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people in my own world. Taking on Choctaw orthography is another question: although there are two “official” orthographies (one developed with linguistic consultation by the Mississippi Band of Choctaws and the other based on the missionary Cyrus Byington’s work and adopted by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma), in reality, writers seem to develop idiosyncratic spelling systems borrowed from many sources. Those who read Choctaw soon learn to tolerate all spellings short of hieroglyphics. When transcribing long speeches, the author uses a hybrid of the Mississippi system—accents and polish hooks on vowels, but an odd and inconsistent mix of symbols for fricatives—then, for other examples of Choctaw in the text, he uses clearly Byingtonian spellings. A word to the reader about orthography might have been prudent.

With respect to style and organization, the book makes some jarring switches in register from the strangely literary preface (xix): “be lured and lulled by the lights and shows and siren song of the Big Jackpot . . .” to the numbered outline of a “research problem” a few pages later. The body of the text similarly mixes dissertation-level jargon with homey descriptions of Choctaw lives, folksy editorial comments, and the use of the second-person (“you”) form of address. It seems that the intended audience for the book is both the academic and the general reader; as it is, both might be mildly frustrated with the book’s style, although ultimately both will gain appreciable knowledge and insight. I found my concentration being interrupted constantly by one of the 163 endnotes, a large fraction of which could have been profitably folded into the body of the text or dispensed with. The book’s main points are laid out in a rather peripatetic manner, leaving the reader to make inferences as she can manage to put the pieces together. The major example of this is the concentration in the early chapters on the fine points of the verbal art itself, saving the context until much later. I would have benefited from having the main points made early and decisively, showing how the prophetic form fits into the culture, then providing the close analysis. It was only in the latter part of the book that I was even convinced that the speech could indeed be called prophecy. Similarly, the list of prophetic themes is placed in an appendix at the end: familiarity with those themes from the beginning would have helped me to see the unity of this discourse and supported the author’s arguments.

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**Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths: A Critical Inquiry.** By Vine Deloria, Jr. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2002. 274 pages. \$24.95 cloth; \$18.95 paper.

No other Native American author is as prolific or as passionate in tackling controversial topics as Vine Deloria, Jr. For the past thirty years, he has set the standard for discourse on such topics as Native American religions, metaphysics, and social and political policy. *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths* again breaks new ground by extending his corpus to include a direct

and thorough inquiry into the polemical topics of the origin and development of the Earth and its inhabitants. Only an author of Deloria's reputation could undertake such a grand challenge.

Inspired by the decision of the Kansas State Board of Education in 1999 to omit the mention of evolution in its new curriculum, Deloria sets out to examine the background for this decision. He undertakes this examination with the intellectual skepticism that he has brought to other topics, and he carefully and thoroughly investigates both sides of this debate. He makes the strong case that neither evolutionary theory nor creationism alone—or some combination such as “intelligent design”—can explain the disparate data and provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomena. The depth and scope of the supporting scholarship further strengthen this case. (The text contains 372 endnotes and 79 original sources.) In fact, after reading the first six chapters of this work, a careful reader will be forced to pause and reconsider what he or she had previously held as certain with regard to the creation and the development of life on Earth. Especially compelling is Deloria's forceful critique of the science of geology and his argument for some form of catastrophism as an alternate agent of global creation and change found in chapter five.

Yet Deloria's goal is not simply to point out the inherent weaknesses and contradictions of these two “modern myths.” Although both are “passé,” they really “represent only a quarrel within the Western belief system, not an accurate rendering of Earth history” (ix). Deloria spends considerable time demonstrating that the debate between evolution and creationism is at its core parochial and exclusionary. Thus, the second goal of this critical inquiry is to move beyond the conventional discourse on both evolution and creationism and to build a case for including new evidence and views into the discussion. For Deloria, this means including non-Western traditions and experiences (157).

However, Deloria's extension of his argument beyond “the intellectual inconsistencies within the Western paradigm” seriously undermines the value of this text. He is correct that scholars of all sorts need to move beyond this paradigm, but where he moves to and how he moves there is problematic.

First, in order for Deloria to include non-Western (meaning non-scientific and non-Judeo-Christian) accounts of the origin and development of the world and its inhabitants, he must first demonstrate that Western approaches are fundamentally bankrupt. It is one thing to show that evolution and creationism in their current forms cannot adequately account for the origin and development of the world and its inhabitants. It is quite another to show that these approaches can *never* account for these events. Deloria goes to great lengths to demonstrate the need to include new and often unconventional information in these approaches. He discusses the need to synthesize the conventional and the unconventional (179–180). But he does not believe that Western science and scientists can perform this synthesis. Instead he sees a conspiracy within academia to prohibit scientists from engaging in the required synthesis. Deloria goes so far as to claim that this hegemony will lead scientists to lie to protect their theories (216). Although scientists—and

learned individuals of all disciplines—might be passionate and possessive about their respective views and theories, a hallmark of a scholar is his or her ability to review and consider other unconventional, and perhaps antagonistic, points of view. Scholars will, where appropriate, combine these alternate ideas with their own ideas to create a more robust and comprehensive view or theory (for example, Copernicus’s development of a theory of a heliocentric universe and the subsequent scholarly studies and debates that it produced). Additionally, the general availability of primary and secondary sources and the free flow of information on a global basis—especially on such global topics as Deloria is considering) will disallow the scholarly comportment and misconduct that he posits. On this point, Deloria is simply wrong.

Second, this move to a more inclusive explanation of the origin and development of the earth and its inhabitants might well require a new paradigm, but it certainly does not require an acceptance of diminished scholarly standards. Specifically, Deloria supports his argument for non-Western sources and theories with questionable reasoning and emotional pleas, both of which have no place in a “critical inquiry.” For example, he detracts from his argument by making unsupportable sweeping generalizations such as:

Our present knowledge is illusory because we have excluded so much data that the anomalies now outweigh doctrinally compatible evidence. (ix)

We have created a society in which science reigns supreme, and aside from occasional minor quarrels within the scientific establishment, there is no appeal to common sense, empirical evidence, or alternative explanation. (15–16)

We live in a scientific culture in which religion has long since lost its authority to speak to the most pressing issues of our time. (47)

If we are looking for certainty . . . we have no more assurance of truth or objectivity from the science of today than we do from the fundamentalist preacher, or from the alchemists and witch doctors of past ages. (54)

In spite of the pious assurances by geologists that the radioactive clocks are accurate, these “clocks” more resemble tarot cards of astrology. (93)

Deloria also sets up straw men instead of dealing head-on with the genuine issues:

No one can deny that on the practical, experiential front, this tradition of naturalism has made great inroads into the institutional religions of the West. Although couched in a New Age format and sometimes

presented almost cafeteria-style, these beliefs and practices are quickly replacing traditional Western interpretations of the world. (124)

Although passion is never absent in Deloria's work, in this study, he would be better served holding his feelings in check and instead presenting a cogent, consistently well-reasoned argument, supported by valid evidence.

Third, the use of rhetorical devices allows Deloria to introduce seamlessly new sources and evidence into the investigation of the origin and development of the world. These sources are the usual non-Western sources—traditional historical accounts preserved orally by non-Western peoples or writings by nonscientific/popular science writers (read: authors not on a university faculty). I will not take the bait and discuss Deloria's inclusion of the ancient astronaut theory as an example of a possible nonconventional source. He includes such sources because they offer nonlinear, non-Western accounts and therefore alternative accounts of creation and development. Specifically, according to Deloria, the Shoemaker-Levy 9 comet that struck Jupiter in 1994 was an event that should have awakened scientists and theologians alike from their dogmatic slumber and forced them to rethink seriously whether the life on Earth was created just once or several times through a series of catastrophic and cataclysmic events (such as meteor strikes that could have produced mass biological extinctions) (20). Deloria embraces this theory of catastrophism and the associated nonlinear theory of time as alternatives to both evolution and creationism (or Western science and religion in general) and uses non-Western, nonscientific sources to support both alternative theories and their inclusion into the discourse:

Almost universally, other (non-Western, non-Christian) people speak of a series of worlds prior to the present one, when things were entirely different on Earth, when other peoples and exotic animals were alive and prospering. In general, their memories are not fables, and contain some reasonably specific ideas that might be verified, given some openness. Depending on the tradition, people speak of "worlds" or "ages" when they are referring to the totality of the previous world, including humanoid creatures and their social structures as well as the physical world. Other people speak of "suns" when the cosmology was different from what it is today. These memories should be included in a rendering of secular, human history of the planet. (167)

There is no doubt that "traditional" non-Western, non-Christian people do speak of a series of worlds, multiple suns, and exotic animals—all caused (usually) by catastrophic events (floods, etc.). Deloria is right in his careful choice of words: these accounts are not "fables." But they are certainly not literal accounts of historical events. The use of these accounts to support his alternate theory is the biggest disappointment and shortcoming in the text. The scholarship that supports the examination and criticism of evolutionary theory and creationism is now replaced by Deloria's naïve (or deliberate, for that matter) attempt to include these sources within the critical inquiry.

First, even if the accounts are of historical events, there is no way that human memory can accurately recollect these events after thousands of years. Even more importantly, although these accounts are not “fables,” they are certainly myths in the sense described by Mircea Eliade: narratives of a sacred history, of an event that took place in “primordial time” (*Myth and Reality*, 1963, 5). Because these myths are fundamentally “non-historical,” they cannot be used to support a spatiotemporal theory of the history of the Earth.

It is easy to see why Deloria is drawn to these sources to support his theory of catastrophism. As Eliade writes:

Myths of cosmic cataclysms are extremely widespread. They tell how the World was destroyed and mankind annihilated except for a single couple or a few survivors. The myths of the Flood are the most numerous and are known nearly everywhere. . . . In addition to the Flood myths, others recount the destruction of mankind by cataclysms of cosmic proportions—earthquakes, conflagrations, falling mountains, epidemics, and so forth. Clearly, this End of the World was not final; rather it was the end of one human race followed by the appearance of another. (54)

But just because Deloria can find numerous instances of these myths does not mean that they are different descriptions of the same historical events. Deloria is too careful in his choice of language and too solid of a scholar not to recognize the distinction between eschatological and cosmogonic myths and historical, scientific accounts. Yet he claims, “we have no basis for rejecting their statements [the statements found in non-Western cultures on the multiplicity of worlds] except to say, as many academics are prone to, that we don’t believe them” (168). On the contrary, we can reject them because they cannot withstand the same rigorous scrutiny that Deloria demands of evolutionary theory and creationism. Using nonscientific sources does not mean accepting unscientific methods or standards of evaluation. The inclusion of these myths as support for his argument is extremely disappointing and seriously weakens the value this text would have had across major disciplines.

This criticism is not the bitter attack Deloria forecasts in his introduction, but rather an acknowledgment that Deloria is right: Western thinkers *have* become desacrilized and thus find it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions and experiences found in non-Western and non-Christian people. These dimensions should be a part of a rigorous study of life on Earth, but only if they meet the standards of scholarship that allow for the honest discovery of the truth. Deloria should have consistently followed his own admonition, that “we should demand that we be treated as adults—no more *Just So Stories* or religious myths need be fed us” (221).

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