

“ONE ELEGY FROM ARUAC TO SIOUX”:

THE ABSENT PRESENCE OF INDIGENEITY IN DEREK WALCOTT’S POETRY AND DRAMA

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Towards the end of Book III of Derek Walcott’s epic poem *Omeros* (1990), the St. Lucian fisherman Achille fantasizes that he is a soldier in an American Western:

He saw the smoky buffalo, a black rider
under a sweating hat, his slitted eyes grazing
with the herds that drifted like smoke under low hills,
the wild Indian tents, the sky’s blue screen. (161)

As Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” plays in the background, a highly cinematic Western scene accompanied by a reggae beat unfolds in Achille’s imagination, “Red Indians bouncing to a West Indian rhythm” (Walcott 161). The Caribbean locale is transformed into the American West: Achille’s oar becomes a rifle, the stern of his boat becomes a saddle. He envisions himself shooting at “savages” who fall “like Aruacs.../ to the muskets of the Conquistador” (162). The brief allusion to the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean in these last lines is subsequently developed in the following scene when Achille, while raking leaves in the yard of the blind old man Seven Seas, uncovers archeological evidence of the island’s Arawak inhabitants. When Achille unearths a stone totem, he is disturbed by the discovery and “wrenches” the totem out of the ground, “hurling” it away.¹

This gesture of jettisoning evidence of an indigenous Caribbean past is not one that the poem as a whole supports. Instead, employing a strategy of indirection in

Omeros that recalls Édouard Glissant's concept of *détour*, Walcott calls attention to a suppressed indigenous past that haunts the Caribbean through a thematic focus on *Native American* history. In addition to repeated but brief allusions to the Caribbean's indigenous past, such as the reference to the island's Arawak name, "Iounalao," in the poem's opening lines, *Omeros* gives sustained attention to the late-nineteenth century U.S. phenomenon of the Ghost Dance and to the events that led up to the death of Chief Sitting Bull in 1890. Walcott's emphasis on indigenous peoples of the Americas, both Caribbean and North American, reflects his rejection of an Afrocentric poetics that has tended to neglect the indigenous Caribbean presence. While some Caribbean writers, notably Wilson Harris, have engaged indigenous themes, Walcott's consideration of the indigene is unusually sustained, spanning three genres of writing, and therefore offers a rich starting point for a discussion of Caribbean constructions of this figure. In particular, Walcott's unexpected—and indeed somewhat controversial—emphasis on Native American material serves to locate the Caribbean in a hemispheric American context that underlines the necessity of a crosscultural perspective when addressing New World identities. Walcott's focus on an iconic episode of Native American history brings attention to the absent presence of Caribbean indigeneity while at the same time resisting an easy identification of indigenous and New World African historical experiences of displacement.

107

THE FIGURE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN IN CARIBBEAN WRITING

Walcott has been widely faulted for his inclusion of Native American material in *Omeros*, a feature that critics have tended to view as the poem's major failing. As Robert Hamner reports, "a number of critics have seriously questioned the thematic and aesthetic value of broaching the plight of Native Americans in a West Indian epic" (92). Hamner is himself among the more generous of Walcott's readers when he describes the appearance of this material as "exceptionally abrupt" (90) and identifies it as the "most precarious experiment in the poem's overall narrative structure" (92). Paul Breslin is more blunt, complaining that in this "weakest stretch of the poem," "[t]he narrative pace...slows to a crawl, while the West Indian islands almost disappear in the vast scale of Walcott's catalogue of displacements and genocides" (262). On the whole, critics tend to view the Native American sections of *Omeros* as distracting from—and as extrinsic to—its Caribbean concerns. Yet it is noteworthy that Walcott devotes not only Book IV of *Omeros* to Native American material, but also the entirety of his play *The Ghost Dance* (2002), which was written during the same period. Native American motifs also feature in such early poems as "Elegy" (1969), "Over Colorado" (1976), and "Forest of Europe" (1979), testifying that Native America has preoccupied Walcott for some time.² The heroine of *The Ghost Dance*, a white

woman named Catherine Weldon who befriended Chief Sitting Bull, is a major character in *Omeros* as well, and she is one of the few figures to appear in both Walcott's poetry and prose (Bensen 119). If, then, we approach the Native American themes in Walcott's writing not as a distraction from his true Caribbean subject matter, but as fundamental to his way of seeing, what insight does this choice of material provide into his poetics? How does Walcott's understanding of the relationship between "Indian" and "West Indian" inform his broader conception of Caribbean identity, and what does his interest in Native American history suggest with regard to his positioning of the Caribbean vis à vis the Americas as a whole?

108 Walcott is not alone among Caribbean authors, or indeed postcolonial and diasporic authors of the Americas, in engaging the figure of the North American Indian. As I have noted elsewhere (Casteel 2007), while the treatment of the indigene in North American settler colonial writing has been widely discussed, little attention has been given to the function of this figure in postcolonial, diasporic and ethnic minority writing. This lacuna is particularly regrettable because it obscures the extent to which the anxieties about belonging that attend settler colonial portrayals of the indigene are also relevant to contemporary postcolonial and diasporic writing. Philip Deloria's illuminating discussion of the motif of "playing Indian" in the colonial United States emphasizes its historical connections to the formation of national identity, to the desire to become "native." Terry Goldie makes a related argument in a Canadian and Australian context regarding what he terms "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" in settler societies (13). Such desires are also manifest, however, in contemporary diasporic writing of the Americas, as is evidenced by the reemergence of indigenizing motifs and the trope of "going native" in such novels as Bernard Malamud's *The People* (1989) and Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* (1981) (see Casteel 2007, 2009).

Contemporary Caribbean writers' treatments of the figure of the North American Indian range from Austin Clarke's romanticization of the silent, enigmatic Indian in his essay "In the Semi-Colon of the North" (1982) to Dionne Brand's more nuanced depiction of the interaction between a Black bus driver in Vancouver and a Coast Salish woman who boards his bus and asks for directions in *A Map to the Door of No Return* (2001). In his essay, Clarke casts himself as a "prospector" and recalls "adventure books of the West" that he had read as a child in Barbados, thereby largely reinscribing settlement narratives. Brand, by contrast, unsettles such narratives by pondering the ironies of a First Nations woman who depends on the more recently arrived bus driver, who is of Caribbean background, to orient her in her own landscape: "The woman asking directions might have known these names several hundred years ago. Today when she enters the bus she is lost" (219).

Walcott's reading of the figure of the North American Indian in his drama and poetry similarly complicates New World settlement and indigenizing narratives. Walcott's treatment of Native American history in his 1996 essay on Robert Frost provides a critical context for his dramatic and poetic presentations of Native

Americans in *The Ghost Dance* and *Omeros*. Two central ideas emerge in the Frost essay: First, Walcott seeks to expose and challenge Frost's espousal of the myth of Manifest Destiny.³ In the essay, Walcott discusses Frost's "The Gift Outright" (1942), a poem that Frost famously recited at John F. Kennedy's inauguration. Citing the key lines:

The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. (952)

Walcott calls attention to the poem's suppression of slavery, the colonization of Native Americans, in short "the dispossession of others that this destiny demanded" ("The Road" 93-94). "The choice of poem was not visionary so much as defensive" ("The Road" 94), Walcott charges, likening Kennedy to a "young emperor" in command "of a country that was not just a republic but also an empire, no more a homespun vision of pioneer values but a world power" ("The Road" 93). Thus Walcott underscores both

109

the United States' annexationist past and its neo-imperialist present. Secondly, Walcott's reading of Frost's poem identifies the American myth of the West as part of a longer tradition of expansionist colonial narratives in the New World. The critique of Frost that Walcott advances links the Caribbean to other regions of the Americas, situating the Caribbean within larger hemispheric patterns of dispossession and dislocation. Notwithstanding his statement in his preface to *The Ghost Dance* that its setting and history are "completely American," Walcott's hemispheric perspective is signalled by his attention to Native American material and by the analogies that he draws between Native Americans and the Arawak and Carib. Walcott writes in his early essay "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (1974) that "we were American even while we were British...because [Americans and West Indians] share this part of the world, and have shared it for centuries now, even as conqueror and victim, as exploiter and exploited..." (51). Here, as in other essays and interviews, Walcott identifies a "common experience" and a "geographic sympathy" that link the Caribbean to both North and South America ("The Muse" 36; "Interview" 172).⁴ Walcott's critique of Frost's restrictive narrative of American belonging is thus informed by a hemispheric perspective that relates the United States to the Caribbean on the basis of a common legacy of colonialism as well as their geographical contiguity.

As the essay on Frost continues, Walcott excavates a racist passage from one of Frost's letters, prompting the difficult question: "Now that other races and other causes in the babel of the republic have been given permission to speak in the very language that ruled and defined them, must everything be revised by the new order?" (114). In other words, is Frost's racism grounds for casting his poems aside? Walcott's answer is no, that to answer old exclusions with new ones is only to 'repeat the old order.' Instead, Walcott argues here, as he has elsewhere, against "an aesthetics of revenge" in favour of a poetics of inclusion (114). The combination of critique and

inclusivity that marks the Frost essay is characteristic of Walcott's drama and poetry as well. Walcott's poetics of inclusion, coupled with his hemispheric perspective and his critique of the ideology of Manifest Destiny, account for his extended consideration of Native American history in *The Ghost Dance* and *Omeros*.

THE GHOST DANCE

The Ghost Dance was commissioned by Hartwick College in upstate New York and was first performed in 1989. Instead of privileging a Native American perspective on the Ghost Dance movement of the late nineteenth century American West, as perhaps one might have expected, the play offers a counternarrative to Manifest Destiny by presenting the conscience-stricken responses of the white men and women who witnessed the growth of the movement. The play is set in North Dakota after Little
110 Big Horn in the days leading up to the massacre of Native Americans at Wounded Knee in 1890 and freely redraws historical figures and events. In so doing, it mimics and displaces the generic conventions of a John Ford Western, with all of the requisite stock figures and props. Strikingly, Walcott chooses to center his play, not on a Native American character, but on a white woman. The widow Catherine Weldon is a friend and former secretary to Chief Sitting Bull who attempts to warn him of the danger he faces by encouraging his people to participate in the Ghost Dance, and who seduces the Indian agent Major McLaughlin in order to extract information about the army's plans. The Ghost Dance, a messianic movement that taught that the old life before the arrival of the white man could be recovered through acceptance of the new religion and the ritual of the dance, is rejected by Catherine as "madness." Catherine is white but also marginalized, a border-crossing figure who refuses to respect racial and cultural boundaries and who resists the polarization of identities that she witnesses taking place (see Bensen 120).

If Catherine claims that she "find[s] no difficulty / at all in crossing the mute line, the boundary / that separates us from the Sioux" (*The Ghost Dance* 223), she is not the only character in the play to question white authority and to cross boundaries. Even Sitting Bull's arch antagonist Major McLaughlin declares himself "exhausted by all the brutality" and asks, "why do we pale faces presume our superiority?" (*The Ghost Dance* 143). McLaughlin himself has an Indian wife, while Lieutenant Brandon is engaged to Lucy, an Indian woman who is attempting to assimilate into white Christian society. Yet the waning of Catherine's friendship with Sitting Bull, the weakening of the two soldiers' romantic relationships with Indian women, and Lucy's failed conversion to Christianity point to the pressures under which such cross-cultural alliances come as the hostility between the Sioux and the white settlers escalates. These pressures culminate in the murder of Sitting Bull and his sons by McLaughlin's Indian police at the end of the play.

Thus while the play highlights contact between cultures—the intermarriages and other forms of interaction and hybridization that shape the society of the late nineteenth century American West (the Ghost Dance is itself a blend of Christian and Native American beliefs)—it also traces the hardening of identities that occurs as the conflict intensifies. Catherine in particular resists this polarization through her sympathy for the Sioux and her friendship with Sitting Bull. “Why, for that matter, couldn’t we become Indians?” Catherine asks; “Why do the Indians have to turn into us?” (150). She insists on the fundamental commonality of Indians and whites: “Well, perhaps I’m Indian. Okay? / At any rate, I don’t see any difference. / I don’t think it is a question of changing faith” (132). Catherine’s positioning between cultures and her capacity for crosscultural sympathy accounts for her prominence in the play. Walcott’s American West is a space of contact and reciprocal influence, of the indigenization of whites as much as the assimilation of Indians. Yet the events leading up to the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee mark an irreparable rupture. According to Catherine, there is no wiping away what has transpired: “But we can’t escape memory. / Every action has its ghost. / Every thought” (243). The United States will be forever haunted by this legacy of dispossession, as the final lines of the play (spoken by Catherine) underscore:

111

I believe they are always there, always approaching,
like thunder without sound, on hooves of smoke,
those whom the land that gave them life belonged to—
Sitting Bull, Kicking Bear, and the leaves of the tribes,
the Blackfoot, the Sioux, the Ogalalas, the Cheyenne. (246)

OMEROS

Walcott pursues his interest in the Sioux and Catherine Weldon in his book-length poem *Omeros*. In *Omeros*, the incorporation of Native American material into what is ostensibly a poem of Caribbean homecoming serves to advance a conception of Caribbean society as a space of contact, interaction, and layered histories—a space of *Relation* in Glissant’s terms. The epic framework is a capacious one that accommodates a plurality of voices and geographies, enabling the poet/narrator to move back and forth from the Caribbean to the United States of the poet’s exile, establishing relationships between the two regions. The American passages of the poem reference a New World slavery past that links the Caribbean and the United States. Less obviously perhaps, they also allude to indigenous histories of dispossession that span the two regions: “One elegy from Aruac to Sioux,” a poignant line of the poem asserts (164).

Revisiting episodes of Native American history in *Omeros* that he had earlier explored in *The Ghost Dance*, Walcott resituates this material within a new framework that makes its resonance with regard to the Caribbean more explicit. More

specifically, Walcott's reading of the Native American West and the relationship between Chief Sitting Bull and Catherine Weldon becomes part of a larger commentary on New World societies and the historical legacies of displacement with which they must contend. In *Omeros*, the incorporation of Native American material works to expand the scope of the poem and to advance a hemispheric perspective on what might otherwise appear to be more narrowly Caribbean concerns. Walcott suggests through his inclusion of Native American material—and concomitantly of spectral indigenous Caribbean presences—that a Caribbean identity and sense of place must be defined in plural, crosscultural terms, thereby moving still further away from the Afrocentric position that he has long resisted.

At the opening of this essay, I noted both the fantasy of the American West in which Achille indulges in *Omeros* and his attempt to erase disturbing reminders of a prior, indigenous Caribbean past by throwing away the Arawak totem. In a Caribbean context, the indigenous presence is perhaps more easily suppressed than it is elsewhere in the Americas, for the genocide of Caribbean indigenous peoples was more total than in other regions. Although the thoroughness of that genocide has been exaggerated, traces of an indigenous presence in the Caribbean—particularly in the francophone and anglophone islands (Rouse 162)—remain extremely marginal, and archaeological and ethnohistorical information about the indigenous peoples who inhabited the islands is relatively scant.⁵ When the British forcibly deported 4,000 Carib from St. Vincent to Central America in 1797, they effectively put an end to independent indigenous settlement in the Caribbean, entrenching the myth that no indigenous populations remained in the Caribbean (see Rouse 161).⁶ Yet if Achille excises material evidence of an indigenous past with relative ease, he is less easily able to erase its linguistic traces. As Seven Seas points out to him, the etymology of words such as “pomme-Arac,” or “apple of the Arawak,” indelibly inscribes the indigenous presence. “This used to be their place,” Seven Seas reminds Achille (*Omeros* 163). The derivation of the trees' names and Achille's discovery of the totem in the soil suggest the continuing presence of the Arawak in the landscape, “the strata of history layered underheel” (163).⁷ Nature seems alive with the past, recalling Wilson Harris' evocative vision of the Caribbean landscape as infused with indigenous ways of knowing as well as Glissant's insight that in the Caribbean, the landscape “is all history” (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 11).

Achille's discovery of the Arawak totem combines with Seven Seas' keen awareness of the Arawak and Carib legacy to introduce reminders of the indigenous Caribbean past throughout the poem. Seven Seas, the blind seer who travels through space and time, is particularly attuned to the indigenous legacy, and his presence in the poem is frequently accompanied by references to Caribs and Arawaks. He is both “river griot” and “Sioux shaman” (318); as such, he is able to make links with the past, including the indigenous past, and to draw connections between Native American and indigenous Caribbean experiences.⁸ Seven Seas tells Achille that he had himself been a Ghost Dancer in the American West:

... He said he was once
 a Ghost Dancer like that smoke. He described the snow
 to Achille. He named the impossible mountains
 that he had seen when he lived among the Indians. (164)

Seven Seas' connection to the American West is confirmed when the narrator, visiting the Trail of Tears, locates Seven Seas among the "ragged bands" of Choctaws, Creeks and other Native Americans who were forced to migrate west of the Mississippi River in the early nineteenth century (177). Thus, Seven Seas provides a direct link in the poem between the Sioux and their Caribbean brethren.

Achille's and Seven Seas' indigenous-themed passages from Book III and the tension between "Indian" and "West Indian" that these passages introduce in an abbreviated form anticipate the fuller treatment that indigenous motifs receive in Book IV when they are taken up by the poet/narrator. In Book IV, however, the focus moves from the Arawak to the Sioux and to North America. Achille's fantasy of the settlement of the West is replayed from a more critical and historically informed viewpoint, as the narrator comes into the foreground of the poem and autobiographical themes predominate. Book IV is set entirely in the United States, and addresses the narrator's period of exile in Brookline, Massachusetts. We find the poet depressed, isolated and adrift in Brookline after the breakup of his marriage. "Home" is a problematic term for him: "I had nowhere to go but home. Yet I was lost" (172).

113

In the midst of the narrator's autobiographical musings, the scenery suddenly shifts to that of the American West, to the Dakotas where the narrator allows a Crow horseman to "pass / into the page" of the poem (175). At this point, the narrator begins to draw what initially seems a rather self-indulgent analogy between the breakup of his marriage and the broken treaties and hardships suffered by the Sioux. The themes of loss and betrayal link the two episodes in a complex mapping of the poet's personal and romantic life onto Native American history. The analogy at first appears reductive, collapsing the historical into the personal and identifying the suffering narrator with the oppressed Indian whose treaty agreements have not been respected.⁹ Yet, as the poem continues, it soon broadens out from the personal to engage larger historical themes. References to American slavery are woven into stanzas about the Trail of Tears, suggesting parallels between the forms of dispossession that historically have beset Native and African Americans, and by extension, the African diaspora in the New World.

Indeed, the analogy between the narrator's suffering and that of the Sioux not only rests on the idea of betrayal but also that of dispossession. In exile in Boston, the narrator is troubled by his sense of placelessness, and the appearance of the figure of the indigene, with its traditional associations with emplacement and Americanization, is not as surprising as it perhaps initially appears. As a now classic literature on representations of the indigene has shown,¹⁰ the settler culture is haunted by an anxious awareness of its lack of legitimacy and by a desire for an authentic connection to the new land. The settler culture assuages this anxiety through what Goldie terms

“appropriative” modes of writing. In such narratives, as Leslie Monkman notes, “the Indian is no longer a foil for white culture but rather an indigenous ancestor in a land where the white man is still an immigrant” (5). The indigene embodies the connection to the land that the non-Native protagonist lacks, and symbolically transfers this connection to the settler by vanishing or dying off or, in the case of the female indigene, through sexual union with the settler. *Omeros*, however, both cites the appropriative narrative of indigenization and significantly complicates it by returning to the non-Native figure of Catherine Weldon in order to consider the challenges of American emplacement.

As she had in the play, Catherine takes up considerable space in the poem. In *Omeros*, Catherine is once again presented as a highly sympathetic figure with whom the narrator identifies, and Walcott again draws heavily on her letters to Sitting Bull.¹¹ The history of Native American dispossession is told largely through her eyes and voice, contributing to the multiperspectival character of the poem. By ventriloquizing Catherine, Walcott broadens the perspective of the poem and privileges the possibilities for crosscultural connection that Catherine’s friendship with Sitting Bull represents. Walcott’s firm belief in the capacity for such crossover and mutual understanding is summed up in a key statement in Book V: “The widening mind can acquire / the hues of a foliage different from where it begins” (207). Yet by the same token, it is significant that as in *The Ghost Dance*, in *Omeros* Walcott does not make a Native American character the focal point. Instead, by filtering the story of the Sioux through Catherine, he maintains a deliberate distance from the Native American material. Although Walcott incorporates the story of Native American dispossession into his broader narrative, associating it with the Middle Passage and New World slavery, he does not assert a one-to-one identification between indigenous and African diasporic experiences in the New World. Walcott employs the mediating figure of Catherine to effect a displacement or distantiating of the indigene, thereby resisting an easy identification or conflation of distinct historical experiences of dislocation. Towards the end of the poem we learn that a St. Lucian villager’s romance with a Cherokee woman in Florida is short-lived; the gap between West Indians and “true-true Indians” remains unbridged. The framework of which Catherine is an integral part is thus one that allows for both parallelism and difference, communication and opacity.

The world of Walcott’s *Omeros* is not one of contained identities in which cultural boundaries are firmly maintained, but rather one of dynamic interaction—if not always identification—among the various peoples who inhabit the New World. For Walcott, the construction of a Caribbean cultural identity must necessarily register the inherent plurality of Caribbean and New World societies. Moreover, a Caribbean sense of place must acknowledge, rather than suppress, competing claims to that landscape. The epic mode in Walcott’s rendering remains preoccupied with traditional epic themes of exile and homecoming, but home is no longer achieved through the coercive force of empire and Manifest Destiny: in *Omeros*, Walcott’s

characters are engaged in "founding not Rome but home" (301).¹² Accordingly, prior presences on the land are not effaced in order that new presences might be substituted. The poem suggests that constructing a sense of place by suppressing evidence of other peoples' claims, as Achilles seeks to do, is not a viable form of postcolonial emplacement. Instead, the landscape that the poem presents is replete with layered histories and competing claims that cannot be ignored. Correspondingly, Walcott indicates that the historical experiences of oppression of various dispossessed peoples cannot be collapsed together, even if there are parallels and continuities among their histories.¹³

The irreducible plurality of *Omeros* reflects the makeup of New World societies, which, as Glissant has noted, are manifestly composite rather than atavistic. Glissant suggests that while atavistic cultures rely heavily on genesis and creation myths, composite cultures are too acutely conscious of their creolized condition to authorize themselves via genealogical narratives. Instead, they emphasize contact and entanglement (*Traité* 194-5). Accordingly, Glissant defines the Caribbean as a "multiple series of relationships" or "field of relationships" (*Caribbean* 139; 253). The hemispheric perspective that Walcott advances in *Omeros* and in his essays foregrounds both this creolized condition and the historical patterns of dislocation that span the Americas, confirming the Caribbean's links to other regions of the New World. One of the less well understood stories of American dispossession is that of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, who were the first New World people the Europeans encountered and whose presence the Europeans were more successful in eradicating than they were in the case of their North American counterparts. *Omeros* is punctuated by frequent but brief references to Arawak and Carib spectral presences—to Arawak words that remain in the language, to Caribs labouring in the silver mines. By sustaining a narrative focus on a much better known (and indeed iconic) episode from Native American history, that of Sitting Bull and the late-nineteenth century Ghost Dance,¹⁴ Walcott is able to probe more deeply into the absent presence of indigeneity that haunts Caribbean cultures than he would have been able to had he approached this presence more directly and through a narrower geography.

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NOTES

1. Hamner interprets this gesture as reflecting Achille's superstitious fear of the Arawak, but as I will suggest below, in my reading it carries a broader significance.
2. King notes Walcott's "surprisingly wide and varied readings of Indian history" (462).
3. See also his critical comments on the neglect of Native America and the presence of the Manifest Destiny narrative in Walt Whitman's American epic ("Reflections" 243).
4. In an interview with José Maria Pérez Fernández, Walcott suggests that "there is always a greater warmth of feeling...between Caribbean people and Latin American people, because of the same experience, the same landscapes in a sense, almost the same history. So that I have a lot of affection for people I know like Mario Vargas Llosa, Octavio and Carlos Fuentes" ("Interview" 170). Interestingly, his notion of a "geographic sympathy" extends to Faulkner as well ("Interview" 172), in keeping with critics such as Glissant who include Faulkner's South in the "Other America."
5. *The Gale Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes* lists the population of both the Arawak and Ciboney peoples as "zero today" (Gorry 515) while *The Indigenous World: 2004* indicates that "there 12,000 people of Amerindian descent in north-east Trinidad" (Vindig 114). See Wilson, ed., *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean*, for a refutation of the myth of the total extermination of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. Also seeking to challenge the myth of indigenous extinction was a 2002 photographic exhibit at New York's Museum of the American Indian which documented the indigenous

presence in the Caribbean. "The New Old World: Antilles: Living Beyond the Myth" was exhibited at the National Museum of the American Indian in New York, November 2, 2002–April 20, 2003.

6. One exception is the Carib settlement in Dominica (see Joseph for an extended discussion).
7. Wilson emphasizes that the indigenous legacy survives in the relationship of the inhabitants of the Caribbean to the land.
8. He is, as Hamner notes, "able to bridge the distance from Carib and Arawak to Sioux through the elegiac fate they have in common with fallen leaves" (85).
9. Breslin is especially critical of the analogy, arguing that it is here "that the poem most painfully overreaches itself" (262).
10. See for example Berkhofer; Francis; Goldie; Monkman.
11. Weldon's letters to Chief Sitting Bull served as sources for both the play and the poem (Bensen 119).
12. Walcott explains in an essay that he is uncomfortable with the application of the term "epic" to his poem because of the genre's associations with political or manifest destiny ("Reflections" 243).
- 118** 13. In this regard I disagree with Bensen's view that the analogies that Walcott constructs in *Omeros* result in the universal becoming a "blank category" (264).
14. The Sitting Bull episode is among the best known in Native American history, having become the icon of all tragic resistance and survival among indigenous peoples. Wounded Knee is seen as the ultimate battle, a final moment in a 300-year power struggle. The iconic status of the episode was ensured in part by the emergence of the popular press, photography, and of mass readerships at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as by the Wild West shows that endlessly repeated and reinscribed these events. As a result, Sitting Bull's story has gained a kind of global currency.