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# **Blood-Speak: Ward Churchill and the Racialization of American Indian Identity**

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## **Abstract:**

After publishing a controversial essay on 9/11, Professor Ward Churchill's scholarship and personal identity were subjected to a hostile public investigation. Evidence that Churchill had invented his American Indian identity created vehemence among many professors and tribal leaders who dismissed Churchill because he was not a "real Indian." This essay examines the discourses of racial authenticity employed to distance Churchill from tribal communities and American Indian scholarship. Responses to Churchill's academic and ethnic self-identification have retrenched a racialized definition of tribal identity defined by a narrow concept of blood. Employing what I term blood-speak, Churchill's opponents harness a biological concept of race that functions as an instrument of exclusion and a barrier to coalitional politics.

**Keywords:** Ward Churchill, Race, American Indians, Agency, Vernacular Rhetoric

In 2001, Professor Ward Churchill published an essay entitled “Some People Push Back,” in which he argued that the 9/11 attacks were provoked by decades of American military conquest in the Middle East. Most notably, he referred to those who died in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as “little Eichmanns ... a cadre of faceless bureaucrats and technical experts who willingly (and profitably) harnessed themselves to the task of making America's genocidal order.”<sup>1</sup> Churchill's controversial claims were framed by an academic career investigating American Indian genocide and American imperialism, including nearly two dozen books, 70 book chapters, and a host of published articles.<sup>2</sup> Given the provocative character of Churchill's arguments and public sympathies concerning 9/11, it is not surprising that his comments eventually catalyzed strong reactions. Amidst widespread controversy over Churchill's remarks, Colorado University investigated Churchill in March 2005 on peripheral allegations of research misconduct and dismissed him in July 2007.<sup>3</sup> The investigation of Churchill placed his academic corpus under an unsympathetic public microscope. Former Colorado governor Bill Owens declared that “all decent people, whether Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, should denounce the views of Ward Churchill. Not only are his writings outrageous and insupportable, they are at odds with the facts of history.”<sup>4</sup> While 200 Colorado University faculty members defended Churchill, he was publicly castigated as a left-wing extremist. Churchill was also sharply criticized by many American Indian groups, including the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the United Keetoowah Band (UKB) of Cherokee, both organizations of which he claims to be a member.<sup>5</sup>

The Churchill controversy provides a useful site at which to examine the varied investments in public condemnation. For some American Indian scholars, claims of Churchill's academic misconduct overshadowed allegations that Churchill had fabricated his tribal membership.<sup>6</sup> After the *Rocky Mountain News* published Churchill's genealogy, reporting “no evidence of a single Indian ancestor,” Native rights activist Suzan Harjo called Churchill a “pseudo-Indian,” a “wannabe” who engaged in “identity theft” by “adopting Indian disguises for profit.”<sup>7</sup> The authenticity of Churchill's blood ancestry became a significant concern for American Indian scholars and activists because he remained one of the most publicly visible self-identified Indian intellectuals. Churchill had been afforded often undeserved latitude in speaking for American Indians. The dearth of visible Indian scholars in the academy enabled Churchill to make far-reaching claims about indigenous viewpoints without significant challenges to his credibility. It is particularly remarkable how Churchill's scholarship was embraced without little question by liberal white scholars. Churchill made the right arguments to endear him to white scholars who were sympathetic to but unfamiliar with American Indian studies. With the polemical style of Howard Zinn or Noam Chomsky, save their acumen for historical writing, Churchill made provocative claims that accessed the liberal guilt of the white academy. The veracity of Churchill's scholarship and identity now in question, important though troubling issues concerning the construction of ethnic identity confront American Indian peoples; the group left to grapple with the consequences.

Churchill's ethnic identity had not come under public scrutiny until 2005; nonetheless, much of Churchill's scholarship was already embroiled in the rhetoric of race and tribal affiliation. Churchill was among many writers, including Vine Deloria Jr., Clifford Lytle, Russell Means, Jack Forbes, and Glenn Morris, who vigorously critiqued formal legal criteria for determining

Indian identity, including the use of the federal “blood quantum.”<sup>8</sup> Churchill disabused many tribal leaders for what he argued was complicity with enforcing a “eugenics code” created by Euro-Americans.<sup>9</sup> When questioned about his own Indian identity, Churchill responded tongue-in-cheek: “I can report that I am precisely 52.5 pounds Indian—about 35 pounds Creek and the remainder Cherokee—88 pounds Teutonic, 43.5 pounds some sort of English, and the rest ‘undetermined.’ Maybe the last part should just be described as ‘human.’”<sup>10</sup> Performing the role of a polemist, it is not surprising that evidence indicating that Churchill had allegedly fabricated his Indian identity would invite blistering criticisms. Some Indian groups were simply eager to distance themselves from Churchill's remarks to avoid entering a political atmosphere unsympathetic to Indian interests. Some were appalled that he was perhaps not even Indian. The UKB severed their relationship with Churchill and released several statements that he “does not speak for the United Keetoowah Band and he is not a member of the UKB.”<sup>11</sup>

Churchill is a perplexing public figure whose controversial scholarship and questionable identity forced tribal communities to confront the meaning of the term “Indian.” Whereas his writings on 9/11 disturbed the national conscience, the troubled status of his identity places Indian communities in the precarious position of provisionally defending a claim to “Indianness” that destabilizes an important legal category or rejecting his postmodern tactics of self-identification and upholding exclusionary notions of race. Churchill is a difficult figure to either accept or reject because he occupies a space of radical ambivalence. Jodi Byrd explains it is because he is a “liminal figure who is invalidated or invalidating Indianness through his presence, activism, and scholarship [that] has created a quagmire in which it is difficult to criticize or support Churchill without reproducing colonialist understandings of Indianness.”<sup>12</sup> The controversy over Churchill's identity engages deeply historical questions concerning tribal membership, blood, colonialism, and authenticity.

Communication scholars have inquired into either the argumentative structure or reception of Churchill's contested memory of 9/11.<sup>13</sup> Very few have theorized the texture of the public controversy over his tribal identity or considered the implications of evaluating the credibility of Churchill's scholarship and identity by his own notion of “Indianness.”<sup>14</sup> Critics have overlooked how the Churchill controversy shapes the contested nature of contemporary Indian identity. National Indian news sources and intellectuals condemned Churchill for disingenuously engaging in ethnic self-identification. His polemics on tribal affiliations were reduced to cynical ploys to justify his own scholarship and interests. Without “real” Indian blood, Churchill's attempts to identify as Indian were seen as inauthentic. This controversy warrants broader inquiry because the symbolic notion of blood at work in both condemnations and support for Churchill elaborate the contemporary challenges of American Indian identity and has implications for status of Indian scholarship. The use of “blood” to index and determine Indian identity has had detrimental effects on American Indian societies; however, blood may be a strategically necessary discourse to protect the categories that provide some protection for American Indians. Whereas the blood quantum objectifies Indian identity, some tribal uses of blood standards may be part of an effort to introduce subjectivity under the law; to make blood cohere with the values and experiences of Indian communities. When these battles are staged in the university, they have profound consequences for who is authorized to conduct research and speak about indigenous issues.

Utilizing the discourses contesting Churchill's claims to Indian identity, in this essay I examine the cultural and political implications of blood discourses for American Indian communities and scholars. I argue that in response to Churchill's ethnic self-identification, some American Indian scholars have retrenched a racial definition of tribal identity defined by a metaphor of blood. Employing what I term *blood-speak*, Churchill's opponents harness a biological concept of race that functions as an instrument of exclusion and a barrier to coalitional politics. By emphasizing the centrality of blood in the performance of Indian identity, blood-speak reduces cultural authenticity and community membership to biological ancestry. I contend that the types of arguments advanced against Churchill's self-identification mimic historic debates about the role of blood in constructing Indian authenticity and make it a salient feature of American Indian scholarship. Focusing on whether or not Churchill is a "real Indian" overlooks both his positive contributions and his relevant failures. Given the paucity of American Indians in the academy, the presumption that Churchill must be an Indian to do good scholarship severely narrows the number of possible contributors from across a range of disciplines and identities. In my analysis, I am guided by Michael Yellow Bird's assessment that rather than promoting valuable discussion about indigenous scholarship, "the issue generally serves as a flashpoint for finger-pointing."<sup>15</sup>

### **Blood Idioms and the Racialization of Tribal Identity**

The question of who is an "authentic" American Indian is divisive and involves access to resources, protections, and personal empowerment. Identity is difficult to measure because it is an individual and collective self-perception, a lived experience, and a socio-political category under which groups forge communities, attain political rights, and seek empowerment. Nonetheless, the legal definition of Indian identity is measured by a blood quantum, which calculates the percentage of Indian ancestry to determine eligibility for civil protections and services. Racial definitions of tribal identity have had some profoundly negative impacts on many American Indian nations; however, blood and race occupy ambivalent positions within many American Indian communities. While the employment of blood metaphors to describe race is a European invention, attitudes toward blood as a standard for tribal citizenship vary, typically divergent between traditional, newly traditional, and nontraditional communities. The disparity depends on different nations' ability to attain federal acknowledgment and manage scarce tribal resources. For some traditional communities, essentialized notions of Indian identity can function strategically, even when such concepts conform to Western standards of racial authenticity. The Flathead of Montana successfully adopted a stricter blood quantum to address federal claims that they were fully acculturated and therefore appropriate candidates for legal termination.<sup>16</sup> As a result, they were able to retain their federal status. Blood has offered a platform for some tribes to limit the size of their nations and make strong cases for federal acknowledgment.

Indian blood retains a unique status under the law in relation to other racial categories. Whereas a number of slavery and anti-miscegenation statutes codified that any percentage of African blood automatically categorizes an individual as black, the blood quantum treats Indian blood as diluted and therefore requires higher proportions to consider an individual to be Indian. Vine Deloria Jr. attributed this disparate treatment to material interests. While white institutions enslaved and denied African Americans access to education, social services, and equal protection, they "force-

fed the Indian what [they were] denying the black.”<sup>17</sup> Whereas the irreducible degree of African blood ensured perpetual enslavement and segregation, the diminishing nature of Indian blood guaranteed legal extinction.<sup>18</sup> American Indians’ historic claims to sovereignty made assimilation, rather than segregation, the prevailing practice of institutional racism in the federal government’s dealings with Indian nations.

Indian identity is not defined by top-down legal definitions alone; it is a self-conception that arises out of material conditions and lived experiences.<sup>19</sup> There are many individuals who identify as Indian, but do not conform to established criteria. Conversely, there are those who meet relevant blood quanta, yet are acculturated and do not identify as Indian. Karen Blu observes that unrecognized and nontraditional tribes such as the Lumbee of North Carolina refuse to adopt any blood criteria for citizenship.<sup>20</sup> For the Lumbee, Melinda Maynor argues that “holding such a strict boundary maintains the dominant paradigm of racial markers and limits the possibility of new revelations, from whatever origin, that will help us perpetuate our families, homeplace, kinship networks, and religious experience.”<sup>21</sup> Like many nontraditional Indian communities, the Lumbee perspective on identity is intersectional, influenced by their unique uptake of Christianity and integration of African American members. Nontraditional tribes are characterized by hybrid identities fused by intermarriage and adoption, and as a result are less invested in blood ancestry than some recognized tribes. Even recognized nations shaped by generations of intermarriage such as the Mashpee Wampanoag ground membership in shared history, geography, and social ties.<sup>22</sup>

Even when used strategically, blood discourses have divisive effects. The National Congress of American Indians has strenuously opposed Lumbee recognition because they are not considered Indians by blood.<sup>23</sup> Kimberly Tallbear argues that the racial ideology that accompanies blood discourse conflates biological essence with cultural membership and works to the exclusion of a more dynamic notion of tribal identity that “include[s] being born within the tribal community, marrying or being adopted into the community, long-term residence within the tribal community, and the assumption of cultural norms such as language, religion, and other practices.”<sup>24</sup> Blood-based standards for community membership mathematically shrink tribal citizenship and undermine the unique status of tribes as political entities. These potential consequences contribute to Melissa L. Meyer’s conclusion that even in its strategic use, blood politics “would not spare tribes or individuals from the destructive consequences of basing policies on racial criteria.”<sup>25</sup> The use of blood to construct tribal identity and determine cultural authority imports and inscribes an often unwieldy dominant racial ideology.

Prior to a European arrival, many Native nations determined membership through a combination of kinship and familial relationships. Present-day tribal enrollment reflects practices established by nineteenth-century treaties that bestowed specific tribal rights and allocated resources to those individuals recorded by a formal census. The first names recorded were those individuals of mixed Indian ancestry. These individuals were charged by the Bureau of Indian Affairs with distributing tribal land and federal resources.<sup>26</sup> The racial principle undergirding this enrollment policy was that Indians possessing a degree of “civilized” blood retained a higher degree of mental competency and would provide a good assimilative model for full-blooded traditionalists.<sup>27</sup> Some scholars trace the legal codification of blood to the Dawes Act (1887).<sup>28</sup> This law established

“rolls” or lists of tribal members collected by an enrollment commission and later used to determine ancestral descent; however, many tribal members resisted and abstained from tribal rolls under the assumption that the policy was designed to dispossess tribal lands. Historians note that because many traditionalists refused to be counted, the Dawes Commission enrolled more accommodating tribal members, as well as many non-Indians and fictitious names.<sup>29</sup> The Dawes rolls continue to be referenced by the federal and tribal governments to determine an individual's degree of Indian blood. Indian nations retain the right to determine their laws and membership requirements, though this power is within contrived Euro-American boundaries and can be preempted by the federal government.<sup>30</sup> Some tribes require that members obtain a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) before they are granted citizenship. The CDIB is a legal document that certifies an individual possesses a specific amount of American Indian blood. As a result of varied tribal laws, the CDIB may be a necessary but insufficient condition for membership. For example, the White Mountain Apache of Arizona employ a minimum of one-half tribal blood ancestry, while others such as the Choctaw merely require individuals to demonstrate genealogical descent from an individual member.<sup>31</sup> In addition to requirements for tribal citizenship, the federal government employs a one-fourth blood quantum to determine eligibility for educational benefits and social services.

Blood has transformed into a common-sense idiom to ascribe racial identities. Jane M. Gaines contends that constructing “racial markers as natural signs always throw up resistance to arguments about the constructedness of race. The ‘blood’ is a great naturalizer of social relations and has historically made a significant contribution to the ideology of the natural, that widely embraced view of things that has done so much to help institutional racism.”<sup>32</sup> The constructedness of blood is not a case for its irrelevance; however, arguments to nature are often the handmaiden of ideology. Blood resonates because of its association with the compositional substance of human life: it sustains life by delivering nutrients and oxygen to the cells of the human body and cleanses by removing its waste products. Blood's microscopic, elemental, and life-sustaining qualities make it an enduring metaphor for larger social organisms and life processes. Blood idioms stand for familial (“bloodlines,” “blood is thicker than water,” “blood brothers”) as well as caste or class relationships (“blue blood,” “royal blood”). Elsewhere, blood connotes communal bonds and even exploitation (“life-blood,” “blood-oath,” “blood-sucker”). Even Karl Marx described surplus value and the prolongation of the work day under capitalism as “the vampire[']s thirst for the living blood of labour.”<sup>33</sup> Jeffery Bennett explains that blood serves as a metaphor for civic participation and connectedness among citizens. Consequently, the exclusion of gay male blood donations serves as the de facto exclusion of queer identities from public culture.<sup>34</sup> These examples demonstrate the common-sense nature of blood to relay connectedness and communicate the social transfusion of behaviors, traits, and values.

Since the nineteenth century, blood has been a central metaphor to describe a biological concept of race and has served as the primary conduit by which theories of race were introduced into American Indian cultures.<sup>35</sup> Eva Marie Garrouette writes that in nineteenth-century theories of race, blood was understood “quite literally as the vehicle for the transmission of cultural characteristics.”<sup>36</sup> One central problem with cultural transmission theories is that indigenous cultures are always by definition in decline. Mixed-blood and partially assimilated individuals

were expected to behave “more civilized,” their declining proportion of uncivilized blood making them “Indians in diminishing degrees.”<sup>37</sup> The influence of the blood quantum is no less salient under present-day circumstances. The combined effects of intermarriage and impossibly restrictive blood quanta constitute the soft path for terminating recognized Indian tribes and attaining vast sums of tribal lands.<sup>38</sup>

Blood metaphors are also ideological. Many scholars find that race is a construction contingent upon a confluence of historical and geographic factors, rather than any innate biological facts.<sup>39</sup> Ian F. Haney Lopez writes that race refers to “a vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry.”<sup>40</sup> Rather than biological meanings, “social meanings connect our faces to our souls”<sup>41</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant explain that race functions ideologically by affecting the ways in which marked bodies and their attendant social structures are constructed, organized, and ruled. Racial formations “connect what race *means* in a particular discursive practice and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized, based upon that meaning.”<sup>42</sup> Though these advantages are strategic, they discriminate against those who as a result of forced removal, assimilation, and exogamy do not meet the blood quantum. Without more holistic definitions of citizenship, blood quanta can be shifted to support ruling factions within Indian nations. Some nations with lucrative gaming operations have been accused of using stricter blood criteria to unenroll members in order to collectively share in higher profits.<sup>43</sup> Also, in 2007 the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma expelled tribal members who were decedents of African American freedmen because, as a result of intermarriage, they no longer possessed a requisite amount of Indian blood.<sup>44</sup> As nations such as the Cherokee rely on blood to protect the distinctiveness of their national identity, they marginalize active participants in Cherokee culture and history.<sup>45</sup>

The Churchill identity controversy most directly impacts the politics of identity in American Indian scholarship and advocacy. For nearly two decades, Churchill published research in American Indian studies as a self-identified tribal member. Much of his research was critical of the federal blood quantum and endorsed a fluid concept of “Indianness.” Churchill’s critique of blood is a defense of his own position as someone with a tenuous Indian identity but who represents a coalitional ally in the academy. Prior to the investigation of Churchill, there were fewer questions concerning his identity with either members of his AIM chapter in Denver or other Indian scholars. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn finds that across minority groups in the academy, American Indian scholars receive the highest amount of scrutiny over the authenticity of their identity. Biological authenticity is often employed to dismiss the arguments of these scholars, yet “no one asks how much Egyptian Naguib Manfouz is, nor do they require that J. M. Coetzee provide proof that his citizenship and identity is embodied in tribal African nationhood.”<sup>46</sup> An emphasis on the purity of cultural expression can disempower those with hybrid identities as well as non-Indian scholars who wish to conduct coalitional research. Churchill is one of many controversial public American Indian figures to be accused of being inauthentic. Other activists such as Russell Means, Dennis Banks, Clyde and Vernon Bellecourt, and other founders of AIM faced similar criticism from traditionalists for being too urban to speak and act on the behalf of Indian peoples.<sup>47</sup> Yellow Bird argues that identity discussions in the academy tend to be unproductive and divide communities

of scholars that should be working in concert to advance American Indian causes. Concerning Churchill, he writes: “I endorse the truth no matter where I find it. Whether Professor Churchill is Indigenous or not, is enrolled or not, or is of a certain blood quantum, is of little or no consequence to me since I am, and always have been, centrally concerned with pro-Indigenous activity.”<sup>48</sup> In much the same way that tying citizenship to blood creates arbitrary in-groups and out-groups, the demand that American Indian scholarship be racially authentic excludes allies outside of established blood criteria.

### **Blood and Vernacular Discourse**

Blood-speak manifests in contentious feuds over who possesses the racial authenticity to act and speak as a member of an Indian community. Joane Nagel notes that in addition to a demographic resurgence in Indian culture following the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the growing number of individuals self-identifying as Indian has forced Native communities to carefully consider their boundaries.<sup>49</sup> Self-identified Indians rose from approximately one-half million in 1960, to 1.8 million in 1990, to 2.5 million in 2000.<sup>50</sup> Tribal affiliation affords greater access to federal money earmarked for Indian social services, educational benefits, and other treaty-guaranteed rights. It also provides access to fellowships, grants, and career advancement opportunities in education. For example, despite never earning a PhD, Churchill was hired and received tenure at Colorado University under the assumption that he was a member of UKB.<sup>51</sup> While many so-called “new Indians” have cultural and familial ties to historic or existing Indian communities, the concern is that the fluid dynamics of self-definition may empower those with fabricated ancestries to exploit their newly adopted identities for personal gain.<sup>52</sup>

Racial authenticity creates important discursive and representational challenges for Indian communities. Blood discourse complicates the enactment and expression of rhetorical agency, broadly understood as a communicative capacity or competence that is constrained and enabled by elements external to the self. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell explains that because agency is a competence that must be recognized by other members of a community, it is necessarily communal. Agency is “constrained by externals, by the community that confers identities related to gender, race, class, and the like on its members and by doing so determines not only what is considered to be ‘true,’ but also who can speak and with what force.”<sup>53</sup> Competence is demonstrated through the display of good will, shared interest, and reasoned judgment, but also “constrained and enabled at times by material structures and communal practices.”<sup>54</sup> Blood complicates the symbolic dimensions of agency because it supplants artistic displays of competence with immutable racial structures. By redirecting the source of this authority internally, blood-speak subverts discursive norms that typically enable political participation.

Blood discourse attains the status of common-sense because it functions as both a strategic rhetoric and an organic expression of American Indian identity.<sup>55</sup> The existence of Indian voices defending racialized notions of identity lends credibility to the idea that it is a vernacular, rather than colonial, definition of community. Kent Ono and John Sloop caution against uncritically championing marginalized discourses as counterhegemonic “by virtue of the discourse being vernacular.”<sup>56</sup> Vernacular discourses—those diffuse and non-institutional discourses that resonate within marginalized communities—ideally affirm marginalized identities while challenging dominant

culture; however, because vernacular discourses help construct marginalized groups' collective identities, they inevitably create distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. Notions of what constitutes authentic vernacular discourses eventually become normalized, mainstreamed, and in some instances institutionalized. Bounded identity is not necessary essentialist or undesirable; however, using certain notions of authenticity can negate the lived experience of Indian identity and vernacular expressions of community empowerment within those institutions. Thus, it is not merely that identities are affirmed by and within marginalized communities, but rather *how* those identities are affirmed that determines the liberating potential of vernacular discourse and how those demands are countered by dominant culture.

Ono and Sloop argue that criticizing vernacular discourses for complicity with dominant ideologies alone does not achieve the project of critical rhetoric. Therefore, they turn to what they call "outlaw discourses," which explicitly reject dominant logics and turn societal assumptions on their head.<sup>57</sup> While certainly a worthwhile endeavor, the problem with applying this approach to some contemporary American Indian discourses is the conflicted and binary character of what constitutes authentic Indianness. For example, blood discourses can uphold dominant racial ideologies, yet to champion self-identification as an outlaw discourse would ignore how such practices also undermine valuable dimensions of tribal authority. The search for outlaw discourses in American Indian rhetoric presumes there is a certain degree of authenticity to be found outside of the mainstream. The tension between Churchill's identity and scholarship is a case-in-point. Churchill deconstructs and disavows dominant notions of Indian identity while also claiming Creek/Cherokee heritage. He purports to be a practicing historian while disabusing those who engage in historical writing. The point here is to suggest that binary notions of law/outlaw tell us little about what is emancipating. Law and outlaw are contingent categories that require contextual analysis. For example, within outlaw communities critics could again identify tacit norms and codes that function as a microcosmic mainstream and therefore replicate logics of domination. Searching for authentic spaces in vernacular criticism can fall prey to the problem of infinite regress. Vernacular agency in American Indian studies and tribal communities should not be an either/or proposition.

By demonstrating how dominant racial formations masquerade as organic expressions of communal agency, this discussion complicates how critical communication scholars should understand the relationship between vernacular discourse and agency. Vacillating between immutable racial categories and postmodern self-identification, constructing an acceptably inclusive American Indian identity becomes elusive. Whereas some communication scholars critique the concept of agency as the illusory residue of modernist subjectivity, American Indian identity construction is unique because it is situated between concepts of racial authenticity and the postmodern politics of self-identification.<sup>58</sup> Under immutable categories of race, socially recognized subjects are afforded less credibility than those who are racially marked. Under fluid notions of self-identification, Indianness is a performance that affirms an individual's self-worth. The danger with both discourses is that they either exclude or dilute advocates with strong social ties to Indian communities who could potentially advance Indian causes. Note here that there are other ways of conceptualizing American Indian identity outside of discourses of blood. Prior to the blood quantum, one could be considered a member of a tribe by assuming the behavioral norms

of that community. Belonging was not a matter of genealogical relationships or performative enactments, but of acting as a member of the community and of being socialized into the community's most intimate habits and rituals. Unfortunately, the extreme positions examined here reduce Indian identity to either everything or nothing, and exclude more responsible and emancipating notions of community membership.

### **Ward Churchill and the Politics of Blood**

To analyze the racial contours of the Ward Churchill controversy, I examine expressions of Indian identity in *Indian Country Today*. I interpret the editorial content from American Indian scholars over the year following the publicity of Churchill's ethnology (February 2005 through the end of the year). I selected this time because it was the most vitriolic period of discussion concerning Churchill's identity, the stories repeating themselves thereafter. During this period, *Indian Country Today* published six reports and three editorials covering both charges of Churchill's academic misconduct and his ethnology, nine guest editorials from American Indian authors dealing specifically with the question of Churchill's identity, and one letter to the editor. I focus on guest editorials because they were selected as "representative" of the viewpoints of prominent Indian leaders. The viewpoints they present are not comprehensive, but the selection process shows a framing practice at work that shapes the contours of how Indian identity is deliberated in national Indian forums. I direct a substantial portion of my criticism on Churchill's most prominent and outspoken critic, Suzan Harjo. Harjo is the President of the Native rights organization the Morning Star Institute and a prominent Indian activist. I focus on Harjo because she is an opinion leader in Native activism and a leader in national Indian politics. She offers the most comprehensive and vehement critique of Churchill, shaping the tone and content of the extant debate. I use the other published opinions to support my analysis.

I focus on *Indian Country Today* because it is one of the most widely circulated news sources devoted to Indian issues, written by Indian authors for an Indian audience. While *Indian Country Today* does not represent a full spectrum of Native voices, it is a space where many American Indian professors and public intellectuals routinely comment on issues that affect Indian Country. The newspaper reports an average weekly circulation of 13,000 and in the words of the newspaper, remains the "the strategic connection point for disparate Native communities, as well as non-Native people/organizations that need true insight into Indian country issues on a national level."<sup>59</sup> The paper is a hybrid vernacular space where marginalization meets the mainstream. Mainstreaming does not necessarily negate the ways marginalized communities negotiate their collective identity or facade to mainstream culture. With institutionalization comes a certain degree of integration into dominant power structures; however, American Indian scholarship itself is premised on advancing indigenous voices within and against the dominant institutions. While *Indian Country Today* constitutes only one of many public venues for American Indian issues, its authors and content speak to the internal dynamics of disparate Indian communities.<sup>60</sup> Since the debate over Churchill's identity has implications for American Indian scholarship, it is important to find the discourses of those positioned within the academy.

I employ critical methods borrowed from Bernadette Calafell, Fernando Delgado, Kent Ono, and John Sloop, in their interpretations of how fragmented texts invent collective identity. For

example, in his reading of *Low Rider Magazine*, Delgado explains how published letters to the periodical “provide culturally and rhetorically illustrative fragments of what Latina/o identity terms mean to those who use, and are addressed through, them.”<sup>61</sup> Examining textual fragments of Latina/o expressions, Delgado is able to reconstruct the varied, complex, and conflicting ways in which individuals invent community. Calafell and Delgado argue that piecing together wide swaths of cultural expressions of identity “makes visible power relations among subjects by exploring the textual fragments of a culture.”<sup>62</sup> Since Native expression lacks mainstream presence, expressions of Indian identity are similarly diffused and fragmented.<sup>63</sup> The expressions of Indian identity in *Indian Country Today* show how particular notions of racial authenticity are normalized within Indian academic communities and how blood assumes a common-sense stature. I identify three main arguments present in ethnic controversy over Churchill: (1) Churchill lacks authority derived from Indian blood; (2) Churchill's physical appearance and behavior are inauthentic; and (3) Indian identity is a commodity that is owned, not exercised.

### **Blood is Authority**

Churchill declared a variety of Indian affiliations throughout his academic career. On his first curriculum vitae, he stated he was Creek and Cherokee; elsewhere Muscogee and Metis.<sup>64</sup> Staff editorials on Churchill concurred with ethnologist Hank Adams' findings that there were “zero Indians” in his lineage.<sup>65</sup> Throughout the editorials, Churchill's entire family lineage was dissected, analyzed, and then thoroughly debunked. Ethnologists traced his genealogy to ancestors in early nineteenth-century Illinois and found that he was predominantly German.<sup>66</sup> One editorial notes that Churchill's white ancestors were even implicated in hostilities against American Indians:

Churchill has cited a possible Indian ancestor six generations back on his mother's side named Joshua Tyner, born in 1767. According to the *Rocky Mountain News*, Tyner's mother Abigail and several siblings, said to be European, were killed and scalped by Creek Indians in an apparent family feud. His father Richard later remarried to a Cherokee woman. In a military pension application, Tyner said he served “as a spy and private, ranging the frontier against the hostile Indians.” When he died in southern Illinois in 1838, one account said he was buried “Indian style.”<sup>67</sup>

With very careful attention to detail, *Indian Country Today's* editorial staff present Churchill's family history as one wrought with conflict between American Indians and whites. Through innuendo, Churchill is identified as being white by blood and a saboteur by family tradition. The purpose of this exercise was not merely to deny his claim to tribal ancestry, but to undermine his ability to speak as an authority on American Indian issues.

These texts emphasize that the unverifiable nature of Churchill's blood claims makes his scholarly claims suspect. Several editorials first dissect his heritage before turning to his scholarship. A February 3 editorial argues:

Churchill's Indian status is not verifiable in the usual ways of checking into tribal membership . . . . He has claimed membership in the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokee, but reliable representatives from the tribe deny Churchill is or ever was, or has blood relatives on their rolls. He was granted an “associate certificate” by a former leader of the tribe (later impeached) for services supposedly rendered, not due to blood relations—but even the tribe declines to exactly identify what that means.<sup>68</sup>

Suzan Harjo argued in her April 13 editorial that, “in Churchill's case, he says 1/16 Cherokee, although he's not been able to produce any evidence to support any claim of being any Indian of any nation”<sup>69</sup> These editorials construct identity as a verifiable fact determined by approximate measurements of blood, rather than by association or ad hoc affiliation. Harjo is certainly correct that an ad hoc affiliation alone does not make an individual an invested member of an Indian nation. Ideally, Churchill's affiliation with the UKB should have obligated him to leverage his academic clout to do work that advanced their goals and interests. In fact, an honorary membership was granted to Churchill so that he could write the UKB's history, a task he never completed. Nonetheless, these editorials place verifiable blood as an important criterion for community membership and scholarly authority. Churchill's real failure was not that he did not possess Indian blood; it was that he did not use his position within the academy to champion the voices of the UKB.

Some editorials admit to a certain degree that Indian blood is not an absolute requirement to participate in American Indian scholarship; however, it augments the type of claims a scholar can advance. In a March 2 editorial, Patti Jo King argues that self-identified Indians are incapable of feeling empathy toward those who possess Indian blood. She writes:

Churchill lacks a believable Native identity and family history. He can't empathize with Indians because he has nothing at stake . . . . He utilizes postmodern techniques, plunging into Indian matters he does not fully understand and attempting to represent them. Sadly, the Indian community will suffer the consequences of his recklessness again.<sup>70</sup>

Here, identity and family ancestry give scholars a stake in advancing American Indian communities; presumably, less is on the line for Churchill if he lacks Indian blood or blood relatives. Prefacing her critique of Churchill's disposition and arguments with a criterion of a “believable” Indian identity belies her criticism by reducing his ability to empathize with an ethnic deficiency. Furthermore, these editorials conclude that self-identification is not just disingenuous, but an inauthentic cultural representation. As a result, inauthentic ethnic scholars have no right to make claims on behalf of Indian communities. A February 10 article argues:

[T]hat is the issue of Churchill's self-developed history of how and why he should be considered an American Indian and thus be further legitimized as a spokesman for Native peoples in the views he spouts. To seemingly manufacture an identity, bargain for it as an individual and then pose from such a dubious base within a university the most vocal and radical positions on behalf of North American Indians, gives the appearance of impropriety and perhaps even professional deception.<sup>71</sup>

In this case, it is not necessarily the radical nature of his claims—though those claims do come into question—as much as it is his lack of organic authority to make those claims on behalf of others. One editorial supports this proposition by concluding that “we will defend a good Indian argument in these pages any time. But, again, there is no evidence that Churchill is Indian.”<sup>72</sup>

Churchill defends his identity throughout his writing by deconstructing the notion of Indian identity. Of course, this defense was received as an attack on Indian leaders for complicity. Churchill argues against the concept of the “tribe” because it is based on racial hierarchies, preferring the concept of a “nation” because it allows more fluid self-identification. This argument, however, did not alleviate the anxieties of those Indian scholars who find both blood relationships

and the experience of being an Indian important criteria of authority. For example, Harjo argues that Churchill's defense of his identity is in fact proof that he is an imposter because he critiques enrollment policies in a deliberate attempt to undermine tribal leadership. "Churchill lashed out against tribal leaders, sovereignty, citizenship and rolls, attacking Native people who did not support his claims as 'card-carrying Indians' and 'blood police.' Then, he went tribe-shopping."<sup>73</sup> Therefore, the more Churchill argued against formal criteria for Indian identity, the more he positioned himself as against Indian communities. Such blistering criticism is understandable given that Churchill has taken some extreme positions on issues of American Indian identity. King argues that Churchill's defense of his identity makes him look less credible, appearing as if he lacks a "common stake in the affairs of Indian Country."<sup>74</sup> Here, what is at stake is the ways in which Churchill's criticism of tribal membership and racial categorization strategically uses the fluidity of racial categories to skirt the question of ethnicity. King continues to argue that Churchill deliberately destabilizes racial categories in order to secure his own authority in scholarship. She argues Churchill "combines hackneyed stereotypes, postmodern gibberish, and radical buzzwords to coax naïve individuals to accept his authenticity."<sup>75</sup> King and Harjo's criticisms of Churchill's arguments concerning blood and race construct Indian identity as more rigidly categorical than they perhaps intended. They reject the idea that racial categories are contingent and constructed, and inadvertently defend a type of Indian authenticity that requires verifiability and legal classification. In their efforts to repudiate Churchill, these scholars construct race as a fixed category.

### **Indian Aesthetics**

Churchill's critics argued that his physical attributes and public persona conclusively prove that he is not a real Indian. This theme appears in appeals to common-sense understandings of how real Indians are supposed to both look and act. As an aesthetic judgment, critics of Churchill assert that "real Indians" can be determined and judged by a combination of physical attributes and corresponding cultural behavior. First, a number of references to Churchill's physical features imply he is white. For example, Harjo relays the story of how she came to know Churchill:

I met Ward Churchill 15 years ago, before he gained his present infamous reputation. My friend, a college professor, said this Cherokee-Creek guy wanted to meet me. I expected to meet an earnest young student who would relate to me as Creek (I'm Hodulgee Muscogee on Dad's side and enrolled Cheyenne on Mom's). Instead, there was Churchill. Caucasian in appearance and in his mid-40s, he was wearing dark glasses and going for the look of an Indian activist circa 1970.<sup>76</sup>

Harjo makes an aesthetic judgment of Churchill's claim to Creek/Cherokee heritage: he violated her expectations that a Creek/Cherokee would perhaps have dark hair and skin, high cheekbones, and other identifiable Indian phenotypes. While Harjo is armed with a number of reasonable criticisms of Churchill's scholarship and claims to tribal membership, her introductory narrative raises questions concerning her standards of authenticity. What purpose does it serve to mention his Caucasian appearance? In her study of racial ideologies in Cherokee society, Circe Sturm explains how both implicit and explicit phenotypical arguments are a part of racial hegemony in which how a "freedman or a white-Cherokee, will be socially classified as Cherokee and/or Indian depends on how various racial markers intersect with other important indices of identity in a given social context, at a particular moment in time."<sup>77</sup> Regardless of Churchill's actual identity, the

presumption of an Indian racial aesthetic has historically reinforced the exclusionary relationship between Indian features and social privileges. As a result, this argument conflates race and culture, ignoring how exogamy and amalgamation confound existing color-lines.

Harjo also implies that Churchill attempts to disguise his whiteness by wearing an Indian activist costume, accompanied by dark glasses and adorned with Indian symbols. AIM's Grand Governing Council also argued this point in their repudiation of Churchill, when they point out that "Ward Churchill has been masquerading as an Indian for years behind his dark glasses and beaded headband."<sup>78</sup> Both authors imply that Churchill made a deliberate effort to look authentically Indian; however, in the process these authors assume a common-sense image of Indianness, easily identified underneath elaborate costumes. The further implication made by Harjo is that Churchill can adapt his disguises to different groups to achieve specific social privileges. Though he does not persuade his outspoken critics, some worry his contrived Indian appearance may mislead and garner authority with some Indian audiences. Simultaneously, his Caucasian features afford him the racial privilege of whiteness: to not be discriminated against based on apparent racial markers. Harjo concludes that "Churchill will not be discriminated against on the basis of being Indian, but he is placing our children and grandchildren in harm's way by creating ill will and hostility against Indians. Native kids and elders who actually look Native are the ones who suffer from the blowback."<sup>79</sup> While Harjo's concern about the denigration of Native racial marks in dominant culture is reasonable, setting up her argument as a comparison between protecting the interests of those who "look Indian" and those attempting to look Indian limits the racial scope of her concern. Perhaps more the result of unfortunate word choice than a conscious decision, Harjo's quip advances a type of racial ideology that, when deployed in other contexts, has served as an instrument of exclusion.

Though Harjo's criticisms are problematic, Churchill is also responsible for his personal affect. If we take Harjo's criticism seriously, then Churchill's adornment of a caricatured American Indian style also participates in an essentialist and stereotypical presentation of Indian life. If identity is merely a "eugenics code" as Churchill would have us believe, his mimicry is disingenuous to his critique. Self-identification is not simply a declarative act; it may also involve a cultural performance in which individuals choose to literally embody the subject positions of their new found identity. As Rey Chow explains, the "fashionable talk these days of performing ethnicity ... is in part the mimetic enactment of the automatized stereotypes that are dangled out there in public, hailing the ethnic."<sup>80</sup> Eager to be accepted as a member of an ethnic community, self-identifiers may embody the worst stereotypes that circulate throughout mainstream culture. Some choose to adopt stereotypical Indian names and personal style in an effort to gain acceptance and self-affirmation.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Churchill's critics expressed concern that he performs an inauthentic and stereotypical notion of Indianness. The irony, one editorial notes, is that "Churchill has projected the image of an angry Indian who became notorious for being in the face of non-Indians as much as possible—even though the evidence builds that he is, himself, non-Indian."<sup>82</sup> The authors elaborate that Churchill represents the "angry Indian" or "Indian on the warpath," a stereotype embedded in Euro-American consciousness. Specifically, "Churchill projects the image of the quintessential American Indian activist and/or warrior angry, defiant, insulting, forceful, and accusatory. Churchill sometimes captures the historical truth of a thing, but only to load it like

deadly ammunition into his ideological machine gun.”<sup>83</sup> In this passage, the author recognizes that at times Churchill elaborates critical historical insights; however, argues that the aesthetics of his persona construct a stereotypical image of American Indians. Similarly, in a March 18 editorial, Professor James Fenlon argues that “America has a difficult enough time accepting our collective history and current struggles for social justice without muddying the waters with simplistic, mean-spirited and wrongheaded claims of complicity.”<sup>84</sup> These arguments also presume that anger, force, and defiance are not only unproductive tactics, but are always inauthentic expressions of Indian identity. Although it is the case that there are appropriate and inappropriate times for the use of confrontational politics, they are practices that have been strategically employed by historic American Indian social movements to achieve important gains. For example, confrontational politics were employed throughout the 1960s and 1970s in a number of insurrectional occupations, most notably protest events at Alcatraz Island (1969–1971) and Wounded Knee (1973).<sup>85</sup> In their historical context, young Indian activists challenged the conventional wisdom embraced by the older national Indian leadership that “Indians don’t demonstrate.”<sup>86</sup> Similar to the case study examined herein, many scholars have argued that mainstream political leaders and the national press also denied that these protests were authentic expressions of American Indian discontent, claiming either that radical protests did not represent the majority of Indian Country or that the protestors did not act like “real” Indians.<sup>87</sup> It is certainly not the case that American Indian activists shied away from militantly challenging dominant culture and entrenched Indian leadership; yet here the authors make the same mistake and presume there is an authentic style to Indian politics.

These discourses express concern that Churchill presents a stereotype that somehow mystifies a more pure, authentic Indian identity that is characterized by politeness, eloquence, and civility. Framed and synergized by claims elsewhere that Churchill is without Indian blood, these discourses establish a standard of Indian eloquence in which “real Indians” behave according to norms of civility, and pseudo-Indians are militant, angry, and indecorous. In reference to Churchill’s comments on 9/11, a February 3 editorial argues “this is not the way to represent American Indian peoples,” and that “Churchill’s remarks on the subject reflect easy ideological posturing in the face of horrible personal tragedies that befell so many families. His lost real point, that Americans need to pay more attention to the suffering they cause in the world at large, has been made by others in much more perceptive and eloquent ways, so that those who should hear it most will be able to receive it more readily.”<sup>88</sup> While each article examined expresses specific concern with Churchill’s writings on 9/11, the authors reiterate disgust with Churchill’s personal style of self-presentation as an Indian subject. For example, one author writes that “to call the people who were murdered on Sept. 11 ‘little Eichmanns’ is a hideous expression that when combined to Churchill’s mistaken Native identity can only poison the public discourse concerning American Indians.”<sup>89</sup> The concern is that if Churchill is believed to have Indian blood or a legitimate claim to self-identification, he would embody the stereotypically naïve, militant Indian who is incapable of civility. “Real Indians” look and act a specific way.

For Harjo, then, the solution is to winnow real Indians from imposters through the process of unmasking. She writes that because “[a]ll pseudo-Indians are mercenaries ... it’s often hard for communities to know what they’re dealing with until and unless there is an unmasking.”<sup>90</sup> Arising to the challenge of self-identification, Harjo proposes that “psuedo-Indians” be publically exposed

so that real Indian communities are not misled. Thus, she assumes that any Indian who ascribed to Churchill's viewpoints, or accepted him as an Indian scholar, must have been led astray or duped. For example, Harjo criticized Indian activist Russell Means, who rallied to Churchill's aid, by calling him Churchill's "mouth piece."<sup>91</sup> As Harjo's argument proceeds, since they are concerned about their own identity first and foremost, self-identified Indians can never have the interests of real Indians at heart. Unmasking self-identified individuals would purge American Indian communities of those who adopt Indian disguises and lack any legitimate claim to authenticity.

### **Identity Theft**

Many of the editorials construct Indian identity as a commodity as opposed to a lived experience. Harjo uses the consumer metaphor of "tribe shopping" to suggest that Churchill adopted "Indian disguises for profit."<sup>92</sup> In her caricatures of different categories of "pseudo-Indians," Harjo describes Indian identity as an object to be guarded against the potential threat of self-identification. She writes that "lying about being Native is more like identity theft, using a stolen passport or falsifying sworn documents. It is not victimless."<sup>93</sup> The description of Indian identity as an owned object derives from the material benefits afforded to those who can make a legitimate legal claim to either tribal membership or blood relationships. Harjo argues that Churchill pretended to be Indian in order to gain both employment at Colorado University and an advantage in publishing his scholarship. Churchill "is now concocting a tale that he believed he was Indian by family mythology, to which he applied zero critical examination. He needs to explain how this thread became specific to varying Native nations and became a special tribal, cultural experience that gave him the edge in employment and publishing."<sup>94</sup> Harjo explains that prior to his employment at Colorado University, Churchill did not claim to be Indian; "then, he went tribe shopping" and "started listing his various 'Indian' credentials on resumes as he moved into academe."<sup>95</sup> According to Harjo, Churchill also used his newly found ethnicity to gain national notoriety in AIM, quoting the American Indian Grand Governing Council: "he used [Denver AIM] to attack the leadership of the official [AIM] with his misinformation and propaganda campaigns."<sup>96</sup>

These passages highlight how authenticity is understood as a commodity that can be leveraged for material benefits. Harjo hints at the central issue with self-identification: individuals without Indian blood may gain access to legally guaranteed resources set aside for those with Indian blood. The risk is that those like Churchill may "con kind-hearted, trusting people into validating them as Indians."<sup>97</sup> Harjo's concern is that there are a variety of disguises under which pseudo-Indians may steal, defraud, or dispossess the rightful identity of real Indians. She contends that pseudo-Indians can be classified as four types. The "eager beaver" is a "wannabe" who enthusiastically adopts Indian identities as a hobby, and is eager to prove their adopted identity by championing Indian causes. "The difference between Indian and non-Indian eager beavers on the one hand and pseudo-Indian eager beavers on the other is that the pseudo-Indians are the ones pretending to be something they are not: Indians."<sup>98</sup> The second and third categories are the "weeping willow" and the "prickly pear." These individuals, when questioned about their identity, divert the issues by constructing themselves as victims of merciless persecutors: "the weeping willows duck the answers and sob on the shoulders of peaceful folks about the mean 'inquisitors' who hurt their

feelings, when all the weepers are trying to do is to help the Indian people (as opposed to the mean Indians who don't do anything to help the people).”<sup>99</sup> Prickly pears also “attack anyone who doesn't support their false claims about their Indian-ness, usually accusing the questioners of being pseudo-Indians.”<sup>100</sup> The final category, however, is the most provocative: “spies in disguise.” Such individuals are cultural saboteurs whose “Indian persona is also calculated for effect.”<sup>101</sup> While Harjo argues that Churchill met all four of the categories established, the last introduces deep suspicions that Churchill carries malintent toward the very people who he claims to represent. King also speculates that because Churchill lacks authenticity, his goals must therefore be suspect:

Churchill lacks authenticity ... Churchill's goal is the disempowerment of American Indians. What better way to achieve this objective than masquerading as a member advocate of the very group he seeks to enfeeble? His motivation remains a matter of speculation. Some believe he is a ‘wannabe,’ a man of generic ethnicity striving for authentication through the theft of a more ‘exotic’ Indian identity.<sup>102</sup>

The presence of inauthentic individuals in American Indian culture and scholarship represents a proverbial fifth column that threatens to destabilize authenticity from within. Self-identification is the theft of an object that belongs to authentic individuals, always the result of self-interested or nefarious motives, and threatens to destabilize the categories of Indian identity. There is a strong and problematic investment in stable categories of identity. The authors’ responses to the problems of self-identification are to promote suspicion that the stable legal categories of Indian identity are at risk, that it is the job of real Indians to protect the integrity of the borders of authenticity. By placing everything at stake, these authors promote a reactionary response to Churchill that reifies authenticity as the standard of judgment.

### **Challenging Blood-Speak**

Unfortunately, Harjo buries her most insightful criticism in her conclusion. She concludes that “it is important for people who deal with affirmative action and the honor system in educational settings to understand that being a tribal person is not a matter of self-declaration or a racial matter. It is a political, legal matter. It is citizenship and only a Native nation can determine its citizens.”<sup>103</sup> Her concern is that Churchill does not have a political affiliation with a federally recognized tribe, rather than a requisite quantity of Indian blood; however, Harjo's assertion that Native nations retain the sole right to determine citizenship is misleading given that the federal government has frequently denied tens of thousands of Indian citizenship claims. Political affiliations do not guarantee authenticity any more than the right to determine citizenship ensures a full measure of Indian sovereignty. But to the degree that Churchill lacks communal recognition by Indian peoples, it is reasonable to expect that he would lose the ability to speak for American Indian communities. Nonetheless, arguments about his blood belie efforts to foreground the political features of Indian interests. Likewise, the most exclusive definitions of Indian identity may cast out well-intentioned allies, and even race-traitors who may potentially advance American Indian causes.

Most importantly, blood discourses divert attention from both the real contributions and the failures of Churchill's scholarship. Throughout his career, Churchill took extreme positions on issues of significance to indigenous people, even criticizing American Indians for complicity with historic practices of domination. As a contrarian, Churchill performed a valuable social role. He provoked uncomfortable conversations and agitated people out of complacency. Though

unpopular, his arguments concerning 9/11 introduced an interesting line of inquiry into violence and responsibility. Many noted activist Indian scholars, such as Vine Deloria Jr., engaged in polemical arguments to disrupt prevailing complacency. Deloria explains:

I have taken extreme positions in regard to them because too often Indian people are so polite that they refuse to insult anyone by bringing up the fact he is giving them a hard time . . . . And that is my greatest concern for the Indian people. That we will be so damn polite that we will lose everything for fear of hurting someone's feelings if we object to the way things are going.<sup>104</sup>

Unlike other well-known Indian polemicists, Churchill did not develop a record of working with Indian communities. As a tenured professor, he could have used his position to advance and transform rather than simply criticize American Indian leadership. The dearth of American Indian scholars in the academy afforded Churchill the unfortunate privilege of not being critiqued for his own misconduct. Duane Champagne notes that even many non-Indian scholars “have been able to achieve excellent and long-term rapport with Indian people, have had their scholarship and consulting work significantly benefit tribal communities, and have earned approbation of the tribal communities they serve.”<sup>105</sup> Regardless of ancestry, Churchill's decision to affiliate with American Indian communities carried with it tremendous ethical responsibilities.

Russell Means concludes that on balance, relatively little is to be gained by denying the identity claims of outsiders. He laments that “we have Indian people who spend most of their time trying to prevent other Indian people from being recognized as such, just so that a few more crumbs—crumbs from the federal table—may be available to them, personally.”<sup>106</sup> When authenticity supersedes pragmatism, coalition politics suffer. Churchill's rhetoric will not augment existing laws concerning tribal citizenship, limited as they may be. Blood discourses most directly affect the credibility of those who conduct research and advocate for the advancement of indigenous peoples and question how Indian identity fits within a racialized society. Rather than criticize American Indian scholars for complicity, I argue that Indian communities have a much stronger set of arguments to advance when faced with representational challenges. To be fair to those who expressed vehemence, there are pragmatic reasons to distance themselves from Churchill. Excising Churchill through discourses of blood may have been a strategic cover to protect American Indians in a political atmosphere hostile to tribal sovereignty. In the early part of the twenty-first century, parochial interests threaten to unmake tribal sovereignty. Anti-Indian organizations such as the Citizens for Equal Rights Alliance exert powerful influence and lobby against tribal rights.<sup>107</sup> American demand for tribal energy resources has placed American Indian self-determination in danger of being superseded. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 gave the US government the power to grant rights of way through Indian lands with permission of the tribe if in the furtherance of strategic energy development projects.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, conservative groups such as David Horowitz's Students for Academic Freedom have targeted ethnic studies programs, calling them liberal doctrinaire, racist, and anti-American. Evidence of this movement's success, Arizona banned ethnic studies curricula in K–12 schools in 2010.<sup>109</sup> With so much resistance to American Indian issues—particularly in the Rocky Mountain region—it is not necessarily surprising that American Indian communities would distance themselves from controversy.

Strategic uses of blood discourses have long-term consequences. When racial or ethnic markers come to stand in the place of rhetorical competence and vice-versa, we lose sight of the dynamic

and performative dimensions of identity that enable greater degrees of political agency. Racializing tribal identity as a response to the challenge of self-identification sacrifices the political and associative dimensions of Indian identity that can build coalitions between those with and those without official tribal membership. In the only editorial during the time period examined that did not formally rebuke Churchill, Professor Scott Lyons argues that emphasis on Churchill's ethnicity diverts important critical attention from more important issues facing American Indians:

[E]ven if he is a white man ... my question is: so what? It's not like an author of his stature and reputation needs the helping hand of affirmative action to land a job. He doesn't write about himself. ... If Churchill is in fact 100 percent white—which no one will ever know for certain—then what exactly would that make him? Seems to me he would then occupy that time-honored position of a colonizer “going Native;” that is, taking on the habits and perspectives—not to mention the politics—of the colonized. He would be what racial theorists call a “race traitor;” one who denies and decries “white privilege” by refusing to participate in “whiteness” as a system of privilege. How exactly would that harm Indian people? I know real Indians who do a lot worse.<sup>110</sup>

Lyons' comment suggests that accusations do very little to protect Indians and come at a high cost. If the denunciation of Churchill is also a rehearsal for emerging conflicts over identity, this essay poses fundamental questions as to how vernacular responses can be crafted to protect Indian interests without excluding potential allies.

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## Notes

1. This essay is reprinted in Ward Churchill, *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of US imperial Arrogance and Criminality* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), 19.
2. See Ward Churchill, “Summary of Fallacies in the University of Colorado Investigative Committee Report of May 9, 2006,” [wardchurchill.net/27-Resp\\_FallaciesofReport\\_5\\_20\\_06.doc](http://wardchurchill.net/27-Resp_FallaciesofReport_5_20_06.doc) (accessed June 11, 2009).
3. The University of Colorado investigating committee report is available at <http://www.colorado.edu/news/reports/churchill/churchillreport051606.html>. The investigating committee accused Churchill of “plagiarism, fabrication, and falsification.” The committee alleged that in at least six different articles he fabricated stories that the US Army intentionally distributed blankets infected with small pox as a form of biological warfare. The committee also alleged that Churchill wrongly argued that the Dawes Act established the federal blood quantum. In 2007, Churchill filed an unlawful termination lawsuit against Colorado University. In April 2009, a jury found he had been wrongfully terminated for political considerations and awarded him \$1 in damages. See Kirk Johnson and Katharine Q. Seelye, “Jury says Professor was Wrongly Fired,” *New York Times*, April 2, 2009, [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/us/03churchill.html?\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/03/us/03churchill.html?_r=1&hp) (accessed June 11, 2009).
4. Bill Owens, “Governor Owens Letter Calls for Churchill to Step Down,” <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/4151452/detail.html> (accessed June 10, 2009).
5. American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council, “Statement of the American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council,” <http://www.aimovement.org/moipr/churchill05.html> (accessed October 18, 2009); and Jim Adams, “Churchill Controversy on Two Fronts,” *Indian Country Today*, February 3, 2005, <http://www.indiancountry.com/content.cfm?id=1096410295> (accessed October 23, 2009).

6. I use the term “American Indian” and “Indian” in the place of other ethnic descriptors. Terms such as American Indian, Native American, First Peoples, Indigenous, among others are the source of much controversy even among activists. Whenever possible, I try to use specific national descriptors, however, given that the subject matter of this essay defends coalitional politics, the use of collective descriptors serves an analytical purpose. AIM founder Russell Means defends the terms “American Indian” and “Indian” “because I know its origins . . . . As an added distinction the American Indian is the only ethnic group in the United States with the American before our ethnicity. . . . We were enslaved as American Indians, we were colonized as American Indians, and we will gain our freedom as American Indians, and then we will call ourselves any damn thing we choose.” See Russell Means, “I Am an American Indian, Not a Native American,” <http://www.peaknet.net/~aardvark/means.html> (accessed December 17, 2007).
7. Kevin Flynn, “The Churchill Files,” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 4, 2005, 24A, <http://denver.rockymountainnews.com/news/churchill/indexDay1.shtml> (accessed June 11, 2009); and Suzan Harjo, “Why Native Identity Matters: A Cautionary Tale,” *Indian Country Today*, February 10, 2005, <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/archive/28171539.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).
8. See Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984); Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Russell Means and Marvin J. Wolf, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996); and Ward Churchill and Glenn Morris, “Key Indian Laws and Cases,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. A. Jaimes (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 13–21.
9. Ward Churchill, *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in Native North America* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1993), 333.
10. Ward Churchill quoted in M. Annette Jaimes, “Federal Indian Identification Policy: A Usurpation of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America,” in *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. A. Jaimes (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 123.
11. “UKB August Regular Council Meeting Minutes,” *Keetoowah News*, September/October 2007, <http://www.keetoowahchoke.org/documents/09-07.pdf> (accessed April 12, 2010).
12. Jodi A. Byrd, “Living My Native Life Deadly”: Red Lake, Ward Churchill, and the Discourses of Competing Genocides, *The American Indian Quarterly* 31 (2007): 327.
13. See John Fritch, Catherine Palczewski, James Farrell, and Eric Short, “Disingenuous Controversy: Responses to Ward Churchill's 9/11 Essay,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 42 (2006): 190–205; C. Richard King, “Some Academics Try to Push Back: Ward Churchill, the War on Truth, and the Improbabilities of Interruption,” *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies* 9 (2009): 31–40. Erika G. King and Mary DeYoung, “Imag(in)ing September 11,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 32 (2008): 123–39; David Schultz and Mitchell Reyes, “Ward Churchill and the Politics of Public Memory,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 11 (2008): 631–58; and Catherine H. Palczewski, “When Times Collide: Ward Churchill's use of an Epideictic Moment to Ground Forensic Argument,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41 (2005): 123–38.
14. See Michael Yellow Bird, “On the Justice of Charging Buffalo: ‘Who Stole American Indians Studies?’ Redux,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 91 (2007) 91–9; and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, “Scandal,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 91 (2007): 85–9.
15. Yellow Bird, “Charging Buffalo,” 92. It is important to note here that Yellow Bird was called as a witness in Churchill's trial. Yellow Bird testified that Churchill's account of the US Army's distribution of blankets infected with small pox was coherent with his nations' oral history. Yellow Bird is Assistant Professor of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas.

16. Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 243.
17. Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press), 173.
18. For an extended history of this line of racial reasoning see Forbes, *Africans*, 191–207; and Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1990).
19. I am primarily guided by sociological theories of structuration, notably the proposition that human identities are performed within and governed by a priori social structure. For Giddens, human agency is governed by pre-existing social structures, though such structures are impermanent and are reflexively shaped by human action. Bourdieu makes a similar observation when theorizing the notion of *habitus*: that human agency is shaped by (and shapes) acquired habits that are reflective of internalized and inherited social conditioning. The purpose of this essay is to be reflexive: to explore both enabling and disabling notions of agency and structure. See Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984); and Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1984).
20. Karen L. Blu, *The Lumbee Problem: The Making of an American Indian People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
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33. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume 1* (New York: Random House, 1906), 282.
34. Jeffery A. Bennett, "Passing, Protesting, and the Arts of Resistance: Infiltrating the Ritual Space of Blood Donation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 23–43.
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37. Garroutte, "Racial Formation,".
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47. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 136–7.
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49. Joane Nagel, "False Faces: Ethnic Identity, Authenticity, and Fraud in Native American Discourse and Politics," in *Identity and Social Change*, ed. Joseph E. Davis (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 81–108.
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55. See Renee Ann Cramer, "The Common Sense of Anti-Indian Racism: Reactions to Mashantucket Pequot Success in Gaming and Acknowledgement," *Law & Social Inquiry* 31 (2006): 313–41.
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60. I acknowledge that *Indian Country Today* is a mainstream newspaper that frequently omits radical and dissenting voices. Nonetheless, I approached this text because it embodies the strongest mainstream Indian backlash against Churchill and therefore features the type of preeminent voices I seek to critique. I am not suggesting these voices represent all of those in *Indian Country*, simply that the newspaper provides an exemplary showcase of public Indian intellectuals as they distance themselves and American Indian scholarship from Ward Churchill.
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62. Bernadette Marie Calafell and Fernando Delgado, "Reading Latina/o Images: Interrogating *Americanos*," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21 (2004): 6.

63. For an explanation of veracity and fragmentation in Native texts, see Jason Edward Black, "Native Resistance Rhetoric and the Decolonization of American Indian Removal Discourse," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95 (2009): 66–88.
64. Jim Adams, "Colorado U Caught in Fracas Over Professor's Remark," *Indian Country Today*, March 16, 2005, A2.
65. Suzan Harjo, "Why Native Identity Matters: A Cautionary Tale," *Indian Country Today*, February 10, 2005, <http://www.indiancountrytoday.com/archive/28171539.html> (accessed October 20, 2009).
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73. Harjo, "Cautionary Tale."
74. King, "Questionable Identity."
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77. Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 110.
78. American Indian Movement Grand Governing Council, "Statement." It is important to note that this statement was reprinted in *Indian Country Today* on February 4, 2005 (accessed via Lexis Nexis Academic on November 6, 2009).
79. Harjo, "Cautionary Tale."
80. Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 118.
81. Nagel, *Ethnic Renewal*, 239.
82. *Indian Country Today*, "Nazi Comment."
83. *Indian Country Today*, "Churchill's Identity."
84. James Fenelon, "The Problem of Ward and 'Indian' Issues," *Indian Country Today*, March 23, 2005, A3 (accessed via Lexis Nexis Academic on April 26, 2007).
85. See Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, ed., *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

86. This was a slogan embraced by members of the National Congress of American Indians in the late 1960s. See Smith and Warrior, *Like a Hurricane*, 37.
87. See Richard Morris and Philip Wander, "Native American Rhetoric: Dancing in the Shadows of the Ghost Dance," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76 (1990): 165; John Sanchez and Mary E. Stuckey, "The Rhetoric of American Indian Activism in the 1960s and 1970s," *Communication Quarterly*, 48 (2000): 120–36; and Mary Ann Weston, *Native American in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 1996), 140–7.
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102. King, "Questionable Identity," A3.
103. Harjo, "Identity."
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