

*A Forest of Time*  
*American Indian Ways of History*  
 By Peter Nabokov

(Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. x, 246. Footnotes, index. \$20.00.)

In their classic work, *Cherokee Dance and Drama* (1951), anthropologists Frank Speck and Leonard Broom documented an eastern Cherokee tradition known as the Booger dance. Boogers were men wearing grotesquely humorous masks who interrupted gatherings at Cherokee houses and broke the rules of Cherokee etiquette. They tried to pick fights and made obscene gestures toward women. They spoke in ugly growls and acted unpredictably. They tried to dance like Cherokees, but their movements were awkward and unseemly. The Boogers were more than rule-breakers. They represented outsiders, with many of the masks offering misshapen versions of white men's faces. The dance, then, not only illustrated the difference between proper and improper social behavior, but offered a commentary on European conquest and on the Cherokees' relations with their unwelcome neighbors. The Booger dance was, in other words, a form of history telling.

Peter Nabokov's *A Forest of Time* describes and examines a broad collection of such American Indian "history ways." Drawing material from many different fields of scholarship, as well as from his own research and experience, Nabokov searches for what he terms the fundamental principles underlying most or all Native

American expressions of history. His purpose is not simply to argue that Indian stories can complement western-style histories, but to demonstrate that there are distinct Indian forms of historical consciousness. These must be understood, he believes, if one is to comprehend Native cultures and the American Indian experience.

Native history ways, Nabokov emphasizes, reside in sources that academic historians tend to ignore or underutilize: performance traditions, religious rituals, material objects worked by Indian hands, place names, stories generally categorized as myths or folktales, and narratives of individual encounters with the supernatural. While many of these sources appear to operate within a timeless, mythic past, Nabokov points out that the stories themselves change over time in ways that one can document using anthropological studies, travelers' narratives, and folklore collections. Those changes, he suggests, can in turn be correlated with historical events and developments. For instance, scholars collected a vast number of trickster stories, some old and some apparently new, in one of the most desperate eras of American Indian history, the period around the turn of the twentieth century. Perhaps, Nabokov suggests, one can find in the flourishing of the trickster tale

a Native response to the suffering experienced in the reservation era, with Indian people using the trickster to examine their condition and find ways to survive. Tracing the changes in the stories one can document an ongoing Native American analysis of colonial domination. What is particularly attractive about this idea is that one can start the investigation with Native texts and Native cultural categories.

*A Forest of Time* represents Nabokov's effort to synthesize decades of reading in multiple disciplines. The breadth of his source material alone makes the book highly valuable. In a sense, Nabokov has created a body of literature, since he has brought heretofore scattered works into conversation with one another. That is a

significant feat, but the book is even more important as a call for future scholarship. If this reviewer's experience is any indication, researchers in Native American history will come away from *A Forest of Time* with ideas for starting new projects and refining old ones. Those in American history, meanwhile, should be inspired to bring Indian perspectives into their treatments of other peoples' pasts. With grace and imagination, Nabokov reminds us how much Native American cultures can contribute to our understanding of life on this continent.

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*Down to Earth*  
*Nature's Role in American History*  
 By Ted Steinberg

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. xiv, 347. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$30.00.)

Environmental historian Ted Steinberg concludes his *Down to Earth* with a warning: "When it comes to the human control of nature, beware: Things rarely turn out the way they are supposed to. The wind shifts, the earth moves, and now and again, when you least expect it, a flock of birds swoops in for a meal" (p. 347). Those few lines summarize Steinberg's argument that a full understanding of American history requires that we portray nature as an active player and

not simply as a backdrop in the evolution of human society over time. Social historians argue for writing history from the bottom up; Steinberg contends that history also needs to be written "from the ground up."

Writing history in this way, Steinberg explains, demands that historians rethink the time periods that they use to organize and interpret the past. From this perspective, three turning points mark the history of America. First, with more than a nod to the