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American Indian Persistence and Resurgence. Edited by Karl Kroeber. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994. 261 pages. $39.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

Strategic resistance to assimilation—in action and thought—has been the chief factor in native peoples' persisting until the present, a surprising achievement in the face of five hundred years of oppression and isolation. But native peoples are more than survivors. Today we are witness to a lively resurgence and regeneration expressed in work and celebration, defiance and peacemaking, a movement that promises to create a new culture transcending past marginalization. Defining a place in the world has always been a principal theme of native oral and literary tradition, whether in ancient narratives or in modern statements of political self-determination. Native thinkers have sought to define their place in the world inclusively. As Métis architect Douglas Cardinal has written (Armstrong and Cardinal, *The Native Creative Process*, 1991), "The vision is that I will make a contribution. In doing so I will see the greatness in every person and see the aboriginal in every person."

In Karl Kroeber's *American Indian Persistence and Resurgence*, a circle of essayists and poets exploring the nature of contemporary native identities invites readers to consider both the origins and the goals of this unexpected native revitalization. What will it mean to be a member of a tribal group in the North America of the twenty-first century? How will the relationship between native and other North American cultures be constructed? From the moment of European arrival, as Kroeber reminds us in his introduction, Native Americans consciously shaped and determined their identity on their own terms. Staying close to traditional values strengthened them against oppression. What they took from the Europeans was thus shaped by native values, and so, "for some Indians at least, indigenous and European cultures could be complexly reinforcing rather than simply divisive" (p. 9).

Of the essays in this hopeful book, Priscilla Wald's "Terms of Assimilation" and Elaine Jahner's "Transitional Narratives and Cultural Continuity" are central to the understanding of Kroeber's important insight. Wald shows convincingly why a bridge between the cultures cannot be erected from the Euro-American side—nor from the native side using nonnative values. She considers the 1831 Supreme Court case of *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*,

focusing her discussion on the United States government's ethnocentric unease at the prospect of a nonwhite people's asserting itself as a legal American entity. The Cherokee, more "civilized" and nationalistic than the federal government liked, had adopted a constitution in 1827, emulating the oppressor as a survival strategy. At issue in the case was a state's right to legislate within the Cherokee territory, which was, by federal treaties, exempt from state law. In its decision, the Supreme Court defined native peoples out of (legal) existence, finding it intolerable that they should persist as nations at the same time and in the same place as the United States itself.

The Court's decision established the status of the tribes in the United States: They were, at best, *domestic dependent nations*, a term still in use today. Only later, when they were no longer a threat to the United States, could Indians be considered capable of becoming recognizable citizens. Their own aspirations to self-determination remained unseen.

In "The Nations of a State"—the book's most lucid essay—Edward Spicer shows how the United States became blind to the existence of the tribes and unable to comprehend their distinctiveness except by considering them "other" and inferior. Only separation from family, breakup of the community, conversion to Christianity, and enforced schooling could turn Indians into Euro-Americans, and forced assimilation seemed an easy enough solution, given that the tribes were easily controlled. Yet these policies proved ineffective, even after more than a century of thoroughgoing assaults on native communities and cultures.

From their side, however, these "others" have found ways to coexist with the dominant society on their own term—terms drawn from the history and ecology of their nations. Jahner's deeply insightful essay about Oglala Sioux political and spiritual leader George Sword (1846–1910) shows how Sword's writing "emerges from the immediate and consciously negotiated experience of radical culture change" (p. 149). Sword deliberately experimented with Lakota oral tradition to create a new kind of literature. He wrote narratives for his close friend James R. Walker, a medical doctor at Pine Ridge who was collecting material for anthropologist Clark Wissler. Walker was looking for "mythic explanations for rituals" (p. 163), and Sword obliged him but without revealing that he himself had created the stories so as to answer Walker's questions. Sword used elements from oral tradi-

tion and reworked them, adding his own ideas, to create teaching texts. What guided him was not merely literary ambition; he "undoubtedly possessed the quality of mind and experience that prompted him to think about the connections between the traditional Lakota culture and the new, imposed reservation culture," a talent "accompanied by an exceptional capacity to adapt to changed circumstances" (pp. 167, 168).

In this way, Sword established a basis for action adaptive to new circumstances, a form of resistance in which concession becomes victory. He created "a reservation way of life based on Lakota values" (p. 157). He avoided either-or choices and insisted upon "both-and." Jahner believes that Sword instinctively used Lakota ways of thinking to incorporate Western conceptualizations in written narrative that was at once an intelligent synthesis and a rationalization of a new culture.

Only native people themselves can successfully understand this new culture, but they do not necessarily find the task straightforward. Another well-crafted essay, by Jarold Ramsey, introduces Francis LaFlesche's short story "The Song of Flying Crow," a "subtle and resonant evocation of the intercultural predicament" (p. 184), which dates from the same period as Sword's writings. In it, LaFlesche, the first professional Indian anthropologist, tells of a vacation trip home to the Omaha Reservation, where it seems that he comfortably reintegrates himself into his community. One night, after sharing a meal and many pleasant memories, he and his friends begin to sing. LaFlesche still knows the songs well, as he reminds his guests, and he joins them in song after song. But, finally, an elder introduces a song that LaFlesche cannot follow. The elder tells him that the song was composed by Flying Crow, LaFlesche's childhood friend, shortly before he died, as a spiritual legacy to future generations. LaFlesche repeats the song determinedly until it is thoroughly fixed in his mind. When his guests have departed, he stays awake remembering Flying Crow, who ran away from the missionary school repeatedly, and finally for good: "Born a pagan he died a pagan, with the song of a pagan upon his lips" (p. 187). With these words the story ends.

The dilemma of the Indian ethnographer at home is the dilemma of many native people today. In one world, they have faced elders who "would not teach the sacred words to any young man; these things could never be a part of the young men's lives" (p. 189). Cut off intentionally or by the force of linguistic and

circumstantial changes, these young people cannot retrieve the wholeness of the knowledge that shaped the culture of their elders. So they try to be part of another world while remaining true to the collective identity of their people. When he hears Flying Crow's song, LaFlesche knows that he must learn it, for two reasons: personal and professional. Both he and Flying Crow have striven to preserve something of Omaha culture for future generations, the one for his grandchildren, the other for non-Indians. It is difficult to find wholeness in the place between these two roles. But—and this is the key point of Ramsey's essay—we learn that LaFlesche never published the words of the song; he refused to make it an artifact, instead preserving it only in the old, oral way;. This refusal is an affirmation "of the wholeness of what LaFlesche knows about himself. Flying Crow's 'pagan' song has, against all the intercultural odds, come home to the author, there to stay. Ethnography has stopped short of betrayal" (p. 196).

In 1972, George Sword's stories were rediscovered by native educators at Pine Ridge, where the community had lost knowledge of the connections between oral tradition and daily rituals. Here, in Sword's manuscripts, were the "emotional force and the clear intellectual scope that the Lakota sought" (p. 166) as a basis for teaching spirituality and oral tradition. Their gratitude must be seen not as ironic but as a triumph of Sword's integrity as a writer and teacher. It is interesting to compare Sword's foresight, nearly a century ago, with that of modern educators. For example, in *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (1994), Gregory Cajete argues that native education will require a collective vision and an authentic dialogue between natives and nonnatives.

American Indian Persistence and Resurgence is an important book precisely because many native people today find it impossible to know "their" language and culture directly from the elders in their community. While pan-Indianism is a natural response to the disappearance of local language and culture, young people also look for a way to maintain the continuity of experience they sense from their parents and grandparents. Kroeber's book helps readers understand how the bridges might be built.

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