

“I Know You!”: Understanding Racial Experience within the Lumbee Indian Community

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## **ABSTRACT**

DAVID LOWRY: "I Know You!": Understanding Racial Experience within the Lumbee Indian Community  
(Under the direction of James Peacock)

The author discusses racial experience within the Lumbee Indian community. Citing earlier discussion of Lumbee racial experience by anthropologist Karen Blu in the 1960s, discussions of identity by Lumbee Indians in interviews performed by anthropologist Carl Seltzer in the 1930s, and the author's experience as a member of the Lumbee community, the author suggests that interactions between Lumbee people can be best contextualized by looking at the history of their invisibility in the U.S. South. His argument is that racial experience, for Lumbee people, is a hybridization of subjectivity to U.S. Southern racial ideals and a concurrent subjectivity to the notions of kinship and community that define most Native American communities.

## Introduction:

In an article published in 2000 in the *Fayetteville Observer*, a newspaper out of Fayetteville, North Carolina, journalist Michael Futch writes about his visit to the Lumbee Indian community in Baltimore, Maryland. As he observes, Lumbee Indian people have migrated to and from Baltimore for over sixty years. Mr. Futch also notes that Lumbee people in Baltimore have maintained very intimate attachments to the community from whence most of them migrated: Robeson County, North Carolina. In his article, Futch interviews individuals who explain both how Lumbee people in Baltimore interact with each other, and what elements of their community serve to reinforce their identities as Lumbee people. In a discussion of the American Indian Center in Baltimore, Futch interviews a young Lumbee woman:

“This is the only Native American center in the city of Baltimore,” said Ayers, who is a striking 30-year-old woman from Red Springs in Robeson County. “They needed a place everybody could go to. I’ve been here 10 years. This used to be the place where people gathered. It used to be a meeting place for other Lumbees like me. There’s nothing like seeing somebody else who looks like me. I think that’s why the Indian center is continuing to exist.” (Futch 2000)

As a Lumbee Indian myself, and more specifically as a Lumbee Indian who has lived inside and outside the Lumbee community in North Carolina, I understand the feelings of Ms. Ayers. Ayers and many other Lumbees live in Baltimore, Maryland, at the fringe of what many would describe as the U.S. South. However, Ayers’ words are important because Ayers and the Lumbee community of Baltimore are intimately linked, socially and historically, with the Lumbee Indian community in North Carolina and with the racial dynamics of the U.S. South.

To have someone who “looks like you” is important to many Lumbee people, especially when a Lumbee person realizes his or her distance from the center of the

Lumbee community in Robeson County. But what do Ayers's statements mean? Is she dependent on visual cues to recognize "people like her"? Does she use visual cues to identify people with whom she can share a more intimate relationship as Lumbee? In this paper, I will explore the importance of Lumbee people seeing and experiencing one another's physical presence. By exploring some key points in Karen Blu's ethnography The Lumbee Problem (2001), borrowing key understandings from discussions of identity by Lumbee Indians in the 1930s anthropological studies of Carl Seltzer, and providing an auto-ethnographic account of my entrance into the Lumbee Indian community as a child, I categorize the "seeing" that is prominent in the interactions between people within the Lumbee community as a bridge between the rigid nature of race in U.S. Southern society and the need to maintain community and kinship ties within the Lumbee community. I argue that this visual and racial experience should be described as a gateway for Lumbee people to know individuals who make up the community and a context to reaffirm community members' abilities to provide commentaries on what constitutes the boundaries of the Lumbee community. The intimacy of relationships that is noticeable subsequent to initial encounters of Lumbee people speaks not only to the very specific importance of "racial features" in the Lumbee community, but also to the specific ways that racial categories in the U.S. South influence how Lumbee people maintain their community boundaries.

Lumbee People: Native Americans in the U.S. South:

In her book American Indian Ethnic Renewal (1996), sociologist Joane Nagel explains a "tension" between two types of race:

[There is the notion that] Native Americans are somehow not really Indians unless they are living according to some putative nineteenth-century lifestyle. [Native American studies scholar Jack] Forbes argues that this is a unique racial

epistemology applied only to Native Americans in U.S. society. [Forbes] contrasts the emphasis on [the “one drop rule”] in categorizing blacks with the emphasis on historical and cultural criteria in categorizing Indians that has resulted in a situation where “‘blacks’ are always ‘blacks’ even when mixed with white or American Indian. ‘Indians,’ however, exist as a sort of *cultural* category (or a caste). They must remain unchanged in order to be considered ‘Indian.’” (Nagel 1996: 71)

Following Nagel, it is important to recognize that the racial body represents a changing world and the results of human interaction – elements that Indian people are not supposed to possess. The Lumbee people, in particular, have been described by various scholars and laypeople alike (some of whom I will describe in this thesis) as racially “ambiguous” and, simultaneously, removed from cultural practices or historical documents that would somehow make them authentic Native Americans. Lumbee people were productive citizens in colonial times and have remained active participants in U.S. society and economy. They have been interwoven into all elements of U.S. society, politics, and conflict, having fought in the American Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and all modern wars in which the United States has been involved. But to say this seems to contradict a historical narrative and commonsense that makes “Indians” different from most everyone else. However, the aforementioned contradiction – between the commonsense of racial visibility in the U.S. South and the more slippery notion that Indian identity is attached to certain cultural and historical criteria – has overshadowed Lumbee people for at least one century.

Saying that someone “looks” like a Lumbee, as Ayers alludes, is not necessarily a tool for categorizing people in some objective sense, even though this does take place within the Lumbee community. Maybe more importantly, it is an entrance into the networks of community, kinship, and identity that have kept Lumbee people together and identifiable in spite of the ways that race that has surrounded (and does surround) them

and often makes them invisible as Native Americans in the U.S. South. The South is best understood by the historical predictability of racial interactions between its inhabitants. In fact, race may be best understood as it has been practiced when people have interacted in one-on-one, often personal situations. In practice, race is an exercise of power; an exertion of authority of certain individuals to identify one another and follow this identification with certain consequences.

Many of us are familiar with White folks using their assumed racial power to announce the presence of Black folks by using terms such as “nigger,” “coon,” etc. Often, in the U.S. South, various forms of violence and other atrocities have followed the intimate interaction between Black and White peoples. Without Sanctuary (2000) – with its astonishing pictures of lynchings over the last 150 years – describes the history of lynching as a history of the relationships between Black and White peoples in the U.S. South. In this text, historian Leon Litwack states that:

Lynching was hardly a new phenomenon. For many decades it had served as a means of extra-legal justice in the Far West and Midwest (U.S.), and most of the victims had been white, along with numbers of American Indians, Mexicans, Asians, and blacks. But in the 1890s, lynching and sadistic torture rapidly became exclusive public rituals of the South, with black men and women as the principal victim. (2000: 13).

In the South, the lynched were almost always Black, and the lynchers were almost always White. However, in this back and forth between Black and White identities – within the tension between Black and White peoples – the racial identities of other racial groups have been easily silenced. One of these groups of people is Native Americans.

I see a strong correlation between Litwack’s historical argument and the phenomenon that plagues Lumbee people and other Indian peoples in the U.S. South. I don’t assume – nor should we assume – that only Black people were lynched and that

White people were always those who lynched. Yet the writing of history of the social climate within the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. South is marked by a habit that Litwack – among other historians – cannot rid themselves of: the reading of the U.S. South as racially Black and White. A couple of questions present themselves: How, in the midst of such a historically and racially polarizing environment, have Native American people been experienced by others and themselves? And, maybe more importantly, to what ends have Indian people in the U.S. South identified themselves—and continue to identify themselves—as Native Americans? My sense is that the overwhelming pressure of race in the U.S. South has made it advantageous for Native Americans to accept some sense of racial identity that mirrors U.S. Southern society. They, like White and Black peoples, have had material bodies that could be read. But it also seems likely that in an environment where the practice of racialization has happened in overwhelmingly Black and White terms, Native Americans – to make themselves visible in this environment – have identified the immediacy and importance of U.S. Southern racial rules but have effectively used the social practices indicative of those rules to maintain alternate and arguably sovereign ways of communicating and living their identities as Native Americans. Native Americans in the U.S. South were not and are not just racial beings. Though they accepted race as a principle – as an ideal – they concurrently connected it with and made it work as a precursor to notions of kinship that had been passed down through generations of Native American families and communities before and during the existence of the U.S. South.

Several major research projects have focused attention on the Lumbee and other Native American communities in North Carolina over the last century. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century



investigations, performed by an array of public intellectuals, found the behavior of “third race” people in North Carolina to be a tell-tale sign of their unwillingness to accept the common ways of thinking about race in the U.S. South. Their opinions substantiate the theory of post-colonial theorist Robert Young, whose Colonial Desire (1995) addresses the emphasis on racial mixture in colonial situations throughout the world. Young explains that colonialism was built upon desires across the racial color line:

Racial difference in the nineteenth century was constructed not only according to a fundamental binary division between black and white. . . .

It was through the category of race that colonialism itself was theoretically focused, represented and justified in the nineteenth century, it was also through racial relations that much cultural interaction was practiced. The ideology of race, a semiotic system in the guise of ethnology, ‘the science of races’, from the 1840s onwards necessarily worked according to a double logic, according to which it both enforced and policed the differences between the whites and the non-whites, but at the same time focused fetishistically upon the product of the contacts between them. (Young 1995: 180-181)

The product of this contact, for early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars of race in the U.S. South, was evident in the “behavior” and “nature” of supposedly mixed peoples, or people who occupied “third races.”

Fascination with “mixture”, however, seems pretty evident in the writings of various Black and White scholars. One of these scholars is well known author Charles Chesnutt. Chesnutt, who grew up just north of Robeson County, wrote a book titled *Mandy Oxendine* that uses common Lumbee surnames for its characters. Though this book was not published until one hundred years after it was written (Andrews 1997: ix), it speaks to a possible fascination and intimate connection that Chesnutt had with the Lumbee community. During the same era when he was expressing interest in the Black “Folklore of the South,” Charles Chesnutt— who is often described as the first widely read African-American writer of fiction—was publishing material that explored the

nature of racial mixture among Black communities in the United States. He was fascinated with the political and social dynamics that developed as a result of prominence of racial mixture. In a 1902 publication titled "The Free Colored People of North Carolina," Chesnutt embarks on a remarkable description of Henry Berry Lowrie, the preeminent Lumbee Indian folk hero. In describing Lowrie's exploits, Chesnutt argues that the social capital given to these supposedly Native American people had given them space to misbehave. Chesnutt contended that claims of self-described Indian people were less a matter of reality and more one of living out fantasy – a fantasy that was fostered by the North Carolina government's unwillingness to put these members of the "colored" community in their appropriate place with all non-White people. This perspective is quite clear in the following vignette about Henry Berry Lowrie:

A body of romance grew up about this swarthy Robin Hood (Henry Berry Lowrie), who, armed to the teeth, would freely walk into the towns and about the railroad stations, knowing full well that there was a price upon his head, but relying for safety upon the sympathy of the blacks and the fears of the whites. His pretty yellow wife, "Rhody," was known as "the queen of Scuffletown." Northern reporters came down to write him up. An astute Boston detective who penetrated, under false colors, to his stronghold, is said to have been put to death with savage tortures. A state official was once conducted, by devious paths, under Lowrey's safeguard, to the outlaw's camp, in order that he might see for himself how difficult it would be to dislodge them. A dime novel was founded upon his exploits. The state offered ten thousand, the Federal government, five thousand dollars for his capture, and a regiment of Federal troops was sent to subdue him. . . . Some years ago these mixed Indians and Negroes were recognized by the North Carolina legislature as "Croatan Indians," being supposed to have descended from a tribe of that name and the whites of the lost first white colony of Virginia. They are allowed, among other special privileges conferred by this legislation, to have separate schools of their own, being placed, in certain other respects, upon a plane somewhat above that of the Negroes and a little below that of the whites. (Chesnutt 1902: no page number)

Chesnutt argues that Lowrie needed the Blacks' sympathy and the Whites' fear; with respect to the emergence of state laws framed around racial inequalities, he believed that Lowrie and his people (ancestral Lumbee Indians) would ultimately use the ignorance of

White legislation – which would privilege them with Indian status – to make it to this place “somewhat above that of the Negroes and a little below that of the whites.”

In this text, the ancestral Lumbee seem like a sideshow in a society having relevant debates over the “color line” between White peoples and Black peoples. Other people who were familiar with the eastern section of North Carolina, who were also voices in the Black community, took similar interest in what Lumbee ancestors were doing and not doing within the structure of the U.S. South (see, for example, the writings of Jack Thorne, a Black journalist from Wilmington, N.C. His book, published in 1907, is titled “*Eagle Clippings*”). These authors thought that Lumbee ancestors behaved oddly, especially given their lack of political clout and the commonsense of racial categories in the U.S. South. Prominent White scholars were also curious about the placement of a Native American population of people within the “commonsense” of, or “everyday consciousness discernable” (Alcoff 2006: 185) in, the practice of Southern racial rules. Claiming that one was Indian, or that one’s community was Indian, was to these scholars a way out of a mixed racial reality that, according to the rules of the region, meant a certain affiliation with Black and White racial categories, which more often than not demanded that persons being perceived as “mixed” were segregated with Black peoples. Being “mixed” meant being “non-White.” And the category of “non-White,” especially within North Carolina, was unchallenged by the establishment but heavily disputed by those whose identities were taken away by this essentializing categorization. Necessarily, as the story of Henry Berry Lowrie indicates, Lumbee ancestors were at the center of much of this dispute.

Guy B. Johnson, the late Kenan professor of sociology and anthropology at UNC – Chapel Hill, was himself a prominent scholar of Black race formation and folklore in the South. In a 1939 article titled “Personality in a White-Indian-Negro Community,” he injected a new term into the discourse of Native Americans in North Carolina who were not reserved or acknowledged by the federal government: “Indians by courtesy.” Johnson follows this description with a declaration that Lumbee ancestors “represent varying mixtures of white, Negro, and Indian blood, but as a rule the white strain pre-dominates, and *Indian culture is either weak or extinct*” (Johnson 1939: 516; emphasis added). Johnson’s subsequent analysis states that these marginal peoples, who are stuck on a spectrum between the two components of the U.S. Black/White racial binary, have an “early history [that] is uncertain”; constitute a “heterogeneous group”; and are a “mixed, despised, and nameless people” (Johnson 1939: 516). In portraying behaviors of Indians in Robeson County, North Carolina, Johnson describes not only what these Indians do, but also how they must feel because of the awkwardness that this “mixed” and “despised” status causes:

The Indian is restricted to his own schools, and he is forbidden to marry a white person. He is supposed not to enter a white man’s front door. He is not addressed as “mister” by white people and if he attends a theater, he has to choose between one which provides a three-way segregation and one which seats him with Negroes. There is not an eating place in the county which permits him to enter the front door and eat with the white people. In numerous subtle ways, by glances, gestures, and intonations, *he is reminded by whites and Negroes* of the unmentionable stigma which attaches him. . . . The Indian, then, is forever on the defensive. He always feels that there is a question mark hanging over him. His wish to escape the stigma of Negro kinship, and thus to be identified with the white man, is uppermost in his mind. It is this wish which dominates. (Johnson 1939: 518-519, emphasis added)

According to Johnson, Indian people live, continuously, in response to and within racial rules and norms in society. Their actions – their personality – are not dependent on their

Indian worldview, but on the worldview of those who “glance,” “gesture,” “intonate,” and in other ways “remind” Indian citizens that they are not acceptable. However, one element that many contemporary Lumbee people disagree with is that people in their families ever wanted to be “White”. As my father has said often about his childhood in the 1940s and 1950s in Robeson County, “We wanted to be treated fairly, but we loved our people. We didn’t want to hang around White people.” Like my father, I am sure that Lumbee people would have told Johnson that “fair treatment” was not equivalent with having a White identity, even though it may have seemed that way.

In his annotated bibliography to Almost White (1963), geographer Brewton Berry lists Guy B. Johnson’s article as one of his sources, writing: “While this pertains specifically to the Lumbees of North Carolina, it gives insight into the psychological problems of mestizos everywhere” (Berry 1963: 517). In Berry’s chapter titled “Almost White,” in which he describes “mixed” people who are trying to be “White,” he provides episodes of this troubling interaction between White officials and the bodies of those who described themselves as Indian but who, according to Berry, “wanted to be White”:

The sheriff, accompanied by two armed deputies and a photographer, paid a call on the Platts. He ordered the terrified children to line up to have their photographs taken. Pointing to one of the boys he said, “You know, he favors a nigger.” Squinting at thirteen-year-old Laura Belle (“Bell” is a common Lumbee surname) he said, “I don’t like the shape of that one’s nose.” Thus, dispensing with the use of calipers and the other instruments usually employed by physical anthropologists, McCall concluded that the Platts were Negroes. He “advised” them to stay out of school until he had made further investigations. The principal, the superintendents, and the school board agreed that they should not return “until the sheriff is satisfied.” (Berry 1963: 180).

Earlier, in his chapter on “What the Negro Thinks,” Berry quotes an administrator from “the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)” when describing the nature of Indian activities practiced by some of

some of the “mestizos” in South Carolina. The N.A.A.C.P. leader argues that, “they think they can solve their problems *with feathers*. . . . They ought to forget all that foolishness and join with us. We could do more for them than anybody else.” Berry answers this suggestion with the following:

He [the N.A.A.C.P. leader] is probably right. If the mestizos would only cast their lot with the Negroes and their militant organizations, they could enter more remunerative lines of employment, improve their opportunities for education, break through the barriers that isolate them, avail themselves of numerous public services, increase their political power, *gain greater mobility*, and free themselves from *the ambiguous social status that dwarfs and circumscribes their whole existence*.

The price? They have to only to say, “We are Negroes.” (Berry 1963: 72, emphasis added)

Berry’s advice is very interesting because he speaks as if he is a counselor of some sort. He is trying to help these people, in some way, to get out of their “ambiguous social status” which to him is evidenced by the presence of feathers and possibly other symbols of “Indian” identity. He and the N.A.A.C.P. understand what the “feather” symbolizes: Indian culture, heritage, tradition, etc. But the wearing of these symbols made no sense in the U.S. South. To his credit, Berry is quite observant of the fact that significant numbers of people, many of whom identify as Indian, were not properly adjusted to the emergence of racial, political, and social commonsenses that made it absurd for anyone in the studied communities to actually think they were Indian. However, unlike Johnson and Chesnutt, Berry does not provide space for Indian identity to exist. Even when describing his subjects as “mixed” or “mestizo,” Berry does not even allow Indian identity to be an ingredient within this mixture. I am most intrigued by the play of words that Berry uses when speaking to the future of “mestizos” who take his advice to join the Black community. He states that they will “gain greater mobility” and “free themselves from” a “social status” that “circumscribes their whole existence.” Berry sees a substantive

disconnect between these “mestizos” and the realities of which he and everyone else are well aware. It is a disconnection that he cannot explain. All he can explain is that these people seem unaware of the world around them, especially with regard to the absence of Indian racial categories. Berry, more so than Johnson and Chesnutt, was blind to the way that Indian people in the U.S. South had learned to deal with the displacement of their identities from the infrastructure of race that had come to dominate U.S. Southern culture.

Making Indians Active and Visible Members of the Southern Landscape:

Anthropologist Karen Blu, in her book about the Lumbee community, describes her understanding of the implications of this blindness. In her preface to The Lumbee Problem, Blu describes what makes Lumbee people intriguing for social scientific inquiry:

A look at the Lumbee as both Southerners and Native Americans shows that some common notions about the (U.S.) South, about Indians, and about what it takes to make a viable society must be altered. If Southern racial ideology appears rigid and unyielding, its workings are far more flexible and complicated than has generally been acknowledged. The evidence of the Lumbee and many other “interstitial” peoples neither Black nor White is compelling on this point. (2001: xii)

Blu’s positioning the Lumbee people as Southerners is quite significant, and it is a point with which I believe many Lumbees would agree. In fact, Blu’s positioning of Lumbees as Southerners helps frame the entire history of Lumbee community-building:

As Southerners, the Lumbee have participated in the great events of Southern history, from the Revolutionary War, when a few Indian men fought beside Whites for independence, to the Civil War and Reconstruction, during which a guerilla band led by a young Indian named Henry Berry Lowry held local Whites at bay for several years. The Indians share with Whites and Blacks the memory of ancestors’ stories about these events, if not the same interpretations of them. But of all aspects of Southern experience, the most pervasive is the system of racial classification and the institutionalized segregation of races based on it. It is within this system that the Lumbee have had to work to establish their identity. The Lumbee struggle for a separate Indian identity has had to be fought in terms of racial ideology and its institutionalization. At the same time, by steadfastly

refusing to accept the classification assigned them by Whites, the Indians changed the course of events in Robeson County and paved the way for the legal recognition of other “third race” groups in North Carolina. As they have responded to changing racial and economic conditions in the state, the Lumbee have managed to exert political influence far greater than their numbers alone would suggest. (2001: 5)

Blu’s description of the “problem” that Lumbee people occupy is based on her research among the Lumbee Indian community in North Carolina during the late 1960s. Along with her former husband, anthropologist Gerald Sider, Blu endeavored to study and complete an anthropological study of the Lumbee Indians. Because of the period in which she was writing, her research was also a mirror to political conversations about race, civil rights, and equality – all topics that were political and theoretical lightning rods during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century in the U.S. South. Blu was also fascinated with the then-current debate over where Lumbee people fit into regional and national notions of Native American identity. Her study, following theoretical trends of the time, examined Lumbee people through the lens of “ethnicity.” Blu recognizes prior scholarship on the Lumbee, and pays particular attention to the importance of geographer Brewton Berry’s contribution to Lumbee scholarship. Countering the normalized use of the terms “mulatto” and “mestizo” to describe the Lumbee, Blu states that:

Any term that suggests mixed-bloodedness, such as “mulatto” or “half-breed” or “mestizo,” a term that Brewton Berry (1963) hoped would be a “neutral” term of reference, is viewed by Indians as unacceptable and insulting. It is one thing for Indians to discuss among themselves their varied ancestry, but they resent any outsider’s doing so. This is partly because, in the South, the terms “mixed-blood” and “mulatto” have usually meant a combination of Black and non-Black ancestry. Because one cannot be a little bit Black any more than a woman can be a little bit pregnant, Robeson county Indians could not be Indians by Southern standards if they were a little Black. Indians have had a long and difficult struggle to be differentiated clearly from Blacks, and they become angry at any implication that they have not succeeded. (Blu 2001: 32)



Blu's notion of "success" in correlation with Lumbees being "differentiated clearly from Blacks" seems a testimony to the era in which she researched. At this critical theoretical juncture, Blu pushes to complicate race in support of her own theorization and the efforts made against racism nationwide. Both the notion of "ethnicity" and fights against racism required that the history of race and identity, as based on how an individual's body is visualized by other individuals, be severely challenged. Thus, in subsequent sections of her text, to support a very intimate disconnection between what Blu describes as Lumbee identity and their being called anything but "Indian," Blu states that Lumbee people describe the "physical" body as the "least reliable" element used in identifying a Lumbee person (Blu 2001: 162).

However, Blu's description of interactions with Lumbee people contradicts this. During a visit from one of her friends from the northern United States, for example, Blu states that a Lumbee person, overcome with curiosity, asked about the person's "nationality." After the friend replied that he was Filipino, the Lumbee person replied: "You could be one of us" (Blu 2001: 162). Blu ignores this event when she later describes the significance of "physical appearance":

In refusing to define membership in terms of presumed biological ancestry, either in degrees of Indian "blood" or in notions of "racially" determined appearance, the Indians have rejected White criteria and set up their own. *Physical appearance is obviously significant to Indians because they know that Whites evaluate them on that basis, but Lumbees today refuse, and insofar as can be determined in the past refused, to characterize themselves as a group according to physical appearance.* They do not refer to themselves as having "red" skin . . . and straight dark hair, for example, even though early White observers described some of them in that light. (Blu 2001: 180; emphasis added)

Blu, in this argument, dismisses the fact that the Lumbee person who encountered her Filipino friend opened up the possibility of accepting him as Lumbee via the doorway of physical inspection. Additionally, she reifies the importance of how she viewed racial

interaction among the Lumbee while not acknowledging that she may have not been able to contextualize or identify how and for what reasons Lumbee people used physical inspection. In an earlier section of her book, when describing Lumbee “cohesiveness,” Blu quotes a young Lumbee man who is trying to explain what happens between Indian people. The man states that, “if an Indian sees another Indian, they’re drawn together like – to a magnet. Indians won’t stay by themselves; it’s in their blood not to” (2001: 147). In this context, “Indian” is equivalent to “Lumbee.” This young Lumbee man brings Native American cohesion down to the level of individual encounters. The metaphor of the magnet foregrounds an ability that Lumbee people have of recognizing one another, and it opens up a critique about what identification means *within* the Lumbee community as opposed to *outside* the Lumbee community. Thus, Blu’s bypassing the identification of the Filipino as possibly “one of us” becomes a very important point. The Filipino man is inspected by a Lumbee person then is asked if he shares the same community relationships as the questioner. When this relationship is denied – when the “magnet” did not take hold – the Lumbee person is left to ponder his being wrong about the initial recognition: “You *could be* one of us.”

Blu, in her text, effectively presents the outline of a Native American community whose members were active in their identity-making. They weren’t just defined by the laws, statutes, and other confining social elements that made them act in certain ways. Rather, they needed and were willing to define who they were in a very pro-active sense. Not only were Lumbee ancestors present in the U.S. South, they were willing to define the U.S. South and their places in it. However, what Blu is not quite able to grasp is that in moments when Lumbee people interacted with each other and looked outward from

their community, they were being proactive and using race as a tool. They were willing to look out and see who “could be” one of them via the racial experience. Oftentimes, this process of living as Lumbee and as Southerner means participating in discussions that challenge the commonly accepted racial ideals that themselves define the U.S. South.

#### Racial Experience Leads To Community Meaning:

In her discussion of the phenomenology of race, philosopher Linda Alcoff suggests our use of “contextualism” as a framework for discussing race. In the “objectivist” form of this framework, scholars of race would objectively define race by invoking grand and totalizing narratives of historical experience, cultural traditions, or processes of colonization. In the “subjectivist” form of this framework, they would describe race by “beginning from lived experiences of racialization [to] reveal how race is constitutive of bodily experience, subjectivity, judgment, and epistemic relationships.” She states that “such subjective descriptions . . . show how one’s designated race is a constitutive element of fundamental, everyday embodied existence, psychic life, and social interaction” (Alcoff 2006: 183). Agreeing with how Frantz Fanon (1967) and Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994) insist that race has to be discussed in both subjective and objective terms, Alcoff observes that “subjectivist approaches have . . . been underdeveloped in the recent theoretical literature, even while there are many first-person memoirs and rich description of racial experience that might be tapped for theoretical analysis” (2006: 184). Alcoff’s reasoning for this lack of “subjectivist” analysis is her identification of a general fear among the scholars that “phenomenological description will naturalize or fetishize racial experiences” (2006: 184). Following the

logic of Merleau-Ponty, she explains how these experiences are often described in the visibility of the racial body:

Visual differences are “real” differences, and by that very fact they are especially valuable for the naturalizing ideologies of racism. But there is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value. And the body itself is a dynamic material domain, not just because it can be “seen” differently, but because the materiality of the body itself is . . . volatile (2006: 185).

Alcoff, in a discussion of “racial seeing”, explains the significance of a “volatile” body vis-à-vis human perception:

Perception has the added attribute of being, as Merleau-Ponty said, “not presumed true, but defined as access to truth” . . . . [From] Foucault we have developed a sensibility to the disciplining potential of visibility . . . . [The] look of the other is a source of domination. (2006: 197-198)

It is important to note, however, the privileged place of the “look of the other” over the look of self or members of one’s community in scholarship on race. It appears that many scholars, even those not invested in racist outlooks, understand race as best described as an “etic” reality. By “etic” I mean that views of race – and specifically of the “pedigree” of the people being studied – were looked at from an outside, “objective,” scientific vantage point. “Emic” views of race, where the body was/is identified in a certain way within a community, were not and often are not found in discussions of the importance of race and racial experience. Subsequently, the views of race from the “outside,” “objective” vantage point are often privileged as the only gaze that can “access” the “truth” about someone or some peoples. In that context, the analyses of Johnson, Chesnutt, and Berry reveal an inability to reach into the worldview of Indian people in the U.S. South precisely because their research projects, despite some value that they possessed, were active components in reifying the importance of race as it was studied scientifically and not subjectively. The science of race, which was the foundation for all

three researchers, was meant to classify people. Sadly, when this scientific classification seemed not to work on its own, the people subject to the research – Lumbee people – were portrayed as having no history, a mixed heritage, and the desire to manipulate and not cooperate with racial commonsense.

Making sense of racial encounters within the Lumbee community, importantly, requires our not attributing them entirely to a Lumbee individual's reliance on or internalization of U.S. Southern racial rules or meanings. As Blu points out quite succinctly, the Lumbee Indian community has, over generations, learned to operate within the U.S. South. This does not mean that they have necessarily come to believe or "buy into" U.S. Southern rhetoric and ideals. Much of this rhetoric has been written in terms of race and racial classification, both of which have come to be major themes in the U.S. South and, consequently, have guaranteed blindness to the large numbers of Native Americans in the region. As Blu points out often in her text, racial classification often eliminated categories for Lumbee ancestors. She points to a long history of Lumbee ancestors dealing with their invisibility vis-à-vis these racial categories, and her descriptions point to the fact that the tension created by lack of Indian social and racial categories created other tensions, often on the individual level:

Tensions over the classification of the people later recognized as Indians rose rapidly after the North Carolina constitutional revisions in 1835, which cancelled many of the rights of free persons of color. Before 1835, Lumbee ancestors had been able to vote and a few had served in the War of 1812. . . . As a result of a series of restrictive laws termed the "Free Negro Code" by John Hope Franklin (1943), which began in 1826 and continued to be modified into the 1850s, the Indians, who had been classified as "free persons of color" at least since the 1790 census, lost their right to vote, legally bear arms without a license, or serve in the militia. . . . They had lost their right to testify against Whites in court in 1777, when the General Assembly of North Carolina forbade "Negroes, Indians, Mulattoes, and all Persons of Mixed Blood" to be witnesses except against each other. (2001: 45-46)

One can imagine the implications of these mandates. Not only did the “mixed” person not have a right to testify against the “White” person, but the authority of the “mixed” individual could only be turned against people who were like them. This, most definitely, festered in certain ways within Native American communities, probably sometimes turning Indians against themselves. However, it may have also served to heighten intra-community awareness of “who we are” as Indian people, providing the social conditioning for preserving what before had been a very normative coming together of Native American communities to survive U.S. colonialism.

Anthropologist Robert K. Thomas points out in his early 1970s unpublished manuscript on the Lumbee people that the “cohesion” he witnessed in the Lumbee community was identical to the “cohesion” that has helped aggregate remnant Indian groups into other new or transformed Indian communities. His argument is quite clear:

Now, Indian tribes simply do not disappear because they disappear from the records. A number of things happen to such tribes. Indian tribes are not divisions of some larger unit. Each Indian tribe is a small national group in and of itself and it is very hard to do away with whole national groups. National groups tend to persist if possible. Now, it is true that sometimes American Indian “tribes” (national groups) have disappeared through being exterminated by military hostilities and disease. Usually, however, these factors have simply cut down the population of an American Indian tribe without exterminating them completely, although in some instances there has been extermination. On rare occasions an Indian tribe will be assimilated by the white or black population that surrounds them. This has been true of a very few Indian groups. Generally, what happens is that tribes merge together to form larger groups if they are small, and in dire circumstances sometimes they will be assimilated by larger Indian groups. The Six Nations are an example of a large confederation of tribes which incorporated quite a few small eastern Indian tribes. The Catawba are another example of such a process. . . . Indian tribes usually prefer a general peoplehood, by merging with other tribes, over against losing their local peoplehood by assimilating into white or black society. (Thomas n.d.: 40)

Thomas’s opinion, however, as witnessed in the research from earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, was not the norm even in Thomas’s own era. There was (and, often, still is) a very strong

consensus that a lack of certain information about a Native American community's background is detrimental to their claims of being Indian peoples. The "mixing" that had taken place in the U.S. South during the colonization of the eastern United States made this lack of information synonymous with an alienation from being authentically Indian. At a later point in his text, Thomas provides his opinion on how scholars and the public have treated Lumbee people and Lumbee history:

I must put in a personal reaction here. I am getting very weary of snide remarks about the Lumbee's "Indianess." The Comanches, some Pueblos, and some Mission tribes in California are largely Mexican by blood. Some Chippewa communities are primarily French in blood and very French culturally, as well. I don't hear any snickers directed at these groups. Nor do I hear anyone say that the people in a large section of northern Italy are not "real" Italians because they are largely descendants of invading German tribes. I find American racism boring as well as annoying. (Thomas n.d.:52)

Thomas acknowledges that peoples from Europe, Africa, and the indigenous United States did interact and, most probably, "mixed." However, what Thomas gives us, most importantly, is a larger national and global map upon which to place this "mixing." In effect, Thomas points out that a focus on the notion of "mixing" as somehow describing Lumbee people was first and foremost a White, middle-class activity. Like Chesnutt, Johnson, and Berry, the comments that Thomas heard from people about the Lumbee were not based on a critique of their being Indian but of their supposedly not knowing what they were racially and/or historically. Are people, who some say are "mixed," bound to this status? Thomas's argument in his text is a firm "no." What Thomas wants his readers to understand is a point that Johnson, Chesnutt, and Berry – among others – do not understand. That point is that to be consumed by race as it has developed in the U.S., and especially in the U.S. South, is to miss the ways that Native American communities have been preserved. Thomas's acknowledgement that Indian people must

first and foremost be seen for how they have interacted and continued to live as Indians speaks to a need to consider how—even if Indian people did interact with and “mix” with non-Indian peoples—the principles of their Indian community and kinship networks determined what ultimately became of their family structures, community structures, and the realities of everyday life. Indeed, Thomas leaves room for us to understand that, even in the active movement of internationally derived groups of people and the hierarchy of race that became important in U.S. colonial context to categorize and control peoples, Native American peoples within Native American communities might have grown accustomed to acknowledging these categories even as they lived within traditionally Native American social patterns.

Circe Sturm, in her groundbreaking ethnography about the Cherokee of Oklahoma, Blood Politics (2002), deals with many of these same issues. Speaking about the Cherokee of Oklahoma, she is interested in how Native American communities may have hybridized racial understandings from the colonial environment around their communities with notions of kinship and community that are still very present and have been passed down through generations of Native American families. Her observation of visual-racial themes in the Cherokee community becomes a major point in her analysis:

Blood can stand for shared biological, racial, or cultural substance, as both Cherokee national identity and individual social identities are manipulated along a race-culture continuum. Recall, for instance, the full-blood Cherokee medicine man with green eyes, or how Cherokee citizens have elected national leaders with increasingly greater degrees of Cherokee blood as the tribal population has become less blooded since the mid-1970s. This trend toward more blooded political, social, and religious leaders shows how Cherokees have internalized various blood hegemonies and how they have become increasingly concerned with blood, both literally and metaphorically, in everyday life. More importantly, Cherokee blood has come to represent the national whole, symbolizing the biological, racial and cultural substance that Cherokees use to define the sociopolitical boundaries of their community. (2002: 142)



Sturm's take on race in the Cherokee community of Oklahoma makes it at once externally and internally important. Sturm argues that Cherokee people live with race *as it exists within their worldviews* as Cherokee people:

The larger point is that Cherokees have neither completely internalized nor resisted the powerful racial ideologies to which they are subject and to which they subject others. Instead, they simultaneously reproduce, reinterpret, and resist dominant race-thinking, as race is mediated through their own local and national categories of meaning. (2002: 205)

Sturm's thinking about these ideas is very important if we are to garner an appreciation of the hybridization of local, regional, and intimate Indian understandings of self with the ideas of race that have defined the national-racial contexts that have surrounded Native American communities.

#### Lumbee Voices from the Distant Past:

This type of hybridization is well documented in the 1930s anthropological research of Carl Seltzer. Seltzer, a physical anthropologist from Harvard University, conducted interviews with pre-selected groups of Lumbee in the 1930s. Members of the Lumbee community chose who would be interviewed, creating a group of Lumbee men and women who appeared to represent a broad range of Lumbee families, Lumbee community settlements, and physical features. In these interviews, Seltzer pursued several modes of inquiry: he took "mug shot" style photographs of each person with a front and side view of their head; he documented a wide range of phenotypes that he placed on a complicated chart of possible physical details; and he had each individual answer a series of questions about how they personally determined and justified the blood-quantum status (for example, ½, ¼, full blood, etc.) that they claimed coming into the examination. Seltzer was working under the auspices of the Indian Reorganization act of 1934, which was written to aid the distribution of U.S. federal government funds to

Indian tribes. His questions show that he and government officials in charge of this research want Lumbee people to describe their identities in ways that would have met U.S. government standards for being “Indian.” However, within these interviews, an array of faces appear and a number of voices speak out in very unpretentious ways about how they, as Indians in the U.S. South, preserved their Indian community borders and Indian identities in the midst of the racial pressures that defined living in the U.S. South.

In his testing, Seltzer asked a standard set of questions about where one lived, who one’s siblings were, and how long one’s parents had lived. Afterward, however, Seltzer (or whoever was performing his questioning) seems to have conducted open-ended conversations with some of those being interviewed. The answers to the questions in these open-ended conversations interweave the lives of these people into a very complicated fabric of Native American identity. An example of this interweaving comes from the testimony of Hugh Brayboy, a Lumbee man from Maxton, N.C., who was interviewed on June 10, 1936. He claimed to be half-Indian. In answering a series of questions, Brayboy contextualized not just his self but also the community in which he grew up:

Q: Is there anything further that you would like to say about your ancestors?

A: No. My grandmother did say that when the white men came here, they prevailed on the Indians to throw away their language and take up theirs so that they could understand them when they traded. My grandmother said that she heard her father talk the Indian language and often my grandmother would have to go and do the trading because her father wouldn’t know whether the traders were saying fifty or seventy-five cents.

Q: Did you ever hear of herb doctors or root doctors?

A: The first doctor I ever heard of coming here was Dr. McBride. We didn’t use to have doctors; the only way we got medicine was to make it. Uncle Aaron Revel was an Indian doctor and was 104 years old when he died. [He] would use herbs and stayed on missions all of the time. I have seen him rubbing folks and I have

seen him give medicines that he made himself. He would sing and make motions over the people.

Q: Did you ever hear of any treaties being signed by any Indian?

A: When I was a boy they elected representatives to go to The Indian Territory. Jim Oxendine and Wash Lowry were representatives. They had to go before my grandmother, Clarissa. She was to pass judgment as to whether they were full blood Indians. Jim Oxendine was turned down but Wash Lowry could be traced back to his great grandparents and could find no trace other than Indian blood in his ancestry. Accordingly he was made the tribal delegate and went to Indian territory for the purpose of finding out how to proceed in getting recognition from the Congress of the United States. He stayed there for a few years and seemed not to have learned anything of importance. Money was then sent for him to come home.

Q: Did you ever hear your grandmother say that she ever heard of any clans among your people?

A: I don't know that I did. They didn't want you to marry negroes or white folks so that we wouldn't get mixed up.

Q. What do you know of the treaty signed by Lazy Will Locklear?

A. They told us about how much land he owned. She (grandmother) said the government was to furnish Lazy Will with a water mill and the things that go with it but they never did. (Seltzer 1936, Application 22.)

Brayboy speaks in hybridizing terms in response to the questions. When asked about there being any type of “herb” or “root” doctor in his life, Brayboy remembers the first doctor that he knew the Questioner would recognize as a doctor. However, he also acknowledges the question that the Questioner is asking, indicating the explicit presence of Indian medicine that he witnessed in his lifetime. This hybridity is also present when discussing the role of family and kinship in his family. When asked about clans, Brayboy simply states that his grandmother told them that to marry white or black people was not good. However, when discussing treaties being signed in the past, Brayboy recalls the time when his grandmother gave her consent for someone to visit Indian territory, which I assume is in Oklahoma. This consent was based on, as Brayboy notes, the fact that

Wash Lowry could be “traced back to his great grandparents” and Brayboy’s grandmother “could find no trace other than Indian blood in his ancestry.” In his memory of events, Brayboy simultaneously speaks with the system of symbols of both being Indian and being in the world that was the segregated, hierarchical southern United States. To interact with Seltzer, Brayboy unabashedly professes his understandings of both worlds even when it was his body that was going to be the determining factor as to whether his personal, family, and community narratives were true or not.

Additionally, it is important to note that Brayboy’s description of his grandmother gives us insight into the practice of visualizing the entire person within the context of the Lumbee Indian community. It is apparent that within the Lumbee community, the inspection and critiquing of the fellow Lumbee was considered to be a normal and necessary process. In fact, the history of the Burnt Swamp Baptist Association, a union of Indian Baptist churches around eastern North Carolina, provides some evidence that Brayboy’s grandmother may have been a leader in mission trips from the Lumbee community to Indian communities outside Robeson County, North Carolina. In a recently published history of the Burnt Swamp Baptist Association, Reverend Mike Cummings states that “a Domestic Mission Board and local missionary involvement led by women brought growth in Christian missions in communities beyond Robeson County. Teachers from Robeson County gained opportunity in other tribal communities outside Robeson county and new relationships formed among several tribes” (Cummings 2008: 14). This organization, which was ratified in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, most probably influenced or was influenced by a relationship between the Lumbee community and communities outside Robeson County. More importantly, for my argument, this stated

interest with missions or representation of the Lumbee community in far-off lands, which was at least occasionally led by women, affirms Brayboy's description of a grandmother that actively critiques the body, specifically, the whole person, generally, and who represents a visualization of the Lumbee community member that is a normal and important part of the workings of the Lumbee community.

Other testimonies by members of the Lumbee community do nothing less than turn the U.S. historical narrative of Indian presence in the U.S. South on its head. Among these interviews are the testimonies of Braxton Strickland and Britton Maynor. In Strickland's discussion of his Indian identity, he is asked: "Will you state as concisely as possible your basis for claiming  $\frac{3}{4}$  Indian blood?" Strickland does his best at being concise, though his words, like Brayboy's before them, tie Lumbee people into a national Native American community, while threading together the substance of what it means to talk about Lumbee ancestry. His answer to the question of blood-quantum is as follows:

My father is John Strickland, living. His father was Harmon Strickland who died about 50 years ago, and his mother Armaretta Locklear Strickland who died in 1921. Harmon Strickland's father and mother were Sanday Strickland and Peggy Locklear Strickland, whose ancestors are unknown to me. The father and mother of Armaretta Locklear Strickland were William Locklear and Mary Ann Locklear. William Locklear's father was Isam Locklear and Mary Ann's father was Allen Lowry and Allen's father was James Lowry. I am not sure of the degree of Indian blood of my ancestors but my father claims  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The father and mother of my mother, Elvie Jones Strickland were Plez Jones who died in 1920 who was known as a full blood Indian and Elizabeth Hodge Jones, a white woman who died a long time ago. The father of Plez Jones was Esau Jones who claimed to be a full blood and the mother Emily Bass was a mixed blood. *It is claimed that Esau Jones and his brother, Alvie, came here from Oklahoma.* My father's brothers were: Pettieway, Max, Aralen, Noah, and Jim Strickland. My mother had two sisters: Mandy Jones Hunt and Julia Jones Hunt; and three nieces the children of Daniel Jones, a deceased brother as follows: Clara J. Oxendine, Lizzie J Chavis, and Melinda J Lowry. I have a brother and sister as follows: Romie Strickland and Buryl Elizabeth Strickland Lowry. (Seltzer 1936, Application 33; emphasis added)

Maynor goes one step further in his analysis of his family's blood quantum. He offers a description of "being Lumbee" that implies less of a reliance on an objectified material (e.g. blood) and more on a positioning of oneself and one's ancestors in encounters between powers in the emerging U.S. nation:

To the best of my knowledge my father Jordan Maynor and my mother Martha Jane (Oxendine) Maynor were full blood Indians, and considered themselves[.] I am only making claim to be  $\frac{3}{4}$  or more Indian, since they may have been a lesser degree of which I have no knowledge . . . .

I have been told that my paternal great grandfather, Henry Chavis, was the son of Hugh Chavis and Clarissa Lowry, the grandson of John Chavis. . . and great grandson of Ishmael Chavis. . . This Ishmael Chavis, *my grandfather four times removed is believed to have been a tribal chieftan, who led the fighting in a last stand against white invaders. . . . John Chavis, the son of the above is thought to be the number six on the muster rolls of the war of 1812. . . .* The Clarissa Lowry who married Hugh Chavis mentioned above was a daughter of James Lowry, said to be  $\frac{1}{2}$  Cherokee and  $\frac{1}{2}$  White. . . . His wife was Mary Trumble (Cumbo?) said to be  $\frac{1}{2}$  Tuscarora and  $\frac{1}{2}$  White. (Seltzer 1936, Application 4; emphasis added)

At relatively the same time that scholars of race in the U.S. South were limiting the identities of Indian people in North Carolina to their tentativeness within the racial structure of the U.S. South, and during the actual process of having their bodies stripped of all dignity for the sake of finding out the "truth" about regional Indian populations, Brayboy, Strickland and Maynor bypassed the authority of these academic voices and the critique of physical anthropological testing. In fact, as Brayboy keenly notes in the telling of his history, the "judgment" that was "passed" onto Wash Lowery by Brayboy's grandmother demonstrated the merging of the world of kinship and community that Brayboy and Strickland knew well with the conceptions of the body being an oracle of some type of truth. However, when Brayboy states that his grandmother "passed judgment" on Lowry, I sense that it was not entirely based on what racial features he did or did not have. It seems that as a significant community figure, at least in her part of the

Lumbee community, Brayboy's grandmother was responsible for looking at Lowry's character, history, personal relationships, kinship connections and physical appearance as collaborative elements of Lumbee identity.

It is important to also note that Lumbee ancestors consistently use blood fractions (i.e. " $\frac{1}{2}$ ", " $\frac{3}{4}$ ", etc.) to describe themselves. Maynor is most decisive with the use of this fraction in his ancestral descriptions, perhaps because this notion of " $\frac{1}{2}$  blood" somehow symbolizes how Lumbee people were defining themselves vis-à-vis U.S. society. Essentially, they were half-way between two worlds – not stuck in the proverbial middle, but somehow able to communicate about themselves using their own language of kinship *and* the tools of race that people outside the Indian community were using. In certain cases, these interviewees took it upon themselves to discuss themselves as having more blood quantum than their parents. This did not mean, as may be easily assumed, that they did not understand fractions. Rather they took the importance of blood quantum fractions as methods for describing to what degree an individual was part of the Lumbee community. Like in Braxton Strickland's description where he describes his mother as having one Indian parent and one white parent and his father as only possibly being  $\frac{3}{4}$  Indian, an individual whose parents moved into the Lumbee community late in their life, and who himself or herself was raised in the Lumbee community, may be  $\frac{3}{4}$  Indian while both of his or her parents may be a lesser degree Indian. These descriptions of blood quantum described by members of the Lumbee community were not a misuse or a manipulation of racial rules. They were a way to bridge the realities Indian identity with the science and mischievousness of race based social science that demanded Indian people categorize themselves according to pedigree.

The record of this vivid look into the merging worlds of Lumbee people and U.S. society, however, gets lost in translation. At the conclusion of his research, Seltzer published a report – well known in the contemporary Lumbee community – declaring that only twenty-two Lumbee ancestors passed the test of Indian authenticity. The official stamp of approval from authoritative voices was starting to be officially removed in the shadow of a grand narrative that had already metaphysically and socially erased Indians from a meaningful space within the Southeastern United States. Despite the very up-front way that Lumbee people had tied their existence to the existence of Indian people both present in the U.S. South and absent in the far-off place called “Indian Territory,” they now became fodder for social analysts who would, ultimately, characterize their Indian identity as a manipulation of the racial rules that were important throughout the U.S. South.

My life as Lumbee:

When I moved to the Lumbee community in North Carolina, I became quite aware that I would have to learn to get used to these racial rules. As a Lumbee Indian, however, I learned that it was very easy to occupy a niche in a society that is overwhelmingly Black and White in context and history if one is willing to constantly critique both that context and history, as Lumbee people often do. I was exactly half-way between my tenth and eleventh birthdays when my family moved from the rural outskirts of Saint Louis, Missouri, to the rural swamps of Robeson County, North Carolina. The move was not a complete shock. Over the years from my birth in 1981 until that transformative day in 1991, my parents had taken my sisters and me on regular trips to visit our family in the Lumbee community in North Carolina. I was quite familiar with the place that my father and mother called “home”; nonetheless, “moving to” this place



was a very different experience than the “visiting” that I had done before. Before I moved to North Carolina, my experience with the Lumbee community was a very particular and important component within a much more complex community that I existed within.

At home in Missouri, my father and mother kept pictures, books, and other relics of their life in North Carolina. As a young child, I was fascinated by the mostly black-and-white pictures. My father, like a “young James Dean” according to my sisters, was captured in photographs from the 1950s and 1960s. Upon asking who the other people were in the photographs, I was told that most of them were from when my father and family lived “at home.” Many of these pictures were from the days when my parents worked as sharecroppers in the tobacco and cotton fields and attended all-Lumbee schools in Robeson County. I often lived vicariously through these photographs and the stories of my parents. The stories were positive and negative; encouraging and disappointing; full of joy and seeded with fear and hate. They helped me understand both the Indian “home” from whence my parents came and the Indian communities in which they lived in as children.

However, it was the trips to North Carolina that seemed to seal my connection with the Lumbee community. As a second grader in Missouri, my teacher gave us the opportunity to create our own books. My book — “A Trip to North Carolina, The Place I Love”—reveals just how fascinated I was with the topography and geography of the place that I visited with my parents: the mountains, the pine trees, the ocean, etc. Interestingly, however, I didn’t include pictures of people in my illustrations. Reflecting on these illustrations, and on the descriptions that I made of the “home” that my parents reintroduced me to year after year, I have often wondered where the bodies are located. I

did not draw Lumbee people in my book. What I have come to realize is that the people that lived in this place called “home” were never really part of what I described when I drew pictures of the North Carolina landscape. They were elements of my everyday existence, and not elements that colored my fictional world. The images from my parents’ photographs were not easily transferred to my imaginative story about the place I loved to visit, although they most definitely intersected. Looking at Lumbee people was not an abstract experience; it was a very real experience on which my sense of identity depended. Their bodies blended with their voices. Their voices blended with a history and an identity. This history and identity blended with a sense of “home.” What I had colored in my 2<sup>nd</sup> grade book were the elements that surrounded this sense of “home” and were not necessarily a part of it.

Lumbee people came and went in my life as a child in Missouri, well before I moved to what some describe as the Lumbee “homeland” in North Carolina. I saw Lumbee people in Missouri on a consistent basis; they were people who themselves spoke of the same place that my family visited at least once a year – a place called “home.” But to say that Lumbee people moved fluidly through my life as a child does not speak to the complexity of the community in which I lived before I moved to North Carolina. I cannot even count the instances when I was subject to strangers questioning “what” I was or “from where” I came. The instances where I compared how other people “looked” to how my family and Lumbee friends “looked” were also numerous. One morning at my bus stop, for instance, a young girl from my neighborhood—perhaps a year older than me—asked: “Are your parents Mexican? My mom says you may be Mexican”. I didn’t reply. But I do remember thinking, “We are from North Carolina.” In

these types of instances, where I felt attacked because of how I looked, I reverted back to identifying with where I “came from.” As I grew older, I became more confident that I was “from North Carolina,” and that I was “from” the Lumbee people with whom my parents kept me in touch throughout my childhood.

My mother and father, on many occasions, spoke openly about how they viewed people. My father, who worked for an automotive company, stated that several men with whom he worked “knew they were Indian,” but didn’t acknowledge this truth. During a period between my sixth and eighth birthdays, our church was pastored by a man and woman who were originally from Nicaragua and Honduras. I remember having an affinity for them, their children, and their grandchildren. They looked like us. They were comfortably familiar. Indeed, on several occasions, visitors to our church openly asked if my sisters and I were our pastors’ children. Though the question didn’t offend either my sisters or me (to my knowledge), I was always intrigued at why, like the girl at my bus stop, individuals were so clear on how they were categorizing us.

That categorization that my family and I underwent wasn’t always so innocent. During and after my childhood, my father occasionally reminisced on having to deal with police harassment over the years in the Midwest. On one occasion, in the late 1960s, a police officer stopped my father. The officer said, “I had to stop you because I didn’t know there were Mexicans up this far into Missouri.” The officer accused my father of no offense; he just spotted my father and stopped him. This incident was repeated in the late 1980s when, on a trip between Missouri and North Carolina, my father and sister were stopped by police who said that “some suspects, described as Hispanic, were identified as” having perpetrated a crime because they were driving a car that was identified with

the crime. Right after the United States invaded Iraq in “Operation Desert Storm,” this same sister worked at a local fast food restaurant (which, ironically, was built on an excavated Native American burial site), and came home distraught one day, unable to fathom why a woman told her that she needed to “go back where she came from.” According to my sister, the woman—having had no conversation with my sister—proceeded to tell her that it was because of “people like her” that the woman’s family members were being forced to fight over in Kuwait and Iraq. All my sister could say was, “We were here first.” It is no surprise that, shortly after my sister graduated from high school, she joined my other sister in North Carolina. They had “returned home.”

But “home” overlapped significantly with my life in Missouri. In addition to the times when my parents (and myself, after a while) would openly comment about how some people “looked Indian,” there were many moments where Lumbee people emerged in my life in Missouri. This happened in several ways. Saint Louis was one of several major industrial areas in the United States where Lumbee people migrated over the years between the 1940s and the 1980s. When I was a child in the 1980s, my parents’ trips to see friends would always include trips to visit some of these people. During this same period, Lumbee people who were visiting my parents or the other Lumbee people in Missouri would regularly appear at our house. They contrasted with our “everyday” acquaintances that included church friends, work friends, classmates and neighbors. They stood out in my mind as “my people.” Not only did they look like my parents and family, but their presences, as I became older, intertwined with the importance of North Carolina in my life. When my family visited North Carolina, I often saw these same people. “Do you remember when I came to visit you?” some of them would ask during my visits to

North Carolina. In these moments, my emerging conception of “home” didn’t materialize only in a sense of land or geography (i.e. as in “homeland”), but also materialized in a sense of people. Lumbee people, whether they traveled into my life in Missouri and/or were present in the place that my parents referred to as home, carried with them – in both the senses of cultural-historical and physical-phenotypic qualities – the components of being Lumbee.

#### Lumbee Community Cohesion:

Through my fourth grade year in an elementary school outside of Saint Louis, even though I noticed differences in the way certain students sun-tanned compared to others during the summer time, I made no connection between how people looked and what their social, political, and or cultural identities may have been. Despite my body being coded in accordance with my neighbor’s worldview at my childhood bus stop, with her understandings of who was migrating into or living in their communities, my body was never subject to a very intimate cultural critique. The woman who addressed my sister in her workplace saw her as symbol of some greater happening in her world, but there seemed to be a separation placed between our racial bodies and the importance of cultural beliefs, values, or ideologies that we may have been perceived to hold. In Missouri, people either wanted to know where we were from or found it convenient to place us into some macro-categorization of the world. To me, beyond that, the presences of our bodies meant nothing.

This changed as I began to realize the presence (and importance) of the Lumbee community into which I was moving during my childhood, especially when I moved to North Carolina in 1991. My sisters had been living in Robeson County for a few years before my parents and I moved there. I remembered how they interacted with me before

they moved to North Carolina. But being in the Lumbee community on a permanent basis had changed them. There was no more break between their everyday life and “home.” They were home. They lived at home. “Look, you have pretty hair,” my sister would say often after we moved. It wasn’t just my sisters who remarked about my hair. When sitting down in a classroom in the Lumbee community, attending church, or joining others for a family reunion dinner, women (and usually older women) would frequently stroke the back of my neck and state that I had “good hair.”

To me, this treatment of my body—this appreciation of my body—stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. Much like the immediacy of identification that plugged Karen Blu’s Filipino friend as a *possible* Lumbee, my experience as a Lumbee in Robeson County, North Carolina was subject to the speculation of people who were also Lumbee – not people of other races. Lumbee people identified me and incorporated me into their community, into their kin network; not only through an understanding of *who* I was but also *what* I was. I was appreciated not just as a Lumbee person by surname or family connections, but as a Lumbee body in a historical and social context where being Indian – being Lumbee – competed with the popular images of who occupied the U.S. South: Black and White peoples. Stating what I looked like, how my hair felt, and how I did or did not fit in quite properly with Lumbee expectations were all components of a conversation that ultimately helped secure my presence as an Indian person in the U.S. South. However, it is important to note that in tandem with this treatment of my body, Lumbee people would often openly comment on how I “acted peculiar.” For instance, the way that I talked, which had been groomed in the dialect of rural Missouri, was obviously different than the dialect that most Lumbee people and non-Lumbee people describe as

“Lumbee Speak” or “Lumbee English.” Therefore, identification and appreciation of the Lumbee body was one thread – but a very important thread – in a cloth of Lumbee identity.

What I discovered when transplanted into the Lumbee community in North Carolina was what I had been prepared for throughout my childhood. The identity with which I had been born, having learned it through relationships that my parents had maintained when they lived outside of North Carolina, and through the way they interacted with their world in Missouri, depended on a constructive cultural positioning of the body. While most uses of the concept of “home” draw upon common land (Malkki 1992: 27), language, and cultural practices, “home” for me was also centered on the presences (or absence of presences) of certain bodies. Cohesion between all of these elements also guaranteed where “home” was.

Lumbee people never mistook me for being “Mexican” or any other nationality despite the significant increase in population of Mexican descended and other Latino people in North Carolina during the early 1990s. In fact, people who were familiar with the Lumbee community, who lived around or among the Lumbee but who were not Lumbee, never identified me as anything but “Indian.” My body, for people in Missouri, had been a canvas upon which the volatility and changing nature of their worlds was exhibited, climaxing in the moment of inquiry: “What are you?” Entering the Lumbee community, my body, being exposed in a different way to the scrutiny of members of my community, was not necessarily a moment or space where volatility was made evident. Rather, having my body being experienced in an intimate way made it a node for collectivity and a component of the complex ways that Lumbee community and kinship

operate. In the Lumbee community, the inspection of my body and my whole person was supposed to unite me with those who observe me. I learned that when a Lumbee person has a good understanding of who another Lumbee person is as an entire individual (for example, with regard to history, family, how one looks, etc.), they easily proclaim “I know you!” Importantly however, like the notion of land in the concept of “homeland,” my body became a singular point within a large collectivity of bodies, which tied together with other elements of culture, history, and kinships mark “home.” An alternative to “homeland,” especially in what I am describing, might be “homebodies” or “homepersons.” In my experience coming into the Lumbee community, bodies of Lumbee people, along with other aspects of “Lumbee culture,” became the material through which people experienced home and each other.

#### Conclusion:

Walking into Alumni building at UNC during my first year of graduate school, I quickly became aware of the special way that my personal identity fits together with my being an anthropologist. As part of the presentation of ethnological research of Native Americans, in which members of the department had taken part, the archaeology staff had placed a collage on the wall that described the history and archaeology of Catawba Indian pottery. Nestled among shards of unearthed pots and diagrams of archaeological Catawba excavation sites in South Carolina were pictures of Catawba peoples from the early to middle 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Immediately the faces of these people, captured softly in black-and-white photos, caught my attention. “That looks like Aunt Lestha Mae’s daughter,” I said to myself. “Actually, are these pictures of Lumbee people?” I looked down at the captions beneath the photographs. This was a family whose members had the



last name “Blue”. I thought again, “There are plenty of Blues in the Lumbee community.” These people, framed in this display of ethnological and archaeological research, were simultaneously being wrapped into my world. I looked at them, and in a glance I felt almost immediately like I knew them. It was neither their pottery-making abilities nor their being defined as Indian in this glass case that made them familiar to me. It was their bodies.

This moment has been repeated hundreds of times in my life. In the oddest places – or, rather, when I often expected it the least – I have been jarred by appearances of what I perceive to be Lumbee people. In particular, in out-of-the-way places, my gaze has picked up the faces of people and I state to myself or another person who may be with me, “They could be Lumbee.” In this particular case in the basement of UNC’s Anthropology Department, however, the people that I saw as “my people” were situated within a very complex ethnological exhibit. As a reviewer of this exhibit, I was asked to see them as more recent craftspeople of certain pottery-making techniques that I assume date back hundreds of years. But it wasn’t the context of their being “makers of Catawba pottery” that made me aware of or interested in who these people were. Rather, it was their bodies that elicited interest. I recognized them as my people, or as individuals who could easily be part of my community – the Lumbee Indian community. I felt, however, that the context of the exhibit artificially cut off any community-making abilities outside of the assumptions that I was making based on what I saw. I wanted to get to know them myself. I would have asked them questions about their ancestors and about other ways they were possibly interlinked with the Lumbee community. I wanted other people in my discipline and throughout UNC to understand that despite the context of anthropological

science in which these people were identified, despite my being Lumbee and having no grounds to claim the craft that was identified as “Catawba,” I felt a connection to these people. I looked into their eyes, and it seemed that they looked back at me as well.

The body – our experience with the body – has been lost in the post-Civil Rights discourse on race. Anthropologists mean well to state outright that race is only an illusion, but oftentimes our discussions of race have served to concurrently blind us (as scholars and everyday people) to the importance of personal interactions with one another and the bodies of one another. I do question the practice of race that distracted early scholars from understanding Lumbee ancestors, but I realize that their studies did not encompass the materiality and symbolism of Lumbee bodies as Lumbee people see them.

When I hear voices of Lumbee people from the past and discussions by Lumbee people today, I hear the conscious intertwining of two systems of thought and two worldviews. It is especially interesting when this happens while one’s body is the subject. I hear Lumbee people say, “You look like a Maynor” or “You look like the Locklears.” Simultaneously, they can and do say that someone has “that Chavis temper” or that someone “favors the Hammonds.” In these statements, if one is the subject, their whole person is taken up and carefully placed in the constellation of Lumbee kin and reification of community. One wants to be able to answer the question: “Who’s your people?” Answering this question not only speaks to your lineage and family, but to your being the continuation of a community that has existed in the shadow of more commonly held beliefs about how people have created and maintained relationships in the U.S. South. Lumbee people have maintained their community through a constant conversation about who, what, where, and how they are. Our ways of thinking about ourselves aren’t

themselves unchanging; what does not change is the fact that we look at, think about, and discuss who we are. It is important that this insistence on discussing and critiquing ourselves not be seen as escapism of some sort, but as indicative of the continual interaction between two worlds – one that is symbolized by race; the other that is symbolized by Native American kinship – that have existed in conversation for many generations. This is not a “problem,” per se. It is, rather, a statement about the legacy of invisibility that has developed along with the legacy of colonialism.

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