

The Bearer of This Letter: Language Ideologies, Literacy Practices, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community. By Mindy J. Morgan. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 344 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

In this compelling ethnohistory of language ideology and practice on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, anthropologist Mindy Morgan explores the impact of English language and literacy on the communicative repertoire of the indigenous Assiniboine (Nakoda) and Gros Ventre (A'aninin) communities during the course of a century. Drawing heavily on the documentary record—which not only represented but also realized Euro-American colonization of these communities—Morgan pursues an explanation for the striking absence of a written vernacular tradition for either tribal language. She does so with historically anchored and persuasively nuanced arguments that link local tribal experiences to federal policy initiatives (while also tracking the shifting national discourses from which these originated). This accessible and illuminating work will be of great interest and value to scholars in Native American and indigenous studies, ethnohistory, education, public policy, and sociolinguistics. Moreover, tribal communities that are engaged in language-revitalization efforts will likely garner insights from Morgan's analysis that will enable them to manage such efforts in true self-determining fashion.

Morgan organizes her analysis of the waning of indigenous language use vis-à-vis English literacy at Fort Belknap in chronological fashion. She begins in the prereservation period when Gros Ventres and Assiniboines were accomplished polyglots owing to long histories of interaction among the indigenous peoples of the northern Plains. As a Siouan dialect, Nakoda is closely related to the languages of other populous northern Plains peoples (for example, Lakota), whereas Gros Ventre was a dialect of Arapaho only really ever spoken by Gros Ventres. English was introduced as a language of commerce with Euro-Americans, and Morgan notes that the adoption of spoken English by the Fort Belknap tribes during these encounters initially presented no noteworthy dilemmas.

The signing of treaties in the 1850s and the consolidation of the reservation during the 1880s altered the casual relationships between these languages, however, as government emissaries, Jesuit missionaries, and Indian agents increasingly exercised hegemonic influence through spoken and written English. Morgan details how the striking of treaties remained an important historical precedent for English literacy, in which Gros Ventres and Assiniboines who "touched the pen" acknowledged that the associated oral performances of various parties had been fixed in writing. It quickly became apparent to the Fort Belknap tribes, however, that such texts were inadequate to preserve these spoken understandings, as tribal resources were liberally appropriated by Euro-Americans thereafter. English literacy thus became associated with Euro-American power to contain, control, and represent Indian lives (for example, through the mandated carrying of written passes during off-reservation travel, the wording of which furnishes the book's title). In response, Morgan argues, Gros Ventres and Assiniboines rapidly learned

to use English literacy to contest this colonial authority, originally with assistance from literate priests, and later by schooling in the reading and writing of English proper.

What interests Morgan in this transition, however, is the absence of a parallel tradition of indigenous language literacy, despite the emergence of such written vernaculars on other Plains Indian reservations. She concludes that a relatively late missionary presence—a common source of the development of such vernaculars—during the actual consolidation of English-based Euro-American power on the reservation mitigated against tribal interest in developing written indigenous vernaculars, especially because federal policy was simultaneously shifting toward an overtly nationalistic English-only mandate. Morgan's consideration of the local role played during this shift by foreign-born Jesuits whose own first language was not English is particularly fascinating. In the end, Morgan traces the long-standing conviction by Gros Ventres and Assiniboines that their indigenous languages are essentially oral in character—and thus neither amenable to nor appropriate for written inscription—to these historic precedents.

Morgan extends her consideration of these themes through the progressive reforms of the Collier administration and the Indian Reorganization Act. During this period, the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) supported tribal members Fred Gone and Mark Flying during the early 1940s in their efforts to write down any remaining indigenous knowledge they could obtain from the "old-timers" in their communities. Morgan explores why these writings were almost exclusively in English. Not long thereafter, policy shifted again. Following World War II, the termination era of the 1950s was characterized by open disdain for the preservation of tribal languages and traditions. The rise of a salient bilingual education movement in the 1970s, however, paved the way for resurgence of interest and opportunity surrounding language preservation and revitalization. Morgan details how the Fort Belknap tribes capitalized locally on shifting federal policy to fund language preservation in the schools despite the clear legislative intent of these programs, which was to engage primarily immigrant children in achieving English proficiency. The Reagan administration sharply curtailed support for these programs, however, and it was not until a national movement to stem the obsolescence of "endangered" languages around the world gained momentum that federal funds would again be available for indigenous language programs at Fort Belknap.

The availability of such funds resulted in rather striking dilemmas at Fort Belknap, namely the question of whether and how to standardize the languages in practical orthographies (writing systems). As a graduate student in anthropology at Indiana University, Morgan participated in community discussions concerning the development of Nakoda orthography. The dilemma faced by tribal members, she recounts, was the long-standing belief that Nakoda is an oral language not amenable to inscription, on one hand, and the need to standardize the language for purposes of curriculum-based classroom instruction, on the other hand. Assiniboines were divided on this issue, with some asserting that the obligation to fix Nakoda into written form

was the ultimate capitulation to colonization, while others recognized and valued the benefits of literacy in the context of a dwindling community of speakers. Ultimately, as Morgan reveals, Nakoda orthography was constructed and remains in use in the local public schools as well as in the tribal college. Nevertheless, Morgan allows that today, ready access to multimedia capabilities renders the question of Nakoda literacy even more debatable, as recorded oral performances now lend themselves to durable and widespread adoption for instructional purposes.

As with all scholarly works, there remain some limitations to Morgan's study. The single most important weakness pertains to her attempt to provide an ethnohistory of literacy among the Fort Belknap tribes collectively. To be fair, Morgan regularly acknowledges tribal differences and attempts to qualify her generalizations with tribal specifics. Nevertheless, there are substantial cultural and historical particularities for each group that combined consideration cannot help but to obscure. For example, Morgan allows that fluent speakers of Gros Ventre and Nakoda have declined dramatically in recent decades, but what this characterization occludes is the truly dramatic decline of spoken Gros Ventre relative to Nakoda. Owing to tribally distinctive responses to colonization, an earlier generation of Gros Ventres intentionally "sacrificed" the language in a bid for primacy over Euro-Americans, Assiniboines, and local Métis, which led to a demise in fluency across a single bilingual generation. As early as the late 1960s, linguists were unable to identify more than a handful of fluent Gros Ventre speakers, which contrasts starkly with the current numbers of Nakoda speakers (who can also draw on the linguistic expertise of sibling communities in Montana and Canada). Thus, Morgan's claim to consider literacy at Fort Belknap masks a privileging of Nakoda experiences that ultimately minimizes, ignores, or distorts key facets of historical Gros Ventre sociolinguistics.

The sophistication of Morgan's study might have been heightened by her seizure of additional methodological opportunities. First, closer analysis of a few key texts would have illuminated and illustrated her findings. For example, she discusses an early petition from the Fort Belknap tribes to Washington—written on their behalf by a Jesuit missionary—urging relocation of their agency to the Little Rocky Mountains. Morgan devotes four paragraphs to this seminal document. Yet it appears that the drafting of this petition essentially established a literary genre that the tribes would use throughout the ensuing decades, suggesting it warrants closer textual analysis. Second, despite the decline in status of old-school ethnology within her discipline, Morgan's inquiry could have produced a more nuanced account of literacy at Fort Belknap through more robust consideration of indigenous cultural practices. For example, she attributes the historical absence of indigenous language literacy to the timings of Jesuit arrival and shifting federal policy. She does not seriously engage, however, the sacred significance of speech as an enactment of power through the expression of thought by life breath that might literally alter reality. Cosmological grounds for the dependence of Plains Indian ritual on smudge, song, pipe, and prayer existed (as Fred Gone explained in his WPA writings): each involves the circulation of vitality (through breath,

wind, or air). The cosmological significance of literacy in this regard remains unclear from Morgan's analysis.

Despite these weaknesses, however, Morgan offers an engaging, accessible, and richly contextualized account of language literacy on a single reservation that contributes substantially to scholarship about these timely matters.

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Biocultural Diversity and Indigenous Ways of Knowing: Human Ecology in the Arctic. Karim-Aly S. Kassam. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2009. 288 pages. \$34.95 cloth.

This book is an interesting assessment of the intellectual state of the discipline of human ecology and the use of traditional knowledge to document human ecology in the Arctic. In chapter 2, Karim-Aly Kassam discusses human ecology as a social science, its development and future. Chapter 3 attempts to "reconceptualize" human ecological relations, which the author asserts is a lens for understanding the relationship between biological and cultural diversity. He dives into an epistemological discussion, citing the Aristotelian notion of "phronesis," and then declares that "human ecological understanding, in the context of communities in the circumpolar north, is best achieved through sensitivity to indigenous knowledge" (13).

The first three chapters contain insights into Arctic indigenous human/biological relations and interactions, although they are fragmented and overly dense in places. Kassam argues that the discipline of human ecology should be regarded as an academic force (the third way), but instead of delivering a sharp outline or clear vision of the discipline's future and application in the real world, he indulges in ideological and theoretical discussions of diversity and knowing. Nevertheless, the case studies in chapters 4 and 5 contribute important data that further a broad understanding of the interwoven lives of Arctic animals and the people who hunt them. The last two chapters add additional commentary regarding the use of traditional area maps and their importance in the process of maintaining, using, and passing on traditional knowledge.

Kassam begins by discussing the north as homeland as a concept that fits the indigenous self-understanding, which he characterizes as featuring diversity, complexity, and the source of local knowledge. He sharply contrasts this against the north as a frontier, which he characterizes as simply a resource vault for imperialistic southern markets. The latter vision, which he attributes to industrial capitalism, is "exogenous," whereas the former is shaped by relationships within the natural ecology.

This stark ideological contrast frames Kassam's vision of Native life in the Arctic at the expense of a more complicated reality. Alaska Native corporations provide North Slope oil and gas support services, local governments administer local land-use regulations, many Inupiat support drilling in the

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All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature. Edited by Brady Harrison. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009. 296 pages. \$50.00 cloth.

Brady Harrison's edited volume of essays on Montana writing, *All Our Stories Are Here: Critical Perspectives on Montana Literature*, has three chief objectives: (1) "to open further interpretive and critical conversations" and "raise questions and foreground issues that have not been widely addressed in the study of Montana literature"; (2) to "explore the work of writers who have not received their critical due"; and (3) to "take new looks at old friends," that is, to reconsider the work of Montana's most recognized writers (ix). For fans and followers of Montana writing—and western American regionalist writing, more broadly—the twelve critical essays in this volume will mark an important contribution to an ongoing literary tradition. Richard Hugo's triumphant call for "making certain it goes on" echoes through many pieces in the collection—appropriately, they are the last words to Louis Welch's concluding historical essay about the University of Montana's creative writing program—and in many ways, this volume will sit comfortably on the shelf next to its clear predecessors: *The Last Best Place* (1988), *Ten Tough Trips* (1990), and *Writing Montana: Literature under the Big Sky* (1996). For students of Native American literature, this volume will also prove useful. Although *All Our Stories Are Here* is not immediately concerned with theorizing the place and status of Native American literature with respect to Montana and western American regionalist writing, the volume does address Native American writers and texts on all three of the principal objectives listed above.

Harrison opens his introductory essay "Toward a Postpopulist Criticism" by highlighting a blind spot: "As even a casual scholar of Montana writing will note, the production of fine writing far outstrips the critical inquiry into the state's extraordinary literary corpus" (ix). As remedy in theory, Harrison calls for a "postpopulist criticism"—in short, a turn to critical analysis over the prevailing boosterism, a healthy but entrenched "proprietary interest" Harrison observes in Montana readers, Montana book culture, and in the history of Montana literary scholarship (xiii). As remedy in practice, Harrison organizes the volume's twelve essays around five critical prompts—"Does Place Matter?," "Women Writing Montana," "Gay and Lesbian Literature under a Big Sky," "Native Revisions/The Problems of History," and "Hugoland"—to model, as well as showcase, what a Montana postpopulist literary criticism actually looks like. Here, Harrison suggests, theoretical diversity and