



A Rhetoric of Contact: Tecumseh and the Native American Confederacy

Robert Yagelski

Rhetoric Review, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Autumn, 1995), pp. 64-77.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0735-0198%28199523%2914%3A1%3C64%3AAAR0CTA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-2>

Rhetoric Review is currently published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc..

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/leb.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A Rhetoric of Contact: Tecumseh and the Native American Confederacy

In August of 1810, the great Shawnee leader Tecumseh met William Henry Harrison, then governor of the territory of Indiana, at the governor's mansion in Vincennes, Indiana.¹ The two leaders came together to discuss a disagreement about a recently signed treaty that would give to the United States a large tract of Native American land in central Indiana. Accounts of this first face-to-face meeting between these two important men abound, and several versions of a "text" of the speech delivered by Tecumseh have come down to us. These accounts and texts contain many inconsistencies, but they all agree that Tecumseh steadfastly refused to accept the new treaty. Claiming that he was speaking for all the tribes, Tecumseh is reported to have said, "This land that was sold and the goods that were given for it were only done by a few" (Klinck 71). He went on to predict dire consequences should the whites occupy the land that he claimed was improperly sold to them. It was an important moment in Tecumseh's efforts to unite Native Americans in opposition to white expansionism.

The meeting is perhaps most famous for the dramatic way in which it ended. At one point after having finished a two-hour speech against the treaty, Tecumseh apparently became furious with Winnemac, a Potawatomie leader who had signed the treaty. As Tecumseh assailed Winnemac in the Potawatomie tongue, Winnemac became alarmed and began to prepare his flintlock pistol, whereupon many of the white spectators reached for their weapons. Harrison rose from his seat and, facing Tecumseh, drew his sword, and at the same moment Tecumseh's warriors drew their weapons as they advanced to Tecumseh's side. Accounts of the incident often highlight this image of these two leaders, one white, one Native American, facing each other with weapons at the ready, and undoubtedly the embellishments of the scene have spawned much of the folklore surrounding the great conflict between Harrison and Tecumseh that would continue over the next two years.²

But this meeting was important for other, less obvious reasons. The meeting underscores the vital role that public discourse played in the conflicts between Native Americans and white Americans as the latter pushed westward into traditional Native American lands. More important, the extant texts from this meeting and other key meetings in Tecumseh's efforts to establish a pan-

Indian Confederacy suggest an important shift in the way Native Americans engaged in public discourse. Tecumseh's use of rhetoric at Vincennes and elsewhere during these pivotal years in his struggle against whites reflects what historian Gregory Dowd has called a "nativist" perspective on Native American identity, a perspective representing a departure from more traditional Native American conceptions of identity. This nativist perspective, which grew out of attempts by Native Americans to preserve their cultures and ways of life in the face of white domination, seems to have spawned rhetorical strategies by leaders like Tecumseh that departed in significant ways from the traditional rhetoric of Native American societies in the eastern United States.

This article explores Tecumseh's "new" rhetoric, first, by describing the role of oratory and public discourse in traditional Native American societies and then by examining Tecumseh's use of rhetoric as he strove to unite Native American tribes into a confederacy. I will argue that Tecumseh's rhetoric represents a point of contact between two cultures in conflict and that his rhetoric both shaped and was shaped by that conflict. Moreover, Tecumseh's oratory reflects the important use of rhetoric by Native Americans as a tool for political struggle and cultural survival. In essence, Native American rhetoric at this time underscores the complex connections among rhetoric, culture, and politics.

Although we have learned—through historical, ethnographic, linguistic, and anthropological study—a great deal about Native American societies and the history of their struggles to survive in the face of white encroachment and domination, we know precious little about the systems of rhetoric that were at the heart of Native American cultures. In 1972 Edna Sorber complained that serious study of Native American rhetoric by trained rhetoricians was woefully lacking and called for scholars to turn their attention to this neglected area of inquiry:

If those whose training should make them able to evaluate oratory more accurately will continue to develop their expertise in cross-cultural understandings . . . perhaps 20th century criticism of American Indian eloquence can give it a substantial cultural place of its own rather than offering it as support for a discredited "noble savage" theory. (234)

Twenty-two years later, Sorber's challenge to rhetoricians is even more poignant. The value of a crosscultural perspective and the importance of recovering heretofore ignored or silenced voices have by now been well established, and careful inquiry into what Sorber called "American Indian eloquence" is part of this larger movement to broaden our collective understanding of language and discourse.

But the study of Native American rhetoric can be a tricky affair, as those scholars who have attempted to recover the long-forgotten voices of the sophists (Jarratt) and nineteenth-century women orators have demonstrated (Campbell). The lack of texts and the unreliability of those texts we do have—texts written by whites who, in the words of Rupert Costo, "phonied up" Native American speech (qtd. in Sorber 234)—make it extremely difficult to draw hard conclusions about what might be called Native American rhetoric (see Hegeman, "Native American," and Murray, *Forked Tongues*, on the authenticity of Native American texts).

Nevertheless, scholars in several fields, including rhetoric and linguistics, have developed methods of minimizing, if not overcoming, these difficulties. Perhaps the most promising framework for examining Native American rhetoric prior to the twentieth century is what linguist Mary Louise Pratt calls the "linguistics of contact" (59). Pratt is interested in the ways in which the speech of "dominated," groups has been portrayed by linguistics scholars. She complains that the tendency among scholars to conceive of such groups as "separate speech communities with their own boundaries, sovereignty, fraternity, and authenticity" (56) misrepresents the speech of these groups so that

social difference is seen as constituted by distance and separation rather than by ongoing contact and structured relations in a shared social space. Language is seen as a nexus of social identity, but not as a site of social struggle or a producer of social relations. (56)

Pratt goes on to argue that such a limited perspective "ignores the extent to which dominant and dominated groups are not comprehensible apart from each other, to which their speech practices are organized to enact their difference and their hierarchy" (59).

In place of this "linguistics of community," Pratt proposes a "linguistics that decenter[s] community, that place[s] at its centre the operation of language *across* lines of social difference, a linguistics that [is] focused on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups . . ." (60). Such a framework can help us examine the rhetoric and discourse of Native American people without falling into the trap of Romanticism that Sorber cautioned against. More important, it encourages us to see rhetoric as, in Pratt's phrase, "a site of social struggle" (56) that can illuminate not only the nature and uses of rhetoric by Native Americans but the broader connections between rhetoric and social, political, and cultural life. Tecumseh's effort to create a Native American confederacy provides a rich example of the integral role of rhetoric at the site of contact and struggle between Native Americans and white Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

To understand this role of rhetoric in the conflict between Native and white Americans requires, first, a careful look at the uses of rhetoric *within* Native American societies. Most of the texts we have of speeches by Native American leaders, however, are texts of speeches given in the context of negotiations over treaties or of surrender to white armies, and nearly all were recorded by white observers. As Sorber has pointed out, these texts and accompanying accounts by whites of the circumstances of their creation present a largely mythical picture of noble savages struggling to preserve their homelands and cultures: "In recording their observations of oratory, these [white] writers gave value judgments of the speaking itself in such glowing terms that the 'savage' often appeared to the reader to be 'noble' precisely because he was eloquent" (228). Sorber goes on to point out that such accounts of Native American oratory have contributed to myths and misconceptions about Native Americans, their culture, and their rhetoric, lamenting that "unfortunately, the 'noble savage' concept, supported by glowing compliments of Indian oratory has not been completely superseded, even in the 20th century" (230).³

What's missing from this popular image of the noble savage orator is a sense of the important role of public discourse in the social and political lives of Native American tribes. Historians and anthropologists have in the past few decades begun to challenge common misconceptions of Native American tribal life and to present a fuller picture of what that life was like (e.g., see Dowd; Gilbert). It was a linguistically rich life, in which oratory was not the sole province of a few special men like Tecumseh. As folklorist Charles Camp puts it:

While it was, and is, true that every Indian is not acclaimed by his own people as a speechmaker, the economic and political structure of many tribes during the nineteenth century did provide the occasion for a wide proliferation of speechmaking ability as a prerequisite of male involvement in tribal affairs, as well as an aesthetically prized talent or skill. (815)

Camp's point extends to the social and political lives of many tribes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as well. Oratory was a central component of what Camp calls "the economic and political structure" of Native American tribes. The many first-hand accounts of tribal life by white European explorers and missionaries as well as by whites who were captured and subsequently raised by Native American tribes reveal political systems that revolved around open public debate among members of a tribe or band. David Jones, a Welsh Baptist minister who spent several years among the Shawnee at Chillicothe, Ohio in the 1770s, wrote of the Shawnee's system of governance:

They are strangers to civil power and authority; they look on it that God made them free—that one man has no natural right to rule over another. . . . Every town has his head-men. . . . The chief use of these head-men is to give counsel, especially in time of war; they are used also as most proper to speak with us [i.e., whites] on any occasion, especially if it be important. (Jones; qtd. in Gilbert 21)

Historian Bil Gilbert explains that

this political philosophy prevailed among most of the natives of eastern North America. In each community or nation there were men and women whose opinions carried special weight . . . and who might command others when it came to settling domestic disputes, farming, hunting, fighting, or conducting foreign affairs. However, they had no real coercive powers; they were followed and obeyed only to the extent that their directions seemed to make good sense to others. (Gilbert 21)

It is important to note that eloquent oratory was not enough for a man to assume a position of influence in most tribes; that man must also have demonstrated through his actions his trustworthiness. Among Tecumseh's Shawnee, as Gilbert points out, this seems to have been particularly true:

Peace chiefs, responsible for domestic order, were sometimes hereditary but succession was by no means automatic. No man was thought fit for leadership until he was at least thirty years old, and thus there was ample time to determine, empirically, whether or not a son possessed the good qualities of a noted father.

War chief was an earned office. Before a man could be considered for the position, he was expected to organize and lead—by persuading other warriors to follow him—at least four free-lance raids. (50)

Actions spoke loudly in such a context, yet effective use of oratory, along with physical prowess, was integral to a young man's emergence as a warrior and leader. Boys learned this power of language early in their upbringing as a tool for advancement as well as for entertainment:

Composing and delivering stirring orations was a major Shawnee art form. Those who could hold the rapt attention of a village or nation for hours as they spoke of serious matters were counted as

great men. These oral performances earned somewhat the same sort of respect that outstanding feats of hunting or war did. (Gilbert 85)

Thus, oratory among Native American tribes at this time both grew out of and facilitated public affairs and was integral to a tribe's social and political life. Oratory was the tool by which individual members participated in and shaped a tribe's collective decision-making.

As I suggest above and as several scholars have pointed out (Hegeman; Murray), the problem of the authenticity of Native American texts is a sticky one, and we have virtually no reliable texts of the kinds of speeches Native Americans might have made in their tribal councils as they debated a particular political or social issue of importance. But the accounts we do have suggest that Native American tribes possessed their own oratorical traditions and *de facto* rhetorics whose characteristics reflected their particular social, cultural, political, and historical circumstances. A few scholars have attempted to reconstruct some of these rhetorics. Don Paul Abbott, for instance, used a variety of first-hand accounts of Aztec life in addition to current knowledge of the Aztec language to describe the characteristics and use of rhetoric among Aztec peoples ("Aztec"). William Strickland described the use of rhetoric among the Cherokee peoples and "the historical role of speaking in the tribe" (375). Gerry Philipsen reported in the early 1970s on his attempt "to construct a native system of rhetoric based on published accounts of the world view, or ethnophilosophy, of the Navajo" (132). Somewhat earlier, Theodore Balgooyen examined "the remarkable variety of public speaking roles open to the typical Plains Indian tribe at the height of their culture during the nineteenth century" (13). These studies reveal not only the richness of oratorical traditions within Native American cultures but the variety of those traditions and their important role in tribal culture. According to Strickland, for example, public speaking figured into Cherokee life in several vital ways: storytelling provided a means for transmission of myths and cultural knowledge; persuasive speeches were delivered in open meetings during which important tribal decisions were made; sarcasm was sometimes used as a means of public punishment. Strickland notes that such cultural uses of public address shaped Cherokee rhetorical style: "The custom that all could speak in the councils meant that the speeches had to be short. This pressure resulted in a style of speaking which was compact, with every word having meaning and a definite reason for being included" (377). Balgooyen examines some of the same uses of public speaking among Native Americans of the Plains. In addition, he describes the important place of special societies among Plains tribes and the role of public speaking in those tribal organizations:

Since it was a cultural necessity for every man or woman to belong to a club or society, each individual had to establish himself in the club by talking about himself [*sic*]. He was expected to share in leading the club's activities, and to speak for the edification of the club or for its enjoyment. (16)

Collectively, this scholarship suggests that there was much more to the rhetoric of Native Americans than the few famous speeches by defeated chieftains that have come down to us as part of American folklore. Indeed, Native American rhetoric may have been quite different from the oratory delivered in the presence of white negotiators or military leaders:

It is often difficult to distinguish this variety from the larger body of texts we consider to be recorded observations of "normal" Indian culture, but we must at least be aware that much of what has been recorded and passed down as "native" or "typical" Indian speechmaking may constitute only a very specific application of certain speechmaking skills and traditions to wholly "non-native" circumstances—chiefly negotiations between tribal leaders and federal bureaucrats. (Camp 811)

Some historical scholarship on Native American tribes suggests that Camp is right. Robert M. Utley's recent biography of Sitting Bull, for instance, draws on a variety of sources, including oral histories and written notes made by several Sioux who learned to read and write, that indicate that Sitting Bull's rhetoric in negotiations with whites, especially after he had been confined to the Standing Rock reservation, may have differed from his rhetoric in councils with his own people. The Sioux tradition of holding councils to discuss important decisions provided a forum in which individual voices were heard on weighty matters. After such councils, individuals made their own decisions about whether or not to follow their leaders' advice. Such a practice differed from the ways in which whites negotiated. In most cases a single spokesperson or a commission of several representatives was authorized to negotiate with Native Americans on behalf of the US government. Utley's work suggests that Sitting Bull and other Sioux leaders typically made speeches to set forth their respective positions during such negotiations. During their own councils, however, they seem to have engaged in livelier give-and-take discussions in order to convince others to pursue a particular course of action or to attempt to reach consensus.⁴

It seems clear that Native Americans had a rich oratorical tradition, with rhetorical styles and strategies that served a variety of purposes within their

own cultures. Moreover, some evidence suggests that contact with whites, especially the usually antagonistic kind of contact that characterized much of Native American-white American relations, not only required Native American leaders to adopt new rhetorical techniques in order to deal successfully with their white antagonists but also may have influenced the way rhetoric was practiced among Native American peoples more generally.

In order to flesh out this tentative thesis, I'd like to return to the famous meeting between Tecumseh and Harrison at Vincennes, Indiana, in 1810. By this point in his life, Tecumseh was an experienced and well-known orator. Not only had he established himself in his youth as an expert speechmaker in countless deliberations within his own tribe, but by 1810 he had had much contact with whites and had spoken to white audiences on many occasions. In short, Tecumseh knew how to argue successfully within the context of his own culture as well as in negotiations with whites, and the various texts of Tecumseh's speech at Vincennes in 1810 offer evidence of his abilities as an orator. Especially noteworthy about this speech, however, is not the suggestion of Tecumseh's eloquence as an orator but the particular rhetorical strategies he seems to have employed in this speech.

The Fort Wayne treaty, which was signed by Harrison and several Native American leaders, was part of Harrison's strategy to wrest away from Native American tribes control of some three million acres of land in the Wabash valley in Indiana. Harrison's ultimate goal was statehood for the Indiana territory, and he wanted to open the Wabash valley to white settlement as a step toward that goal. In the fall of 1809, Harrison gathered together Winnemac, Little Turtle, and a few other Native American leaders who had previously cooperated with white Americans. He persuaded them to sell the land in the Wabash valley for cash and gifts. As word of the treaty spread, a number of tribes, angered by the settlement, began to attack outlying white settlements, and a period of vicious bloodshed ensued on the frontier. Tecumseh apparently saw the opportunity to recruit more tribes to his cause of establishing a Native American confederacy to oppose the whites. The meeting at Vincennes was largely a result of Harrison's anxiety about a Native American encampment at Tippecanoe, whose population was growing as more tribes joined Tecumseh.

In this context, then, Tecumseh gave his address.⁵ Popular accounts of this speech often present it as an attempt by a noble warrior to argue against an unfair treaty that violated Native American principles of common ownership of land (e.g., Eckert). Yet Tecumseh seems to have been less interested in the land itself than in using the treaty as an opportunity to establish a foundation for his confederacy. To that end he employed two key rhetorical strategies. First, Tecumseh addressed the issue of tribal identity, charging Harrison with trying to sow discord among various tribes. He accused Harrison of making distinctions among tribes and using land to foment war among tribes: "[Y]ou

want, by your distinctions of Indian tribes in allotting to each a particular tract of land, to make them [go] to war with each other" (Klinck 71). Implicit in this accusation is Tecumseh's argument for the unity of all Native American peoples: "You wish to prevent the Indians doing as we wish them—to unite, and let them consider their lands as the common property of the whole." He goes on to assert that "you never see an Indian come and endeavor to make white people do so" (71). That is, how is it that whites can be considered united but Native peoples cannot?

What is interesting here is Tecumseh's insistence on racial unity. He argues that although there may be differences among tribes, all tribes are Native American people; thus the land they occupy is the "property" of all Native Americans. Such a belief in racial unity was not unanimous among Native American tribes. Traditionally, governance among Native American people was a matter of consensus among small bands or tribes. These bands did sometimes come together to follow a specific leader or leaders, but anthropologists and ethnohistorians tell us that Native American peoples did see distinctions among themselves. Creation narratives among various Native American peoples typically identify a particular group or tribe as the "true" people of God, or the Great Spirit. For example, one version of the Shawnee creation narrative identifies Shawnees as God's chosen people and other tribes, such as the Creeks, as "inferior" (Gilbert 35-37). Moreover, although tribes did often intermingle, they retained their own identities, rituals, and traditions.

In addition, as Dowd has explained, Native Americans at this time were engaged in deep disagreement regarding their own identity. Dowd identifies two main perspectives among Native American peoples of the eastern woodlands: the traditionalist and the nativist. Traditionalists, according to Dowd, adhered for the most part to longstanding notions of distinct clan and tribal identity; they sometimes sought accommodation with whites as ways to consolidate power among their own tribes as well as to seek "benefits—not always for themselves and their kin but often more broadly for their people" (20-21). Nativists, however, who began to emerge in the eighteenth century as conflicts between Native peoples and whites intensified, "deployed a new theory of polygenesis, stressing both the common origin of all Indians and the spiritual impurity of Anglo-Americans" (21). According to Dowd, this emerging theory of polygenesis was inextricably bound up in Native American religious beliefs, but for our purposes here, its importance lies in the significant shift it represents in Native American thinking about racial identity and in the way it began to shape attitudes toward governance, intertribal relations, and political action. As Dowd explains it,

The religious nativists of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries would struggle as the most militant advocates of a pan-

Indian identity, one that would have been alien to their forebears. Here they would meet a challenge from their rivals at home, those leaders among their peoples who worked to shore up their political authority through connections with Europeans. The nativists' rivals could call upon ethnic or clan traditions against the new intertribal identity. It must be remembered that such a move was also innovative, that "traditional" tribal identities were also in the process of development, particularly when it came to loyalties to a central tribal or confederate authority. (16)

Thus Tecumseh's focus on Native American racial unity represented for many Native Americans, if not a radical departure from traditional perceptions of Native American identity then at least a significant new perspective that was in conflict with more traditional views.

In making this point about Native American unity, Tecumseh also seems to have been aware of the way in which his white audience might understand the legal implications of his argument with respect to the terms of the Fort Wayne treaty. As a white American, Harrison was accustomed to a political system that placed all residents of a country or territory under the authority of a single government. In this case the government was a white government, and it ostensibly united all whites living in the territories under its control. For Harrison such a system made perfect sense, but it would have appeared alien to many Native Americans. Yet Tecumseh spoke as a representative of *all* Native Americans, as if such representation were common among his people. In other words, Tecumseh seems to have employed an argument that would make sense to his white listeners at the same time that he was implicitly making his case for a pan-Indian identity to those Native Americans in the audience who held a more traditionalist view of separate clan identities.

Tecumseh's second strategy is intimately related to the first. As he broached the topic of the Fort Wayne treaty specifically, he asserted that those Native American leaders who claimed to have sold the land did so improperly, because he—Tecumseh—was the legitimate spokesperson for the Native American tribes who lived in and near the Wabash valley: "I tell you so because I am authorized by all the tribes to do so. I am the head of them all" (Klinck 71). This move, too, reflected an unusual and indeed radical position for a Native American of this time. As I noted earlier, Native American leaders emerged as a result of their peoples' perceptions of their abilities as demonstrated by their words and deeds. Such leaders generally led small groups or bands, whose memberships could change as individuals disagreed with the leader's decisions. These leaders had no legal claim to power other than the consensus of their followers and thus could be replaced at any time. And as Gilbert points out, leaders of larger groups were subject to the same protocols:

When separate bands and villages came together to conduct joint operations, their war chiefs selected overall leaders. If successful, these men might be recognized as national general officers and remain so throughout their lives. . . . While expeditions were being considered, individuals, even entire villages, were free to withdraw if they disagreed with the leadership or tactics. (50)

Thus Tecumseh was on relatively shaky ground in claiming that he spoke for "all the tribes." There is little doubt that he was considered a leader by many, but surely not all.

Tecumseh's strategy may be related to the conditions of his struggle with his white American opponents, who functioned under a very different system of government. Harrison, by virtue of his position as governor of the territory, represented the US government and thus spoke for the president and by extension all Americans. It may be that Tecumseh recognized Harrison's advantage in representing such a large group of people and, by contrast, the disadvantage of traditional Native American systems of governance and representation when dealing with the US. In short, Tecumseh's rhetorical strategy represents the use of a argument that was not traditionally Native American—an argument that grew out of the emerging new sense of Native American identity that Dowd labels *polygenesis*. And indeed this new sense of identity itself began to emerge as a result of decades of conflict with whites. In this sense, Tecumseh's rhetoric can be seen to reflect the social, political, and cultural conflict between Native and white Americans. In other words, Tecumseh's rhetoric represents a point of contact between two cultures with differing political systems and differing conceptions of cultural identity.

The ways in which this cultural conflict shaped Tecumseh's rhetoric can perhaps be seen more poignantly in a speech he gave to the Choctaw people a year later in 1811 in what is now Mississippi.⁶ In this speech, in which Tecumseh attempted to persuade a gathering of the Choctaw to join his confederacy, he seems not to have openly assumed Native American unity; rather, he argued for it in the context of a tradition (albeit an evolving tradition) of tribes operating independently from one another. Throughout his speech Tecumseh drove home his premise that all Native Americans were one people even as he implicitly acknowledged the independence and tribal integrity of his audience:

The annihilation of our race is at hand unless we unite in one common cause against a common foe. Think not, brave Choctaws and Chickasaws, that you can remain passive and indifferent to the common danger, and thus escape the common fate. Your people,

too, will soon be as falling leaves and scattering clouds before their blighting breath. Will we not soon be driven from our respective countries and the graves of our ancestors? . . . The white usurpation in our common country must be stopped, or we, its rightful owners, be forever destroyed and wiped out as a race of people. (Klinck 92)

Clearly, Tecumseh's task in this situation was different from his task as he faced Harrison. In the latter speech, his purpose was to establish the grounds for resistance to the Fort Wayne treaty; there was no need to negotiate. In the case of his address to the Choctaws, however, his task was a more traditional one: to persuade a group of Native Americans to join him in a struggle. The deliberative nature of this use of rhetoric is clear, and perhaps it provides a glimpse into what traditional Native American rhetoric was like. At the same time, Tecumseh's insistence on unity and his many references to race not only represent an attempt to address the immediate danger presented to Native Americans by the whites, but they suggest changes in the uses of rhetoric by Native Americans—changes brought on by confrontation with whites; they reflect the belief in *polygenesis* that Dowd describes. In short, Tecumseh's oratory, while it grows out of a rich tradition of public discourse among Native Americans, reflects the ways in which rhetoric became a tool for survival and began to evolve as a result of the ongoing conflicts with white America.

Tecumseh's rhetoric is but one small part of a large body of discourse between Native Americans and white Americans that has been largely ignored and poorly understood. To examine this rhetoric is to begin to fill a gap in the history of rhetoric that is especially glaring today as scholars begin to recover the literatures and discourses of several traditionally marginalized groups in American culture. Moreover, the historical study of the uses of rhetoric by Native Americans in their struggles against whites reveals the importance of public discourse in Native American societies and offers us rich territory for inquiry into the ways in which rhetoric figures into racial and cultural conflicts. As I suggest above, to engage in such inquiry is to gain a cross-cultural perspective on rhetoric as a site of contact between peoples in conflict and to begin to explore the ways in which, in Pratt's words, "dominant and dominated groups are not comprehensible apart from each other" and to understand that "their speech practices are organized to enact their difference and their hierarchy" (59). Such inquiry might also enrich efforts to understand the complex connections between rhetoric and public discourse and the workings of rhetoric within social and political systems. In short, the voices of Tecumseh and those of the countless other Native Americans we have yet to hear can tell us much about the role of rhetoric in society and about its use as a tool for cultural survival.

Notes

¹ I wish to thank Don Abbott (*RR* peer reviewer) for his helpful and gracious comments in reviewing an earlier version of this article.

² This account is constructed from several sources: Drake 125-29; Gilbert 256-59; Klinck 66-70.

³ Perhaps the best example of the kinds of difficulties Sorber highlights with respect to Native American "texts" is the case of Chief Seattle's famous speech about the relationship between humans and their environment, which has become a kind of manifesto for many modern environmentalists. As Rudolf Kaiser has meticulously demonstrated, no record exists that Chief Seattle actually delivered the speech attributed to him; moreover, Kaiser reveals the inconsistencies in different versions of the "speech" now circulating. Yet the speech has not only come to be associated with Chief Seattle, but it has also come to reflect a romanticized and somewhat distorted view of Native Americans' beliefs about ecology.

⁴ See especially Uteley's chapter 22, "Land," on the controversies surrounding the sale of Sioux reservation land. Interestingly, the agent in charge of the Standing Rock reservation seems to have understood the Sioux oratorical traditions, at least with respect to the councils the Sioux held to discuss such decisions, and took advantage of the Sioux's own practices as he tried to convince some of Sitting Bull's rivals to agree to specific proposals regarding land sales which generally favored whites. See page 278.

⁵ Several versions of Tecumseh's speech are extant. The version to which I refer here is taken from Edward Egglestone and Lillie Egglestone Seelye, *The Shawnee Prophet; or The Story of Tecumseh* (London, 1880), 182-86; reprinted in Klinck, *Tecumseh: Fact and Fiction in Early Records*, 70-72.

⁶ The version of this speech to which I refer is taken from H. B. Cushman, *History of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez Indians* (Greenville, 1899), 303ff; also reprinted in Klinck, 91-93.

Works Cited

- Abbott, Don P. "The Ancient Word: Rhetoric in Aztec Culture." *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 251-64.
- Balgooyen, Theodore J. "The Plains Indian as Public Speaker." *Landmarks in Western Oratory*. Ed. David H. Grover. *University of Wyoming Publications* Vol. 34, no. 2. Laramie, WY: Graduate School, University of Wyoming, 1968. 12-43.
- Camp, Charles. "American Indian Oratory in the White Image: An Analysis of Stereotypes." *Journal of American Culture* 1 (1978): 811-17.
- Campbell, Karlyn Kohrs. *Man Cannot Speak For Her*. Vol. 1. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1989.
- Dowd, Gregory Evans. *A Spirited Resistance: The North American Indian Struggle for Unity, 1745-1815*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992.
- Drake, Benjamin. *Life of Tecumseh, and of his Brother the Prophet; with a Historical Sketch of the Shawanoe Indians*. Cincinnati: Morgan, 1841.
- Eckert, Allan W. *A Sorrow in Our Heart: The Life of Tecumseh*. New York: Bantam, 1992.
- Gilbert, Bil. *God Gave Us This Country: Tekamthi and the First American Civil War*. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Hegeman, Susan. "Native American 'Texts' and the Problem of Authenticity." *American Quarterly* 41 (1989): 265-83.
- Jarratt, Susan C. *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1991.
- Jones, Rev. David. *A Journal of Two Visits Made to Some Nations of Indians on the West Side of the Ohio River in the Years 1772 and 1773*. New York: Arno, 1971.
- Kaiser, Rudolf. "Chief Seattle's Speech(es): American Origins and European Reception." *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*. Ed. B. Swann and A. Krupat. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987. 497-536.
- Klinck, Carl F., ed. *Tecumseh, Fact and Fiction in Early Records*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice, 1961.
- Murray, David. *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing, and Representation in North American Indian Texts*. Bloomington: U of Indiana P, 1991.
- Philipsen, Gerry. "Navajo World View and Culture Patterns of Speech: A Case Study in Ethnorhetoric." *Speech Monographs* 31 (1972): 132-39.

- Pratt, Mary Louise. "Linguistic Utopias." *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*. Ed. Nigel Fabb, Derek Attridge, Alan Durant, and Colin MacCabe. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1987. 48-66.
- Sorber, Edna C. "The Noble Eloquent Savage." *Ethnohistory* 19 (1972): 227-36.
- Strickland, W. "Cherokee Rhetoric: A Forceful Weapon." *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 2 (1977): 385-93.
- Utley, Robert M. *The Lance and the Shield: The Life and Times of Sitting Bull*. New York: Holt, 1993.



Robert Yagelski is Assistant Professor of English at Purdue University, where he teaches in the programs in Rhetoric and Composition and in English Education. His articles on teaching writing have appeared in *English Journal*, the *Journal of Teaching Writing*, *Radical Teacher*, and *Research in the Teaching of English*. His recent research explores implications of postmodern theory for understanding literacy and the relationship between rhetoric and public discourse.

Announcement

Work in three broad categories is sought for a new essay collection, *Professional Writes of Passage: Enculturation Processes in Composition and Rhetoric*: critical narration that offer personal or historical perspectives on professional enculturation; research narratives that examine transitions from novice to professional compositionist; and political analyses or theoretical discussions that address the "disciplining" of rhetoricians and compositionists. One copy of your 1-2 page proposal should be sent to each editor: Lauren Sewell, English Dept., University of Louisville, Louisville KY 40292, llsewe01@ulkyvm.louisville.edu and Jane Detweiler, Dept. of English/098, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557-0031. Postmark: January 8, 1996.