

- Stevenson, Harold W. 1982. Influences of Schooling on Cognitive Development. *In Cultural Perspectives on Child Development*. Daniel A. Wagner and Harold W. Stevenson, eds. Pp. 208–224. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.
- Tomchin, Ellen M. and James C. Impara. 1992. Unraveling Teachers' Beliefs about Grade Retention. *American Educational Research Journal* 29(1):199–223.
- Tyack, David B. 1974. *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vincent, Guy. 1980. *L'Ecole Primaire en France. Etude sociologique*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.
- Walsh, Daniel J. 1989. Changes in Kindergarten: Why Here? Why Now? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 4:377–391.
- Wilkinson, Louise Cherry. 1988–89. Grouping Children for Learning: Implications for Kindergarten Education. *Review of Research in Education* (Ernst Z. Rothkopf, ed.) 15:203–223.
- World Bank. 1994. *World Development Report 1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wylie, Laurence. 1974. *Village in the Vaucluse*, 3rd ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Zazzo, Bianka. 1978. *Un Grand Passage: De l'Ecole Maternelle à l'Ecole Élémentaire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

### The Silent Indian as a Cultural Production

One of the most enduring images in the educational literature is that of the silent, underachieving Indian. After reviewing how other educational anthropologists have explained the silence of Indian youth in white classrooms, I would like to present an alternative perspective derived, in part, from field research among the Mesquakis. The Mesquakis are an Algonquin-speaking tribe of one thousand presently residing on a five-thousand-acre settlement in central Iowa. They have resided there since the Black Hawk wars of the 1840s, when they relinquished their old hunting grounds—roughly the present state of Iowa. Since the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Mesquakis govern themselves through an elected tribal council. Economically, the settlement is a low-income community with many social, economic, health, and educational problems. Tribal members work in the factories, nursing homes, and schools of central Iowa. The tribe also employs approximately three hundred adults in various tribal social service programs, a convenience store, and a multi-million dollar gambling operation.

Culturally, most Mesquakis still practice their native religion and speak Mesquaki. They are generally considered one of the most traditional Midwestern tribes. Educationally, the tribe runs a K–8 Bureau of Indian Affairs—contract school for approximately 25 percent of their youth. The remainder of the youth (two hundred plus) attend the K–12 program in Tama, an adjacent town of three thousand. This loss of children to the white-run town schools is a source of great consternation to many tribal leaders, and the Mesquakis have recently obtained a 7.5 million dollar grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for constructing a K–12 educational complex.

My recent year of fieldwork among the Mesquakis has special meaning for me because I went to Tama High school with many of the present-day tribal and town leaders. In addition to the usual participant-observation, informant, and interview data, I have many personal memories from which to draw. I also had access to an extraordinary set of historical materials on the Mesquaki. From 1948 to 1958, the University of Chicago ran an anthropological field school on the settlement. Professor Sol Tax and his students developed what they called an “action anthropology” project to help the Mesquaki (Gearing et al. 1970; Gearing 1970). The project initiated a successful college scholarship program and several unsuccessful economic development schemes. Further, Tax and his students

produced a variety of popular press materials on Mesquaki culture. They hoped that these writings would counter stereotypical and racist attitudes among whites. The fieldnotes from this project generally provide an exhaustive account of post-World War II Mesquaki society and culture. They serve as a benchmark for understanding cultural and educational change in present-day Mesquaki society.

In the full account of my fieldwork (Foley 1995), I conceptualize change among the Mesquakis since World War II as a process of ethnogenesis (Roosens 1989). This study chronicles both organized Mesquaki political activity and the tribe's broader "cultural and discursive struggle" against the ideological hegemony of mainstream American culture. Put succinctly, the civil rights era spawned a new, more assertive generation of Mesquaki political leaders. In the early 1970s, the American Indian Movement (AIM) inspired a series of racial confrontations in the local bars and schools. Since that time, the tribe has taken advantage of several federal laws to encourage self-determination and economic and educational autonomy. This new generation of leaders is building a tribal welfare state based on their social service programs and gambling enterprises.

On the cultural and ideological front, these new tribal leaders—the first Mesquaki generation with greater access to higher education—are also beginning to exert control over popular and academic representations of the tribe. A young tribal historian, a crusading journalist, a heart-stopping poet/novelist, a political cartoonist, and a host of drum groups and graphic artists are producing new representations of Mesquaki culture. These same leaders are also developing a more bilingual-bicultural tribal school program to preserve and transmit Mesquaki culture. It is within this historical process of ethnogenesis and ideological struggle that we must situate any discussion of "silent Indians" in white classrooms.

#### EARLIER ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPLANATIONS OF NATIVE AMERICAN SILENCE

Before presenting a small slice of my fieldwork, I would like to sketch how educational anthropologists have typically explained the silence of Native American youths in white classrooms. A number of educational anthropologists (Wax 1969; Dumont 1972; Philips 1974; Erickson and Mohatt 1982) document how white teachers are quick to read the silence of Indians as evidence of low motivation, lack of competence in English, or, worse still, low cognitive ability. This leads white teachers to lower their expectations for Indian students and include them less in classroom activities. These anthropological findings add further confirmation to the "self-fulfilling prophecy" explanation of failure in schools (Rosenthal and Jacobson 1968; Rist 1970).

In addition, these studies produce a sociolinguistic explanation of ethnic school failure (Foley 1991). This perspective emphasizes that speech style differences lead to miscommunication and low rates of student participation. Susan Philips' (1983) study of Warm Springs Indians illustrates this explanation of school failure particularly well. She portrays the "silence" that Indian youth

express in white classrooms as a widely shared, traditional speech style passed from generation to generation. She exhaustively describes how these youth learn to use less nodding and gazing, less body and facial movement, and a lower voice tone—all of which teaches the importance of stillness. Indian youth also learn to use visual channels of communication more, thus becoming keen observers who use subtle, indirect cues to get others' attention. Philips contends that Indian youth learn a very collective, democratic mode of communication which has no single adult authority. It is a speech style in which there is little competition for adults' attention, talking out of turn, and drawing attention to oneself as a speaker. In short, Indian students' tendency to be silent in white classrooms is due to their distinct, learned linguistic and cultural tradition.

Although this portrayal of the "silent Indian" has real merit, the work of another linguistic anthropologist, Keith Basso (1979), suggests a "cultural politics" dimension missing in Philips' sociolinguistic account. Basso's *Portraits of the Whiteman* describes how Apaches use such differences in speech styles to produce a cultural image of the whiteman. According to Basso, the white "other" of Apache jokes and stories is this back-slapping, garrulous, nose-y, arrogant, bossy, and rude person who asks too many questions and never listens. These self-indulgent, uncontrolled white creatures are lampooned as little children and old women who talk too rapidly in loud, demanding, high-pitched voices—yet imagine themselves to be chiefs and authorities.

Basso originally portrayed what critical theorists would label a "counter-hegemonic Apache discourse" against the stigmatization of Indians as "silent" inarticulate, unfeeling dummies. Although Basso frames his book as a classic sociolinguistic study, he ends up detailing how Indians symbolically invert the negative portrayal of their "silent" speech style. In the Apache discursive construction of the silent Indian, being silent becomes positive. The "silent Indian" becomes noble, humble, wise, communal, and egalitarian, while the loud, unsilent white "other" becomes ignoble, stupid, individualistic, and inegalitarian.

What Basso has done is lay bare the politics of how ethnic groups generally construct oppositional cultural identities through their expressive cultural forms. This type of cultural analysis, often associated with the performance school of folklore (Paredes 1971; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Limón 1994; Peña 1985), zeroes in on the political and power dimensions of speech play. From this general perspective, there *may be* objective speech style differences between whites and Indians, but what interests cultural performance scholars is the way each ethnic group uses discursive forms to produce a positive group image or identity.

Studies of identity-producing cultural performances provide an alternative critical paradigm for interpreting the silence of Indian youth in white classrooms. From this perspective, the expression of silence is much more than the simple enactment of learned language patterns and speech styles. It is part of a much larger discursive or ideological struggle between whites and Indians over cultural representations. With this point in mind, I would like to present a few examples

of the white discourses against which all Mesquaki adolescents must construct a group identity.

#### THE LOCAL IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR PRODUCING THE SILENT INDIAN

Like the educational anthropologists cited earlier, I observed many Indian adolescents sitting passively and silently in white classrooms. Like the white teachers in earlier studies, many teachers explained Mesquaki silence as shyness, backwardness, lack of English proficiency, and laziness. Lurking beneath these explanations was their view that federal welfarism had promoted the moral decay of the once noble Indian. In contrast, a few liberal white teachers stressed that Indians are racially oppressed, and have thus learned to be failures in an unforgiving, racist system. Two of these teachers recited views learned in classes on multiculturalism that sounded remarkably like Philips' perspective. In general, however, most local white educators still read Mesquaki silence as a cultural and linguistic deficit to be corrected by learning the white cultural and linguistic code.

This assimilationist perspective recurred in four basic narratives. For me these four narratives constitute a "discursive field" (Foucault 1972) which continually reproduces the hegemonic ideology of cultural assimilationism. First, white leaders have historically advocated an official policy of forcibly closing down the settlement school. They portrayed the Mesquaki-run tribal school as unprofessional and corrupt. According to them, Indian youths get a "superior" education in the academically advanced white town school. In response, the Mesquakis have always battled the Bureau of Indian Affairs and local white leaders to keep their tribal school open.

Second, whites consistently idealized *some* Indian students over others. Many white teachers extolled what Mesquakis call "town Indians" or "half-breeds." According to whites, the more traditional Indian youths sit silently because they lack the entrepreneurial drive of the semi-assimilated town Indians. Whites invariably illustrated this view with stories of exemplary Indians. In my era, it was Ben Warrior, a high school sports star, who eventually married a white woman and moved away from the settlement. In the current era, it was Len Moline, the first Mesquaki to be accepted into West Point. Len was raised on the settlement, but he eventually came under the tutelage of a prominent white lawyer. Len's denunciations of the settlement as a drunken, slothful, violent place received considerable play in Iowa newspapers. Whites were quick to celebrate him as an ideal role model for other Indian youth. Conversely, the Mesquakis saw him as either a traitor to his race or a confused pawn of whites.

Third, in contrast to these "super-Indians," whites portrayed most Mesquaki adolescents as indulging in a self-destructive cycle of drinking and dropping out. Most agreed that this cycle begins in junior high. Teachers generally attributed the high rates of substance abuse to "what goes on out there." In the white mind, the settlement was this dark, mysterious, dirty, unsafe place where Indian youths followed their alcoholic parents into despair, hopelessness, and violence. By the

high school years most Mesquakis became "at risk" students, and nearly 50 percent finished their secondary diploma in Indian boarding schools or in the local GED program.

Fourth, most whites portrayed the tribe's claims allotment policy as ruinous to Indian youth. In the 1970s the tribe received seven million dollars in reparations for lands taken during the 1830s. Approximately half of this money went into the tribal operations fund, and the other half was allotted equally to every tribal member. For the present-day Mesquaki youth who turn 18, their original share, plus interest, has grown to approximately twenty-three thousand dollars. The oft-told tale of how profligate Indian youth used this money goes as follows: After receiving their claims check the Indian youth drops out of school, buys and wrecks an uninsured car, loans his friends money freely, and drinks up his/her claims money. In this scenario, the passive, "silent Indian" of the classroom becomes the loud, irresponsible, "hell-raising Indian."

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Foley 1993), this ideological construction of Indian youth contains an element of truth. Many Mesquaki youth, especially the males, do go through an unusually long cycle of rebellion, drinking, and hell-raising. Some of these youth are very self-destructive, and as many as 50 percent drop out of school. But any fair-minded observer would note that their rebellion is also laced with moments of pride and self-valorization. Moreover, adolescent rebellion is a stage in life rather than a way of life. If one follows the lives of these rebellious youth over a period of years, nearly all marry and settle down into stable, productive lives in their tribal community. Observers bent on proving the need for cultural assimilation tend to greatly exaggerate the permanent effects of Mesquaki adolescent rebellion and hell-raising.

#### SOME OBSERVATIONS IN CLASSROOMS

Despite a good deal of open rebellion and hell-raising, most Mesquaki adolescents become "silent Indians" in white classrooms. It is important to note, however, that most Mesquaki children were initially anything but silent and passive. As Philips' study of Warm Springs Indians indicates, Indian students actually do not become nonparticipatory and silent until about the fifth grade. Observations in the Mesquaki tribal school and the testimonies of K-3 white teachers generally corroborate her findings. Mesquaki youth in the early grades were neither passive nor particularly silent. They talked and played like most other youth. More importantly, by fifth grade, unlike in the Warm Springs setting, racial peer groups developed. This led to almost daily battles on the playground and at the local swimming pool. Beyond the gaze of the teachers, the Mesquaki kids were quick to defend themselves. In white-controlled territories like classrooms, however, the Mesquaki youth were becoming "silent Indians." By high school, no more than a handful of college-bound Mesquaki students were verbally outgoing, and most teachers agreed, the Mesquaki youth were generally silent in their classrooms.

Conversations with white students undermine the teachers' sweeping portrayal of the Mesquaki students as silent. White students, especially girls, remember sarcastic remarks and whistles from clusters of Mesquaki boys hanging out in the hallways. White athletes recall Mesquaki players talking back and making fun of them when no whites were around. Several white students exhorted me: "Don't make them out to be angels because they aren't! They like picking on whites, and they do!"

One liberal white student, who supported a 1993 Mesquaki school walkout against racism, described how she saw white teachers responding to Mesquaki silence:

I heard there's a policy by teachers. If Native Americans don't want to answer, they can't keep asking the question. There must be a policy because they kinda act that way. Teachers let Native Americans stay in the back row and let them be. They give up and go on to others. They don't even ask them questions. If they do, the Native American kid just shrugs and says I don't know. They say that is how their culture is. They want to be left alone. The teachers need to try. It isn't fair to whites or Indians, I mean Native Americans. The deal is, lots of Mesquaki students don't really care. They don't work at school. They can't see any future in it.

This student went on to explain that many white students resent the non-participation of Mesquakis. They think their teachers have a double standard for Mesquakis because they are reluctant "to push Indians as hard as they do whites." They also think that Mesquaki kids take advantage of timid white teachers, who fear being labeled racists. For them, Mesquaki kids use the "silent Indian" image very effectively to avoid schoolwork. They persuade white teachers to accept their indifference towards school as a cultural difference.

When I tried this explanation out on Mesquaki ex-students, several laughed, and one admitted that they used, as he put it, "the old silent Indian thing" to keep white teachers off their backs. During one class, I observed a particularly politicized Mesquaki student use a stern, stoic posture to keep a rather timid white teacher at bay. Based on thousands of hours of interacting with Mesquakis, I have little doubt that they play with the whiteman's negative image of the silent Indian. During initial conversations, many Mesquakis responded with stern-faced stoicism and feigned ignorance. As time passed, the same people invariably dropped these postures. But as we shall see, silence is much more than a communicative practice that Mesquakis use strategically. Such a reading of Mesquaki silence imposes too sweeping a political reading on these speech acts. Being silent with whites means many different things to different Mesquaki students.

When I first started to explore the silent Indian image, I initially got a good dose of commonsense logic from tribal elders. I asked Lee Kingfisher, an old classmate and clan leader, why he and other Mesquakis were always so quiet in class. Lee answered my question with another question, "When you and other whites come out to the settlement, do you talk as much as you do in town?"

I sat there speechless, and Lee sensed he had an anthropologist in his muskrat trap. He said slyly, "Why not?" I had to answer, "Well, it's a strange situation. Anyone with any sense would hold back to see how you should act."

That brought a big smile to his face, and Leo said it was the same with Mesquakis. He was just trying to say that Indians are people like everybody else. If you have any sense, a strange situation calls for less talking. My grandfather, a taciturn Iowa farmer, could not have said it better.

There was a basic truth in what Leo was saying, but many other Mesquakis explained their reserve in the white schools in much the same manner that Susan Philips does. They emphasized that Indian children were brought up to listen and observe and to avoid calling attention to themselves like whites do. They described Indians as more shy and reserved than whites. Having seen such behavior in Mesquaki settings as well as in white classrooms, there may well be a cultural speech style difference between whites and Indians. Educational anthropologists' models of an "Indian speech style" may explain some of the reserve and silence of Mesquaki students.

On the other hand, this sweeping linguistic explanation becomes porous when filled with the narratives of Mesquaki students talking about their school experiences. When asked to explain why they sat silently in the back of white classrooms, Mesquakis recounted a variety of feelings and motivations. For example, youth counselor Andrew Peacemaker gave a poignant, less linguistic explanation of Indian silence in white classrooms:

When I look back on it, most of the Indian kids chose to sit in the back and were very quiet, but that is changing a little now. I didn't talk much because I wasn't sure if I had the right answer. I felt like the whites were looking at me and might laugh if I got it wrong.

As we talked, Andrew said he knew other Mesquaki kids who also had "self-esteem problems." Then he cited cases of other youth with whom he works who were bored with school and had many personal problems. For Andrew, silence in the classroom was either a self-esteem problem, or a question of boredom and indifference. Both of these themes occurred again and again in discussions with former Mesquaki students. Oftentimes, the theme of low self-esteem was entwined with a strong strain of rebellion and anger.

One excellent example of the complex emotions which feed silence was the experience of George TallTree's children. The three spent their early years in a nearby college town while their parents pursued college degrees. They recalled how strange it was to transfer from an urban school with no Indians to South Tama County High (STCH). After getting along well with whites at previous schools, they were suddenly constructed as a minority, and it was, "Us vs. them. We were no-good Indians. The white children on the bus did not want to sit beside us because they said we stunk." The brothers, Joe and Jack, remember junior high days as marked with gang fights between Mesquakis and "the better off white

kids who got all the praise and good grades." They all remembered teachers calling on these white kids more, giving them little privileges, joking with them. Both brothers and Sally remember having friends among whites who played sports or were farm kids, but "racial lines were hard to cross in the early 1980s." There was also very little interracial dating and few strong friendships.

Academically, all three eventually went to prestigious Iowa State University. Sally finished a B.A. in fine arts and is presently working on an M.A. in creative writing. Joe finished all but one semester in an engineering program, and Jack finished two years in engineering. All the TallTree children were A and B students in grade school, but finishing at STC High School was a very different matter. Sally stuck it out because she made white friends, "Eventually the farm girls in sports became friends, but white boys who dated Indians got a lot of crap about their 'squaws.' Being part white, we also got it from Mesquakis, even though we were enrolled." Meanwhile, her brother Joe sat quietly in the back of class until his junior year. His silence was a mixture of feeling angry and very bored, so he opted to drop out and do a GED.

In contrast, Jack was more openly rebellious, and he eventually got into trouble with the law. His story of quitting school and football during his senior year was told with a mixture of sadness, pride, and relief:

When I finally quit I went to school and turned in my books. Then I went to the football game that night. I was just standing there on the sidelines in my jersey watching. Several guys came up and asked me why I wasn't suited up. I didn't say anything because I had proven what I wanted to. I got good grades when I wanted to. I started on the varsity football team. It wasn't a big deal, so I just left.

So there was Jack making his final statement. Upon returning to Tama he had been made to feel inferior. He had gotten himself into trouble with drinking and drugs. He probably had some self-esteem problems, but he also wanted to prove that he was as good as rich white kids in academics and sports, and that "succeeding in rinky-dink STCH was no big deal." In Jack's story, he is standing silently and stoically at the whiteman's football game. Then, in one noble, heroic act he gives it all up and just walks away from his tormentors. Like many other stories that I collected, Jack's tale evokes the image of the noble, silent Apache (Basso 1979) in the face of a loud, insensitive white world. Although teachers called the TallTree brothers "drop outs," like many other Mesquaki youth, they were actually "push outs."

Too many white teachers, and even some Mesquaki educators, were quick to psychologize the silence of the TallTree brothers as a sign of low self-esteem. Indeed, the silent retreat of these youth, especially Jack, was laced with self-doubt and self-destructive behavior. In the cases of Sally and Joe, if they had self-esteem problems, it did not stop them from succeeding academically in a major university. These cases suggest that the feelings and motivations of Mesquaki youth, like all other youth, may often be complex and contradictory.

Basso's (1979) study of Apache storytelling helps underscore that the silence of many Mesquaki youth like Jack and Joe TallTree has a definite political edge. As indicated previously, these youth are part of a much larger verbal battle over cultural images that has escalated since the 1970s. Consequently, Mesquaki students' silent retreat is sometimes a very self-assured political statement. As University of Iowa graduate Len Firstley put it, "I sat there and said nothing because it was easier. I just wanted the whites to leave me alone." Len, who now runs the tribal housing program, was a quiet, self-assured kid. He dealt with what he considered loud, blustering whitemen by just sitting there quietly. Many other Mesquaki students who are now successful tribal leaders told essentially the same story.

Unfortunately, silent rebellion in the classroom does not lead most Mesquaki youth to the academic promised land. Too many Mesquaki students like Jack TallTree end up getting a GED. Others, like Debbie Rock Island, transfer to boarding schools like Flandreau "to get away from all the racial stuff." The GED and boarding school alternatives leave Mesquaki students less well prepared academically or less motivated to go to college. The price for heroic retreat into silence may be lost future educational opportunities. Although far quieter than the noisy, wise-cracking youth in other studies (Willis 1981; MacLeod 1987), many Mesquakis also end up dropping out. In their cultural milieu, it is often the honorable way of handling the garrulous, aggressive whites.

#### SOME REFLECTIONS ON READING AND PRODUCING CULTURAL IMAGES

So how are we to read the "silence" of most Mesquaki adolescents? As anthropologists like Philips (1983) have noted, there may be an objective, learned "Indian speech style" which uses less nodding, gazing, body and facial movements, and a lower tone of voice. Indians may also tend to talk out of turn less and rarely try to draw attention to themselves. To most white observers, both academic and nonacademic, Mesquaki students seem more reserved or taciturn. They seem to have a cultural speech style that is different from mainstream whites.

Although this linguistic perspective has general merit, Mesquaki silence or reserve can also be thought of as a strategic, situational speech style that ethnic minorities deploy during relations with whites (Foley 1990). From this perspective, a complex historical, political process of ethnic identity construction is taking place. Cultural groups in modern complex societies have no stable, essential cultural identities which are transmitted unproblematically from generation to generation. There are only "discursive moments" or "discursive skirmishes" between ethnic, gender, and class identity groups in the ceaseless production of shifting cultural images.

This perspective also assumes that the struggle over cultural representations takes place in a number of oral, written, and cinematic texts in the general sphere of popular culture, particularly in mass media and schooling institutions. Such

cultural institutions may be used to systematically misrepresent non-mainstream, ethnic groups. In response, these misrepresented groups often challenge and seek to control these mass-mediated images of their culture.

In my South Texas study (Foley 1990), I emphasized class differences in expressive speech styles. Working-class Mexicano youths resisted white domination through a rude, aggressive working-class speech style that constantly challenged the polite, deferential, deceitful speech styles of middle-class youth. Conversely, rebellious middle-class Mexicano youth learned how to manage their images and deceive and manipulate the authorities much like their middle-class white counterparts.

In sharp contrast, Mesquaki youth utilized rather different discursive resources. They tapped into a long, distinguished tribal memory of place and military resistance against the whitemen. They drew heavily upon the separatist ethic that Mesquaki traditionalists have always expressed. Mesquaki elders supplied their youths with a resistance discourse on the difference between white and Indian speaking styles. Like the Apaches (Basso 1979), Mesquaki youth grew up learning a cultural construction of their "silence" that emphasizes how the silent, noble, dignified Indian often fools or tricks the loud, rude, unobservant whiteman. This trickster tale was expressed orally in much everyday joking and humor. It was also in Ray Youngbear's (1992) novel, Jonathan Buffalo's (in press) history, and Everett Kapayo's (1986) cartoons. Disgruntled Mesquaki youth tapped and used this rich cultural construction of themselves as the noble silent Indian, thus reversing the negative connotations that many white teachers placed on their silence.

Unlike many Hispanics and African-Americans, few Mesquakis have ever wanted to be integrated into white society. They simply want to be left alone in their solitude. These youth constantly recounted their anger and indifference towards teachers and school. One youth spoke for many when he said, "I sit there and say nothing because it is easier. Teachers know I want to be left alone." Silence is this political retreat into a separate cultural space and identity far from the white world.

#### A FINAL NOTE ON DECONSTRUCTING MODELS OF THE CULTURAL OTHER

Having made a case for reading the silence of Indian youth in classrooms as a discursively constructed and contested image, I must, however, end with a cautionary note. Several recent works on Native Americans (Clifton 1991; Clifford 1989; Bruner 1985; Berkhofer 1979) provide insights into how anthropologists, literary figures, lawyers, and government bureaucrats have created the cultural identities of subjugated indigenous peoples. Bruner's (1986) incisive categorization of anthropological narratives as assimilationist and anti-assimilationist helps clarify that modern sociolinguists and critical theorists, like earlier social scientists, are a bit too anxious to side with down-trodden Native Americans. As a result, well-meaning liberal social scientists replace the old

assimilationist narratives with anti-assimilationist narratives that glorify their heroic political resistance—hence they replace one simplistic cultural image with another.

The poststructuralist critique of knowledge production (Foucault 1972) shows us that the disciplines that produce "cultural others" must deconstruct their own constructions. In addition, we knowledge producers must open up our totalizing, rationalistic models of linguistic and cultural behavior to those caught in complex historical articulations. One antidote for totalizing "scientific models" or "master narratives" seems to be a philosophical commitment to collecting many contradictory voices (Clifford 1988; Rosaldo 1989).

When I simply listened to the stories of Mesquaki youth, I heard a welter of different feelings. Despite the common cultural and political forces that made these youth rebellious (Foley 1995), they were still unique individuals. Everything in the stories of these youth was not heroic political resistance and self-constitution. Many expressed anger and rebelliousness against white rules and stereotypes. Yet some of these same students expressed a nagging self-consciousness about speaking in front of whites. Some admitted that they were afraid of sounding stupid, others that their English was poor, others that they were ignorant and lacked information. Still others were indifferent and distracted, rather than politically motivated.

In retrospect, it would seem that sweeping sociolinguistic explanations of Indian silence as a learned speech style are susceptible to glorifying the survival of traditional culture. Conversely, sweeping cultural production interpretations of Mesquaki adolescent rebellion are susceptible to glorifying cultural resistance and rebellious speech acts. Any interpretive model that overemphasizes rational, intentional linguistic acts of cultural preservation may miss the paradoxically self-destructive/self-valorizing quality of the silence of many rebellious Mesquaki youth. A comprehensive ethnographic account of how the silent Indian image is produced must include how local actors "articulate" (Hall 1980; Gilroy 1987) their own history. If we leave out the subjects of history, we may be left with the sound of our own discourses in the academic forest.

#### REFERENCES

- Basso, Keith. 1979. *Portraits of the Whiteman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Charles L. Briggs. 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19:59–88.
- Berkhofer, Robert F. Jr. 1978. *The Whiteman's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present*. New York: Vintage.
- Bruner, Edward. 1986. Ethnography as Narrative. In *The Anthropology of Experience*. Victor W. Turner and Edward Bruner, eds. Pp. 139–155. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Buffalo, Jonathan. in press. *A History of the Mesquaki People*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifton, James, ed. 1991. *The Invented Indian*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Press.
- Dumont, R. V. 1972. Learning English and How to Be Silent: Studies in Sioux and Cherokee Classrooms. In *Functions of Language in the Classroom*. C. Cazden, V. John, and D. Hymes, eds. Pp. 42-61. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Erickson, Fred and Gerald Mohatt. 1982. Cultural Organization of Participant Structures in Two Classrooms of Indian Students. In *Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action*. George Spindler, ed. Pp. 132-174. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- Foley, Douglas E. 1990. *Learning Capitalist Culture: Deep in the Heart of Tejas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- . 1991. Reconsidering Anthropological Explanations of Ethnic School Failure. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 22(1):60-85.
- . 1993. Mesquaki Sports as an Adolescent Rite of Passage. *Journal of Ritual Studies* 7(1):28-44.
- . 1995. *The Heartland Chronicles*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1972. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-77*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1977.
- Gearing, Fred. 1970. *Face of the Fox*. New York: Aldine.
- Gearing, Fred, Robert McNetting, and Lisa R. Peattie. 1960. *A Documentary History of the Fox Project, 1948-1959*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1987. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Hall, Stuart. 1980. Race, Articulation, Societies Structured in Dominance. In *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*. Pp. 306-324. Paris: Unesco.
- Kapayo, Everett. 1986. *The Larry Andy People Fun Book*. Tama: Mikona Publishing.
- Limon, Jose. 1994. *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- MacLeod, Jan. 1987. *Ain't No Makin' It: Leveled Aspirations in a Low-Income Neighborhood*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Paredes, Americo. 1971. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Peña, Manuel. 1985. *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working Class Music*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Philips, Susan. 1983. *The Invisible Culture: Communication in Classroom and Community in the Warm Springs Reservation*. New York: Longman.
- Rist, Ray. 1970. Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Schools. *Harvard Educational Review* 40:411-450.
- Rosenthal, Robert and Lenore Jacobson. 1968. *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Teacher Expectation and Pupils' Intellectual Development*. New York: Holt.
- Roosens, Eugene E. 1989. *Creating Ethnicity: The Process of Ethnogenesis*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Rosaldo, Renato. 1989. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Willis, Paul. 1981. *Learning to Labor: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Youngbear, Ray. 1992. *Black Eagle Child: The Facepaint Narratives*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.