

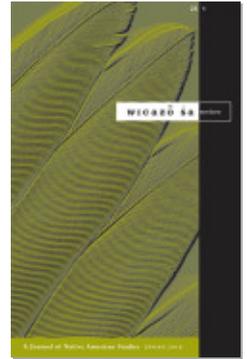


PROJECT MUSE®

Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians
(review)

Cristina Stanciu

Wicazo Sa Review, Volume 25, Number 1, Spring 2010, pp. 87-90 (Review)



Published by University of Minnesota Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.0.0047>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/380303>

Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians

by Cari M. Carpenter
Ohio State University Press, 2008

Indigenous anger has been the subject of recent sociological studies from examinations of anger as a decolonization tool in indigenous peoples' struggles with settler states to explorations of indigenous perspectives on anger and violence.¹ Cari M. Carpenter's *Seeing Red: Anger, Sentimentality, and American Indians* turns to a literary mode—sentimentality—to explore articulations of indigenous anger by American Indian women writers. More specifically, she turns to nineteenth-century American literary history to examine how early American Indian women writers represented anger in several literary genres, from the sentimental novel to the autobiography, poetry, essays, and public performances between the 1880s and the 1900s.

Carpenter's study traces the intersections of emotional, racial, and gender performances in the works of Alice Callahan (Muscogee/Creek), Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins (Paiute), and E. Pauline Johnson/Tekahionwake (Mohawk). Acknowledging that for some Native Studies scholars the use of the sentimentality paradigm may seem suspicious—invoking, among others, Craig Womack's acerbic criticism of Callahan's *Wynema*—Carpenter argues that, by disregarding the potential of a popular genre that Native women writers "manipulated" in their response to Native dispossession, we "dismiss an important aspect of indigenous resistance" (7). She maintains that sentimentality and anger gave the writers in question the opportunity to assert both self and nation: "[S]entimentality is a tactic through which anger may be articulated in the defense of an indigenous nationhood" (15). Anger matters. Indigenous anger matters more, this book suggests, and understanding the role of anger as "both stereotype and resistance tactic" becomes one of Carpenter's main agendas. To this end, she sees both the "conventional form" and the "ironic counterpart" of sentimental discourse as productive ways to articulate indigenous anger (5). For Carpenter, anger is "a system of relations that always communicate power: a mark of the connection (or distance) between self and community that is shaped by race and gender" (17).

Using a variety of critical methods, from "Native American studies of anger" (10) to feminist theories of anger, tracing historical constructions of anger in the nineteenth century, Carpenter envisions anger as a place of connection rather than difference between white women reformers and Native women at the end of the nineteenth century. However, the critic examines not only instances of indigenous

women's anger; she also turns her attention to white women's appropriations of indigenous anger in their Indian reform work, as her analysis of the first known novel by an American Indian writer, Callahan's *Wynema: A Child of the Forest* (1891), demonstrates. White women reformers, she suggests, borrowed "'Indian' anger in the service of American nation-making" (32). They, too, "played angry" in their Indian reform work, which in many ways was an outlet for channeling their own anger at patriarchy and the cult of domesticity.

Many literary scholars will find Carpenter's study useful for its compelling analysis of the cultural and political work of Callahan's, Johnson's, and Winnemucca's texts and public performances. In her explorations of anger as a raced and gendered concept, Carpenter shows how Alice Callahan draws from Indian reform and temperance narratives, a limited and limiting archive, resonant in the competing scripts that her narrator navigates. On the one hand, Callahan represents *Wynema* in the sentimental tradition, as a uni-dimensional "child of the forest," who attains domesticity but is not allowed to "play angry"—a privilege granted only to white women, who as "'protectors' were able to borrow from the masculine authority of white men" (37); on the other hand, Callahan's narrator takes a critical stance against the confinement of both literary genre and racial politics. Indigenous protest and anger, however, find a place in Callahan's novel, but outside the domestic space. It is in the voice of an elderly Lakota woman, Chikena, that the horrors of the Wounded Knee massacre are recounted at the end of the novel. Chikena's protest is a direct expression of indigenous anger; her disregard for the rigid masculine and feminine roles and her transgression of these categories, Carpenter suggests, show the novel's "rejection of conventional sentimentality" (50) and offer a powerful instance of indigenous anger expression.

Whereas Callahan manages to reclaim indigenous anger within the confines of the sentimental novel, as Carpenter shows, E. Pauline Johnson finds more genres compatible with indigenous anger, from poems to essays and public performances. In her engagement with contemporaneous images of "the fiery Indian maid" or "the savage fury," we learn, Johnson negotiated between various nineteenth-century scripts of anger. Carpenter focuses her attention on two famous poems by Johnson—"Ojistoh" (1895) and "The Cattle Thief" (1894)—to show how poetry can disrupt what she calls "stereotypes of femininity and savagery" (72) while maintaining alliances with white audiences. In contrast, two of Johnson's most popular stories—"A Red Girl's Reasoning" (1892) and "As It Was in the Beginning" (1899)—which the critic reads in the context of Johnson's critical essays, show the Mohawk writer's attempt to represent the anger of a First Nations woman who takes a direct stance against dispossession. Carpenter's promising analysis brings yet another useful archive to examine indigenous anger—Johnson's essays published in the popular *Mother's Magazine* between

1907 and 1912—where the anger of the Mohawk mother/clan matron becomes legitimized in the service of family and nation. Ultimately, we learn, E. Pauline Johnson's stage performances of "the fiery Indian maid" who protested racial mistreatment, borrowing elements from Haudenosaunee oratory, yielded mixed reactions in her white audiences, from "sexualized anger" to "attractive indignation" (62–63), as Johnson's indignation was often perceived as sex appeal.

Northern Paiute Sarah Winnemucca (Thocmetony) had a different rapport with white audiences, for whom she acted as both performer and translator. Carpenter suggests that anger becomes central to Winnemucca's public image as both a performer and a writer. In her autobiography, *Life among the Piutes* (1883), she uses shaming, an effective form of sentimental critique, to address white audiences and consequences of conquest. Moreover, as an interpreter for the colonizers, Winnemucca uses irony "as a subtle means of distinguishing herself from the whites she speaks for" (108). Winnemucca's manipulation of discursive systems and the effectiveness of her anger prevail; even as she speaks for whites, she manages to maintain a voice of her own. Building on feminist theories agency and theories of translation, Carpenter shows that "imperfect translation" becomes Winnemucca's strategy to write both her loyalty and indigenous survival (116).

A really useful aspect of this study is Carpenter's reference to the use of these texts in the American Indian literature classroom, where they are met with various types of anger or resistance. In the four case studies she offers at the end of her book (as well as a number of other pedagogical moments throughout her study), Carpenter meditates on the productive attributes of anger in the classroom. In an epilogue to the chapter devoted to Sarah Winnemucca, she takes the relation between anger and indigenous nationhood a few steps further, reading contemporary angry responses of Northern Paiutes to the legacy of Winnemucca. The recent memorialization of the Paiute woman—Nevada declared a statewide Sarah Winnemucca Day in 1991, an elementary school was named in her honor in 1994, and a statue was introduced in the U.S. Capitol in 2005—continues to raise questions about her U.S. patriotism and Paiute loyalty, which complicate rather than illuminate her relation with the Paiute community. Carpenter also invokes some of the pedagogical difficulties that a Paiute teacher on Pyramid Lake Reservation encounters as she brings the work of Sarah Winnemucca and its legacy into her classroom. Without anger, she tells her students: "It's okay to listen to our relatives, but open your mind. . . . [Y]ou might just learn something from someone else" (Harriet Brady quoted in Carpenter, 118).

Carpenter's work is timely in its engagement with expressions and representations of Native women's emotions vis-à-vis themselves, their communities, and the national arena. One thing the book could have

done more, had its focus been more theoretical, is to engage with the recent work of theorists of affect—such as Brian Massumi, Sianne Ngai, and Antonio Damasio—and begin to theorize what could become a useful category of critical inquiry, “indigenous affect,” with productive political implications. Carpenter’s concept “playing angry”—building on Philip J. Deloria’s concept of “playing Indian”—is a wonderful potential start, but its representational and ideological consequences remain somewhat underdeveloped. Nevertheless, Carpenter builds an important bridge between nineteenth-century articulations of indigenous anger and twentieth-century Indian activism, where anger brings nations together. And, although Callahan, Johnson, and Winnemucca are not equally successful in their representations of indigenous nationhood, Carpenter’s conclusion is optimistic: “their anger—and sentimentality—point toward an activist future in Native American literature” (140).

N O T E

1 See, for instance, Catherine Lane West-Newman, “Anger in Legacies of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and Settler States,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (May 2004): 189–208; and

Andrew Day, Martin Nakata, and Kevin Howells, eds., *Anger and Indigenous Men: Understanding and Responding to Violent Behaviour* (Leichhardt, N.S.W., Australia: Federation Press, 2008).

REVIEW ESSAY by *Michael W. Simpson*

Forced Federalism: Contemporary Challenges to Indigenous Nationhood

by Jeff Corntassel and Richard C. Witmer II
University of Oklahoma Press, 2008

Suzan Harjo recently stated in a presentation at the University of Arizona that we should not get too hung up on eras of federal Indian policy in that we are always in an era of assimilation. While admitting the truth of this statement, we can still recognize that policy eras can help us to be critical about changes in the political landscape that are so important to American Indian peoples who are and must be political, given their unique status within the U.S. system. Shifts in eras can be especially important in warning of future potential pitfalls and current questions, actions, and responses. Corntassel and Witmer use tribal government surveys, interviews with tribal leaders, and analysis of documents and discourse to examine changes wrought by the enactment of the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA). Specifically, they highlight the political