *one* American Indian is employed as a full-time faculty member by the entire three-campus University of Colorado undergraduate system, and he remains untenured].¹⁰

Unsurprisingly, given the circumstances and overall context of its creation, when *Mother Earth* eventually was released it extended the thesis that its subject had never been a *bona fide* element of indigenous tradition at all. Instead, its author held that the whole idea had been inculcated among American Indians by early European colonists, and had been developed and perfected since the conquest. With deadly predictability, he went on to conclude that insofar as any special rights to North America accrue to a belief in Mother Earth, they must accrue to everyone—Native and Euroamerican alike—equally (one is left a bit unclear as to Gill's views on the proprietary interests of Afro- and Asian-Americans on the continent). Thus, *Mother Earth is An American* (rather than Native American) *Story*.

A Discussion with Sam Gill

Shortly after his book's release, I called Sam Gill on the phone. After a few moments of conversation, he asked whether I was upset by what he'd written. I replied that I was indeed quite upset and responded to his query as to why with a long and somewhat disjointed discourse on the nature of cultural imperialism, the fact that he had quoted material I'd ghost-written for others quite out of context, and my impression that he had quite deliberately avoided including *any* American Indians directly in the research process by which he had reached conclusions about them so profoundly antithetical to their own. "I think we had better meet in person," he said.

To his credit, Gill kept the appointment, arriving as scheduled at my office. In response to his request to go deeper into some of the issues I had raised on the phone, I explained that I felt there was probably validity to the idea he had articulated in *Mother Earth* that the interpretation and reinterpretation of the Mother Earth concept by succeeding generations of Euroamericans (such as Gill himself) had blocked any broad understanding of the original indigenous meaning of it. I also acknowledged that this additive phenomenon had, over the years, no doubt carried the popular notion of Mother Earth very far from any

indigenous meaning. However, with that said, I stressed that nothing in either postulation precluded there having been a well-developed indigenous Mother Earth concept already operant in North America before contact. Further, I emphasized that he had bought out nothing in his book which precluded an *ongoing* and autonomous Native American conceptualization of Mother Earth, divorced from popular (mis)understandings, exactly as traditionalist Indians presently claim.

"Well," he said, "this is interesting. I quite agree with you, and I think that's pretty much what I said in the book. Have you read it?" Taken by surprise, I reached across my desk for a copy and read an excerpt from page 6:

As I have come to know it, the story of Mother Earth is a distinctively American story. Mother Earth, as she has existed in North America, cannot be adequately understood and appreciated apart from the complex history of the encounter between Native Americans and Americans of European ancestry, nor apart from comprehending that *the scholarly enterprise that has sought to describe her has had a hand in bringing her into existence, a hand even in introducing her to Native American peoples* [emphasis added].

Without looking up, I skipped to page 7: ". . . Mother Earth has come into existence in America largely within the last one hundred years. . . . When her story is told, it becomes clear how all Americans, whatever their heritage, may proclaim Mother Earth to be the mother of us all . . . [emphasis added]." And again, almost at random, from page 157: "Mother Earth is also mother to the Indians. This study has shown that *she has become so only recently*, and then not without influence from Americans . . . [emphasis added]." With the third quote, I indicated I could go on but figured the point had been made. At this juncture Gill suggested that perhaps his writing had not been as clear as he had intended. I countered that while I agreed the text suffered certain difficulties in exposition, these particular passages seemed quite clear, in line with his overall treatise as I understood it, and were lacking only in possible alternative interpretations. "Oh well," he said with a small shrug, "I never intended this as a book on religion anyway. I wrote it as a study in American history. Are you planning to review it?"

When I replied that yes, I was, and as widely as possible, he said, "Then I'd very much appreciate it if you'd treat it as an historical work, not in the framework of religious studies. Fair enough?" Surprised again, I agreed.

Sam Gill's Historiography

There are a number of points of departure from which one might begin to assess Sam Gill's historical project, none of them as telling as the way in which he defines the object of his quest. On the very first page he declares that, "Mother Earth is not only a Native American *goddess* but a *goddess* of people the world over . . . [emphasis added]." Two things are striking here:

- First, Gill seems to simply disregard from the outset the obvious literal meanings of statements by three different American Indians—the nineteenth-century Wanapum leader Smohalla, contemporary Navajo politician Peterson Zah, and AIM leader Russell Means—all of whom he quotes on the same page. In each of these diverse utterances, the speaker refers to the earth *herself* as being "the mother." All allegorical references to human anatomy—*e.g.*: the soil as "skin," rocks as "bones"—are clearly extended *from* this premise in an effort to allow the (non-Indian) listener to comprehend the concept at issue. *No* attempt is being made to utilize the earth as an allegory by which to explain some humanesque entity.
- Second, Gill immediately insists upon precisely this reversal of polarities, quoting Edward B. Taylor to the effect that, "among the native races of America the Earth Mother is one of the great *personages* of mythology [emphasis added]." He then reinforces this by quoting Åke Hultrantz, a major topical Swedish scholar on American Indian religions: "The belief in a *goddess*, usually identified with Mother Earth, is found almost everywhere in North America [emphasis added]."

This is what is commonly referred to as "setting up a straw man." By thus "establishing" on the opening page that the Native American conception of Mother Earth assumes the Euro-

centric form of a "goddess"—rather than the literal "earth deity" embodied in the articulated indigenous meaning—Gill has contrived a false context for his historical examination which allows him to reach *only* the conclusions he desires: viz.: Mother Earth did not exist in Native North America prior to the European invasion. Therefore, *ipso facto*, it follows that Europeans had as much to do with the creation of the indigenous conceptualization of Mother Earth as did the Indians themselves—or more.

The conclusions will be "true," of course, given the author's framing of the questions. But one could as easily decide that, insofar as the yin and yang principles of Hinduism and Zen Buddhism embody male and female principles, they too "must" signify a god and goddess. Self-evidently, no amount of "historical scrutiny" will reveal the existence in these traditions of a god named Ying or a goddess named Yang (albeit it may be possible to locate both "personages" at the Naropa Institute in Boulder). Notwithstanding the fact that such god and goddess entities never had a place in the Buddhist or Hindu lexicons themselves, are we not bound by Gillian "logic" to conclude that neither the yin nor the yang principle ever had a place in the structure of either Hindu or Buddhist spiritual concepts? And, if we do manage to reach this absurd conclusion, does it not follow that since the terms yin and yang are now employed within the vernaculars of these traditions, they must have originated in the interaction between East and West, the concepts themselves "introduced" to the Orient by the Occident? To the extent that we can accept the whole charade up to this point, won't it follow that we are now entitled to consider Buddhism as much a part of our own non-Buddhist heritage (read: "property") as it is for the Buddhist Vietnamese, or even the Zen monks? Such questions tend to answer themselves.

In many ways, then, examination of Gill's historiography need go no further than this. A project as flawed at its inception as his offers little hope of reaching productive outcomes, a matter rendered all the more acute when an author exhibits as marked a propensity to manipulate his data, forcing it to conform to his predispositions regardless of the maiming and distortion which ensues, as does Gill. Examples of this last appear not only in the manner described with regard to the first page of *Mother Earth*, but in abundance—through the sins of both omission and commission—within the remainder of the book.

As concerns omission, one need only turn to a section entitled

“The Triumph of Civilization over Savagism” (pages 30-39) to catch the drift. Here, we find Gill making much of the female Indian (“Mother Earth”) iconography being produced in Europe and its North American colonies from roughly 1575 until 1765. It is not that he handles what he discusses with any particular inaccuracy. Rather, he completely neglects to mention that there was a roughly equal proportion of male Indian iconography streaming from the same sources during the same period. Along the same line, and in the same section, he goes into the impact of Pocahontas (female Indian, “Mother Earth”) mythology on the formation of Americana without even an aside on the existence of its Hiawatha (male Indian) corollary. The result of this sort of skewed presentation is to preclude the drawing of reasoned conclusions from the subject matter, and to block the book from serving as a useful contribution to the literature in any positive way at all.

In terms of commission, there is a small matter of Gill putting words (or meanings) into people’s mouths. The clearest examples of this are in Chapter 7 (pages 129-50), in which he sets out to “prove” that the adoption of a belief in Mother Earth has led contemporary American Indians away from their traditional tribal/cultural specificity and toward a homogeneous sort of “pan-Indianism” (this is a variation on the standard rationalization that Indian rights no longer exist as such because Indians in the traditional sense no longer exist). To illustrate this idea, he selects quotations from several individuals, including Grace (Spotted Eagle) Black Elk, Sun Bear, and Russell Means.

Grace Black Elk died recently and is therefore no longer able to clarify or debunk the meanings Gill assigns to her words. However, in my own (extensive) experience with her, she was always *very* clear that, while she strongly and unswervingly supported the rights of all indigenous peoples to pursue their traditional spirituality, she herself followed *only* what she described as “Lakota way.” Further, she was consistently firm in her desire not to see Lakota way diluted or “contaminated” by the introduction of other traditions. Such a position is obviously rather far from the somewhat amorphous, inter-tribal spiritual amalgam Gill claims she represented.

Sun Bear, for his part, has also been quite clear, albeit in an entirely different way. Marketing aside, he has stated repeatedly and for the record that the eclectic spiritual porridge he serves

up has "nothing to do with Indian religion," "pan" or otherwise. He also has acknowledged openly that his adherents are composed almost exclusively of non-Indians; he admits that he tends to steer well clear of Indians these days, because they would "beat me up or kill me" due to the deliberately misleading marketing strategies he employs. *This* is the emblem of an "emerging pan-Indianism"?

As concerns Russell Means, Gill quotes repeatedly from a single speech delivered at the 1980 Black Hills Survival Gathering. While assigning a pan-Indianist meaning to the passages he elects to use, he carefully destroys the context in which the words were spoken. This includes categorical statements, toward the end of the speech, that Means does *not* consider or intend himself to be a "leader" in the pan-Indian sense, and that his thinking and actions are guided by a view of himself as "an Oglala Lakota patriot." Again, it is difficult to conceive a much clearer statement of tribally-specific orientation and motivation—and rejection of pan-Indianism—than this.

Ultimately, the reviewer is left with the feeling that he should replay in paraphrase a scene from the film, *Apocalypse Now*. Sam Gill (playing Col. Kurtz) asks: "Do you find my methods to be unsound?" The reviewer (playing Capt. Willard) replies: "Frankly, sir, I can't find any valid method at all."

A Question of "Revisionism"

The point has been made by Roger Echohawk, a Pawnee student at the University of Colorado, that even if Gill's historiography is lacking in certain important respects, there still could be a practical value and utility to his analysis of particular themes or sub-topics. The point is solid enough on its face, if a bit strained, and therefore is worth pursuing at least to some extent. By way of example, we will concentrate on Gill's examination of the first of the major historical occurrences dealt with in *Mother Earth*—Tecumseh's "Mother Earth statement"—the negation of which is a linchpin for the author's arguments throughout the rest of the book.

After a brief but reasonably accurate depiction of Tecumseh's diplomatic and military confrontations with the United States (pages 8–13), Gill sets out to prove that the great Shawnee leader never actually made a particular statement—"The earth is my

mother, and on her bosom I will repose"—during negotiations with William Henry Harrison in 1810. On pages 13–14, he notes that he has discovered a total of 27 references to this statement in the literature of the nineteenth century, the first of these in an article in the *National Recorder* on May 12, 1821, by an anonymous author. The next, he says on page 15, comes in a little-read history published in 1824 and written by Moses Dawson, a former aide to Harrison and eyewitness to the negotiations. Then came Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *Travels in the Central Portions of the Mississippi Valley* in 1825. After that, there were a steady stream of references, several by other eyewitnesses.

The obvious conclusions to be drawn from all this is that so many people refer to the Tecumseh statement for the simple reason that this is what the man said. The problem for Gill in this proposition, however, is that Tecumseh's having said it would seriously unhinge a portion of the thesis presented in *Mother Earth*. Hence, he faces the need to demonstrate that the verbiage attributed to the Indian actually came from another, non-Indian, source, and that all succeeding published references merely parroted what had been said before. The logical point of departure in this scenario would be Schoolcraft, given that he was far and away the most popular, accessible, and thus quotable of the writers in question. This is problematic insofar as both the 1821 and 1824 references were published prior to Schoolcraft's. Gill "solves" this difficulty on page 15 by quietly "suggesting" that for unexplained reasons Schoolcraft—who is not at all known for a tendency to write anonymous tracts, and who was a "name" any editor gladly would have afforded a byline—authored the unattributed *Recorder* article in 1821, unaccountably fabricating the Tecumseh statement.

An implication of this thoroughly unsubstantiated "historical discovery," never brought out in *Mother Earth*, is that for some equally unexplained reason Dawson next must have opted to deliberately falsify his historical record of the negotiations by borrowing this fictional quotation from an obscure 3-year-old article which even Gill describes as "filler" in the back pages of a magazine. After Schoolcraft's book, of course, he is much freer in writing off other eyewitness accounts as fabrications (at least with regard to the Tecumseh statement); this includes the account contained in Josiah Gregg's 1844 *Commerce of the Prairies* (covered on pages 21–22), and the accounts of Augustus Jones

and Major Joseph M. McCormick, recorded by Lyman D. Draper of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin during the mid-1880s (covered on pages 23–24). All one need do is accept Gill's utterly unsubstantiated—and unlikely—initial speculations, and his subsequent chronology of systematic plagiarism works out splendidly.

Having thus dismissed standard history as nothing short of a sustained hoax involving everyone from participants to playwrights, Gill next sets out to “correct” the record. This he purports to accomplish by reference to a solitary eyewitness account, this time by a man named Felix Bouchie, published in the *Vincennes Commercial* on January 8, 1889 (covered on pages 25–27). Therein is found a recounting of an interchange between Tecumseh and Harrison which occurred on a bench (not on the ground), lasting every bit of five minutes during two full days of negotiations, and in which the Mother Earth statement (an utterance which would require less than five seconds) is not made. Bouchie does not say that Tecumseh did *not* make the Mother Earth statement; he is simply recounting something else, and does not bring it up.

Again, there are obvious conclusions to be drawn. For instance, it would seem likely—since there was ample time available—that both the bench episode *and* the Mother Earth episode might have occurred, at different points, or even on different days during the negotiations. Bouchie does not claim to have been present during the entirety of the sessions, and his account could be viewed responsibly as a valuable *addition* to the record. Gill, however, will have none of this. Rather, he insists that Bouchie's version of events “must” have occurred *instead of* the other 27 more-or-less harmonious versions. This, he says, constitutes his final (crushing?) “proof” that the extremely well-documented Tecumseh statement is a fiction.

One senior American Indian scholar (who wishes to remain anonymous), upon reviewing Gill's Tecumseh material, dismissed him as “a lunatic, not worth the time and energy to argue with.” In a less emotional and more constructive vein, an Indian historian (who also asked to be left unnamed), offered a more thoughtful insight:

You know, what we're confronted with here is not uniquely—and maybe at this point not even primarily

—an American Indian issue. What this calls to mind more than anything is the sort of “historical revisionism” practiced by people like Arthur Butz and Richard Harwood, guys who use all sorts of pseudo-scholarly sleights-of-hand to “prove” the Holocaust never happened. Their stuff won’t hold up to even minimal scrutiny, but they keep right on going because they’re ideologically motivated.

Precisely. And with that, there seems very little left to say concerning the possible value of Sam Gill’s historical analyses.

Conclusion

And so the question naturally arises as to what sort of ideology might prompt an individual like Sam Gill to write a book lending itself to comparison with the sentiments of an Arthur Butz.¹¹ Certainly he would recoil in horror at the suggestion of such linkage at any level. Likely, the same can be said for any of his cohorts from Castaneda to Highwater, from Sun Bear’s ersatz Indians to the ecology movement (with the possible exception of the Earth First! Foreman/Abbey/Weurthner group, which seems to have found its preferred niche under the term “fascist”).

By and large, it also appears just as probable that all the above entities would express a vehement and heartfelt disavowal of the historical processes of physical genocide and expropriation visited upon Native Americans by the federal government. In their own minds, they are typically steadfast opponents of all such policies and the ideologies of violence which undergird them. At some level they are no doubt sincere in their oft and loudly repeated professions of being true “friends of the Indian.” There can be no question but that they’ve convinced themselves that they are divorced completely from the ugly flow of American history, and it would be worse than dubious to suggest that they might be inclined to muster forth the Seventh Calvary to work their will.

Yet, demonstrably, as much as any missionary, soldier or government bureaucrat who preceded them, those of the New Age have proven themselves willing to disregard the rights of American Indians to any modicum of cultural sanctity or psycho-

logical sanctuary. They, too, willfully and consistently disregard the protests and objections of their victims, speaking only of their own "right to know" and to victimize. They, too, have exhibited an ability to pursue courses of conduct bearing arguably genocidal implications, to shrug off the danger, and to argue only that genocide couldn't be genocide if they are the perpetrators of it. They, too, have persistently shown themselves willing to lie, distort, fabricate, cheat and steal in order to accomplish their agenda. The salient queries thus may be reduced to "why?" and "what are they after?"

The answers, in a real sense, are as simple as the facts that they are here and that they fully plan to stay. While the New Age hardly can be rationally accused of performing the conquest of the Americas, and its adherents go to great lengths in expressing their dismay at the methods used therein, clearly they have inherited what their ancestors gained thereby, both in terms of resources and in terms of relative power. The New Agers, for all their protestations to the contrary, aren't about to give up any of either. Their task, then, is that of simultaneously hanging on to what has been stolen while separating themselves from the *way* in which it was stolen. It is a somewhat tricky psychological project of being able to "feel good about themselves" (that ultimate expression of the New Age) through legitimizing the maintenance of their own colonial privilege. The project is essentially ideological. As Martin Carnoy has explained it:

The legitimation of the colonist's role requires the destruction of the colonized sense of culture and history, so the colonized is removed [or excluded] from all social and cultural responsibility.¹²

Albert Memmi adds:

In order for the legitimacy to be complete, it is not enough for the colonized to be a slave [or thoroughly dispossessed and disenfranchised], he must also accept his role. The bond between colonizer and colonized is thus [both] destructive and creative.¹³

Within the context of our immediate concern, these insights add up to the circumstance where Native Americans are marginalized or barred from participation in the generation of "knowledge" concerning their histories, cultures and beliefs. The

realities at issue are then systematically supplanted, negated and reconstructed to suit the psychological needs of the current crop of colonizers, and the result reproduced as "truth" among both the oppressors and oppressed. As early as 1973, Jamake Highwater was telling us that "[truth] is not simply a matter of getting the facts wrong, but of developing a credible falsehood."¹⁴ In 1984, he went further:

The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction. There being nothing else, the exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe in it willingly.¹⁵

In its final manifestation, the mythology which is forged ("created") in this process *always* assumes the form of an "inclusive" doctrine, legitimizing the present colonial status quo. The invaders' "contributions," however invented they may be, inevitably "entitle" them to superior status; there may have been a problem once, but it's in the past so forget it; we're all in this together now, so let's move forward (with me in the lead); I'm OK, you're OK (so long as you stay in your place and don't upset me with questions of or challenges to my privilege), and so on. We now can name the ideology which motivates the Sam Gills of America. It is called "New Age," but as Russell Means once remarked (in an another connection) it represents only "the same old song of Europe."¹⁶ And, in the contemporary United States, its codification has rapidly become an academic growth industry.

Hence, the living fabric of Indian society is to be destroyed as its youth are "educated" to view their heritage in exactly the same way as those who seek to subsume it. This is no rupture with, but rather a continuation and perfection of, the twin systems of colonization and genocide which have afflicted Native America for the past 400 years. From this vantage point, false as it is from start to finish, the scholarly disgrace which constitutes *Mother Earth* really is "an American story."

NOTES

1. Vine Deloria, Jr., "American Indians in Higher Education," paper presented at American Indian Awareness Week Conference, University of Colorado at Boulder, April 19, 1982.

2. Pam Colorado, letter to the author, March 23, 1983.
3. Russell Means, conversation with the author, May 16-17, 1988.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Robert Davis and Mark Zannis, *The Genocide Machine in Canada: The Pacification of the North* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1973), 20.
6. *Ibid.*
7. George Wuerthner, "An Ecological View of the Indian," *Earth First!* 7:8 (August 1987).
8. Edward Abbey, letter to the editor, *Bloomsbury Review*, May 1987.
9. Dave Foreman, editorial commentary, *Earth First!* 7:6 (June 1987).
10. Wallace Coffey, statement at the Denver Indian Center (Denver Native Americans United), March 14, 1987.
11. Arthur D. Butz, *The Hoax of the Twentieth Century: The Case Against the Presumed Extermination of European Jewry* (Torrance, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 1977).
12. Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1974), 67.
13. Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), 89.
14. Jamake Highwater, quoted in Hank Adams, *Cannibal Green* (Olympia, WA: Survival of American Indians, Inc., 1984), 1.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Russell Means, "The Same Old Song," in Ward Churchill, ed., *Marxism and Native Americans* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 19-34.