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## **Native Resistance through Art: A Contestation of History through Dialogue, Representation, and Action**

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### **Abstract**

Beginning November 2006, and continuing through December 2007, Oklahomans were alerted to the promotions of the Oklahoma Centennial. For Indigenous Oklahomans, this was a problematic marking of a historical event. The Centennial's grand-narrative advanced a story privileging the "pioneers" who "settled the land" as the official story of Oklahoma's past. This article deconstructs the manufactured Oklahoma history advanced through the Centennial by identifying and examining, utilizing Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory, the counterstory put forth in the *Current Realities: A Dialogue with the People* art show produced by Oklahoma Native artists in the OklaDADA collective. *Current Realities* functioned as social justice—providing all Oklahomans with a comprehensive history of Oklahoma by telling Indigenous Oklahomans' history and reality through art.

## Introduction

Beginning in November 2006, and continuing through December 2007, Oklahomans were alerted to the promotions of the Oklahoma Centennial. For the Native people of Oklahoma, this was a problematic marking of a historical event. Historian Angie Debo (1940/1991) proclaimed, “The plunder of Indians was so closely joined with pride in creation of a great new commonwealth that it received little condemnation” (p. 92). Although the exploitation, terrorism, and killings of Indigenous Oklahomans for land, oil, and other resources have been documented, this history did not enter into the Centennial discourse. Historical amnesia is more comfortable for most Oklahomans—however, Indigenous Oklahomans remember through their family and tribal stories and their art, heightening consciousness and conceptualizations of the state’s past for the education of children, youth, and adults who perhaps have been forced into or have chosen to stay in this historical amnesia.

I am one of those Indigenous Oklahomans who remembers and calls into question the mythical history promoted within the Oklahoma Centennial. I was born in Cooweescoowee District of the Cherokee Nation and I am a descendent of a family who was resettled to and then took allotments in the community of Catoosa, Oklahoma. I am an enrolled member of, thus a citizen of, the Cherokee Nation, and I am a Native scholar in an institution of higher education. I am an inheritor of the stories and history of the place that became Oklahoma. I am also a story (re)teller and work to re-write/re-right history as a means to fight historical amnesia. In this article I deconstruct the manufactured Oklahoma history advanced in Centennial projects and celebrations by identifying and examining the counterstory put forth in the *Current Realities: A Dialogue with the People* art show produced by Oklahoma Native artists in the OklaDADA collective.

## Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory’s (CRT) basic premise is that racism is a historical, systemic, ideological manifestation of power to serve, maintain, and protect white privilege (Delgado, 1989; Harris, 1993), resulting in the silencing and marginalization of the experiences and realities of People of Color. CRT’s goal is to construct an alternative reality by naming one’s reality through storytelling and counterstorytelling, thus, the advantage of CRT is the space for voice that it provides People of Color. Examples of the “voice” of these counterstories include “parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction, and revisionist histories” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 57), and should include art, which provides an aesthetic space for speaking back as well. The contestation, deconstruction and reshaping of the master or grand-narrative helps members of the dominant racial group know “what it is like to be nonwhite” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 39). The multiple perspectives and counterstories are sources of valid knowledge, facilitating transformation; hence, CRT contains an activist dimension for movement toward social justice.

Indigenous scholars utilized CRT to examine the effects of racism and power on Native communities, employing stories as truth-telling—to speak back to colonization and oppression. Brayboy (2005) used CRT as his foundation to introduce Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to examine issues of Indigenous People in relationship to the U.S. and its laws and policies. Although a significant role is played by race, a primary tenet within TribalCrit is the endemic nature of colonization and its processes in society. CRT and TribalCrit generate truths about colonization in larger social and structural contexts to facilitate change. “Since the truth about injustices perpetuated against Indigenous People has been largely denied in the United States, truth-telling becomes an important strategy for decolonization” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 7).

Looking through CRT and TribalCrit lenses, the grand-narrative of the Centennial advanced a narrow story privileging the “boomers,” “sooners,”<sup>1</sup> and “pioneers” who “settled the land” as the official and sanctioned story of Oklahoma’s past. This “pioneer history” is problematized and challenged by presenting the counter-narrative from the perspective of Native Peoples, the state’s first citizens, by highlighting the stories, work, and actions of those involved with the OklaDADA artist collective and the *Current Realities* exhibit.

### ***Research Framework and Methodology for Data Gathering and Analysis***

An analysis of the *Current Realities* show necessitated a thorough and deeply nuanced understanding of discourse within the Oklahoma Centennial, contextualized within the history of colonization of Native Peoples in both the U.S. and in what is now the state of Oklahoma. Oppressive laws and Acts which fostered the oppression that Indigenous Oklahomans endured historically, and continues today in various forms, had to be identified and understood. I offer this Tribal Critical Race Theory Case Study of *Current Realities* as a means to (1) access and understand the historical colonizing experiences of Indigenous Oklahomans; (2) understand oppressions are still enacted upon Indigenous Oklahomans; and, (3) transform that enactment of colonization and oppression to achieve social justice through an accurate and comprehensive representation of Oklahoma history in public discourse and public schooling.

Data for the case study consisted of interview transcriptions, researcher notes, digital files or photos of artists’ work, public documents including but not limited to newspaper articles and newsletters, Internet websites, historical documents and literature, and verbal and written oral histories of Indigenous Oklahomans. I viewed the *Current Realities* show in Tulsa, Oklahoma and took researcher field notes on the artwork and the show, and gathered information from a total of 9 artists and community members involved in *Current Realities* exhibit and the

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<sup>1</sup> “Boomers” refers to those who pressured the U.S. government to open lands that were “not used” by tribal peoples for white occupation, and subsequently began attempts at illegal homesteading. “Sooners” refers to those who jumped borders illegally to enter the territory early, staking claims before the official start of the land run.

OkladADA artist collective. Formal interviews consisted of 1 to 1 ½ hour audio-taped interviews with 5 individuals at the interviewees' home or other preferred location; two interviews were through conversations with 2 individuals at the interviewees' home and a coffee shop; and communications with 3 individuals were conducted in written question and answer via email conversations. These variations in interviewing technique and documentation followed Indigenous methodologies and appropriateness (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Smith, 1999). In honor of validity and reliability, the manuscript was sent to each participant for congruence with representation of their voice and intentions. Changes were made to the manuscript in relation to their feedback.

### *Silenced and Ignored, but not Forgotten: An Historical Overview*

In the quest to acquire more land for non-Native occupation and as a method to contain and control Indigenous Peoples, many tribes were violently ripped from their homelands across the U.S. and forcefully removed to Indian Territory, what is today the state of Oklahoma. Treaties and agreements for removal guaranteed the new homelands would be the possession of tribal nations in perpetuity. However, through the ideology and policies of Manifest Destiny, the new homelands were quickly coveted and invaded by non-Natives. The U.S. federal government sanctioned the allotment of Indian land through the 1887 General Allotment Act and the various land runs, land lotteries, and sealed bidding of land in the western half of the state (beginning in 1889 and concluding in 1906), authorizing white occupancy. Indian land was communal property until the Allotment Act enforced the privatization of land through individual ownership. Coercion, deceit, and greed for land plagued allottees. Parman (1979) reported that by 1908, approximately 60% of allottees who received fee simple titles had lost their land. An underlying motive of the Act was the forced assimilation of Indian people into a White value system of private property ownership. The combined force of assimilation and the legal assigning of individual parcels was a calculated method of divesting Indigenous Peoples from the land.

After the designation of the western half of Indian Territory as "Oklahoma Territory" by the U.S. government, plans were executed to join the two territories into a single state. The tribes and many non-Native occupants of the remaining Indian Territory protested. A convention was held in 1905, delegates developed a constitution for the state of Sequoyah that would exist independently from the proposed state of Oklahoma, made from Oklahoma Territory. The State of Sequoyah was to be comprised of forty-eight counties with representation of four at-large congressmen. Republicans fought an Indian state because it would be Democratic and because of the loss of control of natural resources the tribal nations possessed. Republican U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt signed the bill forming the single state of Oklahoma on June 16, 1906 (Debo 1940/1991; Hegewood, Paige & Littlefield, 2005), extinguishing the reality of an Indian state. On November 16, 1907, Oklahoma became the forty-sixth state in the union.

Historically, Native people were legally classified as wards of the U.S. government; legislation at the federal and state levels furthered that control. In Oklahoma, the Five Civilized Tribes Act of 1908 extended federal “protection” to Natives one-half or more Indian blood—rendering them “incompetent” to handle their own affairs. All minors were removed from federal protection and delegated to Oklahoma county probate courts for the assignment of guardians to supervise their wardship status and property holdings. The guardian system operated to exploit, harm, and kill Native children through a wide-spread system of political plunder. Following allotment, a few Native people obtained immense wealth from the discovery of oil on their allotment land, but most never benefitted from the oil or gas royalties due to losing their money to the white guardian class, attorneys, and Oklahoma probate courts; some were killed for their resources (Debo, 1940/1991).

Although this history is rarely discussed in public discourse or public school curriculum, Native families and tribal communities remember and live with the residue of past oppressions. This is the history that framed the counterstory to the Centennial celebration discourse and was reflected in the OklaDADA artists’ artwork in the *Current Realities* exhibit.

#### *OklaDADA and Current Realities: Artists Speaking Back Through Art*

The OklaDADA artist collective originated in Fall 2005, as a group of artists forming a network “to disseminate information regarding opportunities within various artistic venues, facilitating entrance into the broader art community beyond the Indian art classification” (S. Wasserman, personal communication, February 7, 2010). A prime concern for the group was the instance of many Oklahoma Indian artists leaving the state and their tribal communities to seek wider markets for their art (H. Ahtone, personal communication, July 8, 2008; N. Burgess, personal communication, February 3, 2010).

The show, *Current Realities*, developed, in part, in response to a particular Oklahoma Centennial Commission sponsored project, the *Centennial Land Run Monument*. The commissioned sculpture by Paul Moore depicted the 1889 land run in which “settlers raced—on horseback, in wagons, and even on foot—to claim a parcel of the frontier to homestead” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 90). Placed on the Bricktown Canal in downtown Oklahoma City, only a short distance away from where the American Indian Cultural Center and Museum (AICCM) is being built, the sculpture is “the single largest work ever planned for installation in the United States” (Reynolds, 2007, p. 90) and features 45 large bronze pieces spanning 365 feet. Completion is expected in 2015 at an estimated cost of 6 million dollars (Downtown OKC, Inc., 2006, p. 4).

Oklahoma Centennial Commission Executive Director, J. Blake Wade, referred to the monument as recreating “the great spirit, bravery and determinism of Oklahoma’s early

settlers, many of whom overcame obstacles of epic proportions to create a new life and a new state” (“Centennial Land Run Monument,” 2007, p. 2). Representative Ernest Istook proclaimed the monument as “the defining symbol of Oklahoma’s heritage, and of the people who came here to live out their hopes and dreams and stake their claim in America” (Casteel, 2001, para. 7). Strikingly absent from discussion was who the land belonged to on which claims were staked, or references to the destruction that occurred for the 39 tribal nations upon the U.S. federal government’s opening of Indian lands to non-Natives.<sup>2</sup>

OklaDADA artists Nocona Burgess (Comanche) and Brent Greenwood (Chickasaw/Ponca) questioned the monument’s funding and lack of funding for Native art work of equal scale. They also spoke back to the grand-narrative of “Oklahoma’s pioneer heritage” radiated by the Land Run Monument. Burgess commented, “I want to epoxy about a thousand little plastic Indians underneath the sculpture, as if they are getting run over” (personal communication, February 3, 2010). Greenwood added:

Nocona and I joked about how we could sabotage the land run monument, all in a non-destructive manner of course. We felt since there was no Native representation in this area, we were going to spray paint white lines of Indian silhouettes around the monument—just like the white chalk lines of old murder scenes. (personal communication, February 15, 2008)

Burgess and Greenwood’s imagery of action speak back to the monument’s grand-narrative of pioneer heroics. They voice the Native experience that has gone missing in the space, both historically and figuratively, of the monument.

A few Native artists were involved in Centennial projects such as posters and the centennial stamp, however, funding equal to the land run monument was not awarded for Native-oriented artwork through Centennial projects funding or other state or federal monies. Brent Greenwood was involved with a proposed mural project in the Oklahoma City Bricktown area, near the land run monument, however, the tribal artists’ mural was rejected by the Bricktown Commission and dropped from discussion. “What upsets me is that the Bricktown

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<sup>2</sup> To relocate many Native Peoples to Oklahoma, the U.S. government negotiated treaties with the various nations, such as the Treaty of Medicine Lodge in 1867 with the Kiowa and Comanche. Under the conditions of the treaty, the Kiowas and Comanches ceded a large parcel of their traditional lands in exchange for a smaller parcel of land in southwestern Indian Territory. As a result of the Dawes Act and the allotment of tribal lands, “excess” lands were planned for sale to non-Native homesteaders. This move violated the treaty which mandated an approval of any land cessions by  $\frac{3}{4}$  of adult males. Lone Wolf, a Kiowa leader in what came to be the Supreme Court case of *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock* (1903), sued U.S. federal officials; Lone Wolf lost the case. The Court ruled that Congress had plenary power and could abrogate treaties—meaning that terms and conditions, or promises to tribes, could be altered without the consent of the tribes. This remains a landmark case in Indian law (Hauptman, 1992; Prucha 2000). With the blessing of the U.S. judicial system, treaties and agreements were broken with other tribal nations on the road toward Oklahoma statehood.

Commission didn't even want to work with the artists to create a cohesive mural that addressed our diverse and rich Native heritage" (personal communication, February 15, 2008). Greenwood reasoned that because the near-by state capitol dome was crowned with "The Guardian," a 17-foot tall sculpture by Seminole/Creek artist and Oklahoma Senator Enoch Kelly Haney, the importance of having additional Native influenced public works lessened.

J. Blake Wade asserted that Native concerns of Centennial inaccuracy and insensitivity was "unfounded" (Ervin, 2007, para. 28); "[W]e've really tried to be sensitive to *our* Native Americans and their well-being" [emphasis mine] (para. 35). Wade stated, "That's why we're calling it a 'commemoration' instead of a 'celebration'.... We're not trying to change history. We're trying to make sure they're a part of this commemoration" (Ervin, 2007, para. 29, 31). A simple survey, however, of the Oklahoma Centennial Commission's website or Wade's own words in interviews and other promotional outlets revealed that "commemoration" was rarely used—"celebration" was the term of choice and tourism marketing.

Discussing the marking of the Oklahoma Centennial, Shoshana Wasserman, a member of Thlopthlocco Tribal Town and Muscogee (Creek) Nation and Director of Marketing and Public Relations for the AICCM, felt that a revision of history occurred, "on a grander scale...state-wide, it was a celebration and there was a re-writing of accurate history (personal communication, July 10, 2008). Taking that further, Heather Ahtone (Chickasaw/Choctaw), a creative word artist, art historian, curator, and founding OklaDADA member asks, "Why would anybody in power want their history to be rewritten or analyzed if in the analysis they lose some of that political control, they lose some of that propaganda that they're able to teach children?" (personal communication, July 8, 2008). The grand-narrative of heroic homesteaders was fore-fronted while Native experience was ignored and lost within a history translated into a pioneer myth. Nocona Burgess was critical of the grand-narrative put forth in the Centennial as well,

I think people have the right to celebrate if they want to, but not at the expense of the truth. It is important to acknowledge the real history and not the "Disney" version. The Land Run is history, but it was also taking away people's land. (personal communication, February 3, 2010)

Discussions centering on the media coverage of the Moore's Land Run sculpture; the lack of support of the Native art community; and, most importantly, the absence of the Native perspective in the Centennial, prompted OklaDADA to develop the *Current Realities* exhibit. According to Heather Ahtone,

The whole exhibit was kind of speared on by the feelings about this large sculpture.... The marker is about the taking of the land and not statehood. It's all about whose story gets to be told. (personal communication, July 8, 2008)

Shoshana Wasserman and Richard Ray Whitman, a Yuchi/Muscogee Creek Nation artist, actor, and photographer, described the exhibit as a proactive approach to having a Native presence in the Centennial discourse (S. Wasserman, personal communication interview, July 10, 2008; R.R. Whitman, personal communication, August, 1, 2008). Wasserman was an active community member with OklaDADA and supporter and facilitator in the beginning discussions leading to the *Current Realities* show. She describes *Current Realities*' origins as a point of "dreaming and conceiving"—"it became bigger than life" (personal communication, July 10, 2008), that is, it emerged into its own through the collective actions of the artists and their allies. Ahtone reflects:

When the show was hung and everything was brought into that, it was like the first bloom of what that next century could be about—the next century of strong political statements, an American narrative, and strong sense of tradition and rootedness. (personal communication, July 8, 2008)

The *Current Realities: A Dialogue with the People* exhibit opened<sup>3</sup> November 9, 2007, purposefully a week before the marking of the 100 year anniversary because "We wanted our voice to proceed the celebration of statehood" (S. Wasserman personal communication, July 8, 2008). Drawing attention to an Indigenous presence in today's Oklahoma and claiming that space, more than 60 OklaDADA artists<sup>4</sup> presented their work to address, speak back to, and create a dialogue regarding Oklahoma's history and present reality of the Indigenous community.

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<sup>3</sup> *Current Realities* opened November 9, 2007 and ran through December 21, 2007 in Oklahoma City. The show then moved to the Southwest Plains Indian Museum in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Some of the work was featured at the Living Arts of Tulsa Gallery, February 7-28, 2008, where I viewed the show.

<sup>4</sup> *Current Realities* artists had to be a Native American residing in Oklahoma or had to be from an Oklahoma tribe; creations had to be new and address the Centennial historical moment.





Figure 1

Brent Greenwood contributed a historically-based and powerfully symbolic painting *Not a Designated Centennial Project* [see Figure 1] for the show. One of the two Native men, seated on the ground, is a “real” person; the second is a black “shadow” person with the number “89” stenciled in the middle of his back representing the removal of the Indian as a result of the 1889 land run. Above them in a clouded sky is the Oklahoma Centennial logo with an image of a little white boy with a cartoonish, green, yellow, and red feather headdress on staring back at them. Off in the distance to the right of the two men are oil wells with the lyrics to “Oklahoma Rising”<sup>5</sup> rising overhead. Brent explained additional concepts integrated into his piece, which provides a counter-story to the revelry of the statehood Centennial.

<sup>5</sup> *Oklahoma Rising*, by country singer/songwriters, and Oklahomans, Vince Gill and Jimmy Webb, was the theme song of the Oklahoma Centennial.

I wanted to reference ideas that overwhelmed me during the whole Centennial celebration. I started by prominently displaying the year that Oklahoma was officially declared Indian Territory, 1834. It was said that the “Red Man” would have a new land for him to hunt and live in peace “for as long as the grass grows and the river flows.” Well, we all know what happened a short 55 years later. From that, I felt it important to hint at some of the one-sided lyrics to the song, “Oklahoma Rising,” because it seemed to be the theme song for 2007. My narrative was not meant to be resentful but rather educational. It is necessary to share our side of history to promote awareness. (personal communication, February 15, 2008)

Kenneth Greenwood (Otoe-Missouria) and Kimberly Rodriguez (Muscogee (Creek)/Oglala Sioux/Mexican) created two photography collages for *Current Realities* in a take-off of the block of photos at the opening to *The Brady Bunch* television show; this family, however, was aptly named *The Braidy Bunch* (see Figure 2).



Figure 2

In the first collage, Alice, pictured in the middle of the family, is posed as the domineering Bureau of Indian Affairs official and the different Braidy family members portray various dysfunctions resulting from generations of oppression and cultural stripping which has instigated the presence of alcoholism, domestic abuse, child neglect, and victimhood. In the

second collage, Alice, representing federal powers, has been ousted, resulting in happy, healthy, and successful family members. Kennetha emphasized that

People should know that Indians are making a big contribution whether they are becoming doctors or lawyers; that we're choosing not to be the victims. We're looking for a better future. We know the past, we lived through it, suffered through many things. We don't want our children to forget, but we want them to have a better future, a better outlook. (personal communication, July 7, 2008)



Figure 3

America Meredith (Cherokee Nation) painted *The End of the End of the Trail* (see Figure 3), portraying “contemporary Natives pulling down a statue of the *End of the Trail*, a la Oertel's *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III*” (personal communication, January 31, 2008). The *End of the Trail* statue, created by James Earle Fraser in 1915, depicts a lone warrior, lance in hand, leaning over from exhaustion on his equally downtrodden horse. This image has been utilized to “symbolize” Native people; however, it is a symbol of defeat and



extinction. Meredith's painting instead symbolizes the rejection of the *End of the Trail* image, in acknowledgement of the existence and vibrancy of Native Peoples and cultures.

A large sculpture installation, *Dirt Poor, Oil Rich*, by Richard Ray Whitman (see Figure 4), stunningly symbolized the exploitation and destruction of Oklahoma Indian people and land due to greed for oil. In this installation, Whitman posed the body of a Native person lying face down in red earth while an oil pump extracted oil from the person's back.



Figure 4. Richard Ray Whitman: *Dirt Poor, Oil Rich*, sculpture installation  
Photo by Vicki Monks, courtesy of Richard Ray Whitman.

Along with the sculpture, Whitman presented viewers with a written story telling of Moses Bruno (Citizen Band Potawatomi) and Mary Fish Bazquez (Muscogee Creek), both whom lived in dire poverty while their oil-rich allotment land leased by the federal government to non-Indians produced riches for the lessees, not for Bruno or Bazquez.

The opening of the exhibit was deemed a success—approximately 500 were in attendance. Ahtone said of the exhibit:

Nobody really knew if it would be good or too hot, if it was going to be so angry...but it was a little of everything. It was a little of celebration, and a little bit of cultural

specific references, and it was a little bit of political statement and a little bit humor. But all of it is our reality. (personal communication, July 8, 2008)

Wasserman strongly asserts that, “the thing that was the most rewarding about this exhibition was not necessarily the artwork that was generated, it was the dialogue that occurred between Native and non-Native, between people of different tribes and experiences, urban and rural, traditional and contemporary – that was remarkable....It wasn’t just about a visual dialogue, it was about an actual dialogue because Native artists felt they were being left out of the greater dialogue (personal communication, July 10, 2008).

OklaDADA’s purpose of the show had been realized—to create a space for dialogue. Indigenous Oklahomans had a presence in the Centennial on their terms. Ahtone assessed OklaDADA’s actions in the Centennial moment:

The common commitment was the need for an opportunity for the Native community to have an artistic voice. We speak through our art, that’s our tradition, that’s our history and that’s how our history is recorded and we needed to document this point (personal communication, July 8, 2008).

#### *Utilizing Art to Speak Truth to History and Current Reality*

Saltman (2009) asserts the fight for social justice ensues as “people and groups struggle over the representation and retelling of history and that these representational contests over the meanings of the past are inextricably tied to broader material and symbolic struggles, forces, and structures of power” (p. 1). Aside from the artwork created for *Current Realities*, some artists continually challenge and resist the disenfranchisement of Native experience and history through their work—Brent Greenwood describes his work as “social commentary on canvas” (personal communication, February 15, 2008). Because accurate histories are seldom reflected in mainstream media, America Meredith uses her medium as a means to counter historical inaccuracies or silences. She finds that fine art holds a more central, relevant place in communicating about history among Native Americans than it does for mainstream Americans. Although she sees change as more Natives are filming their own documentaries and movies to provide the counter-narrative, the medium of painting provides those who might not have access to expensive technical equipment to have access to a paintbrush and canvas to communicate that history (personal communication, February 8, 2008).

Regarding Native history, Heather Ahtone asks,

Who gets to write history? Whose history? Every individual has a history and sometimes those collective histories have shared elements that can be recorded as a larger history but when we read history books, how often are we seeing

that Native perspective included? Not too often, not too often even now.  
(personal communication, July 8, 2008)

The artists' work in *Current Realities* became public text challenging that version of Oklahoma history distorted for commercialization and tourism purposes, which denied exposure of truths to all citizens and rendered false "happy endings." As the art became text, all Oklahomans—children, youth, and adults—had the opportunity to read the historical landscape in ways often denied them, to understand the injustice of federal and state laws and actions by prominent and everyday citizens that executed that injustice onto the Native Peoples of our state, carrying oppression and racism into the present. The art from *Current Realities*, specifically, and work crafted by Indigenous artists, in general, produces for us culturally-contextualized text which provides a heavily nuanced history amplifying the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Indigenous Oklahomans' stories which ultimately belong to and are the responsibility of all citizens of Oklahoma.

### Conclusion

Critical Race Theorist Cheryl Harris (1993) declares that "...the settlement and seizure of Native American land supported White privilege through a system of property rights in land in which the 'race' of the Native Americans rendered their first possession right invisible and justified conquest" (p. 1721). The public and promotional discourse of the Centennial continued the protection and advancement of white privilege, serving as evidence of the continuance of colonization.

What is evident in the work of the OklaDADA collective and the artists who participated in *Current Realities* is the resistance and contestation of the Centennial, providing a counterstory that confronts and problematizes the grand-narrative of the land runs and the "settling" of the state by "pioneers" (Greenwood's *Not a Designated Centennial Project*), the illicit taking of natural resources such as oil and exploitation of and harm to Native people, (Whitman's *Dirt Poor, Oil Rich*), and the positioning of Indians as static, existing only in the past (Meredith's *End of the End of the Trail*). The artists instead illustrate Native Peoples' capacity to guide their own destinies (Greenwood and Rodriguez's *Braidy Bunch*). What is also evident in their work from the heightened consciousness the art contributes, is the promise of possibility—the transformation of the visual and verbal landscape of Oklahoma. Emphasizing this point, Bell (1997) emphasizes that social justice "involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others and the society as a whole" (p. 3). Destroying the myths and silences directed toward Native citizens in Oklahoma reshapes public perception and historical reality. Heather Ahtone addresses our possibility, but also our responsibility to history:

History...has the potential of providing great insight to the present when we open ourselves up to those unwritten experiences. But more than historical inaccuracies are the inaccuracies of our contemporary experiences—these we must speak now. We can't rewrite history, but we can change what history is written now. (personal communication, February 11, 2008)

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