

Resisting Indian: Arnold's Diary and the History of Indian Autobiographies

Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary* relays the autobiography of reservation Indian, Arnold Spirit. Arnold's narrative describes how attending the all-white Reardan leads his tribe to punish him and label him less Indian: red on the outside but white on the inside. Yet historically speaking, Arnold's decision to leave and to write an autobiography remain in keeping with being Indian. As Arnold Krupat points out, during the time of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, Indian autobiographies emerged to challenge the popular belief that Indians could not and should not be saved and would vanish. Works such as Black Hawk's autobiography presented accomplished Indians very much alive to counter colonial discourse. In that same vein, Arnold's Indian autobiography can be viewed as the autobiography of a resisting Indian, someone who refuses to vanish and fights the ongoing effects of colonialism on his reservation. Arnold and the other Indians use an abbreviated form of the word reservation, rez. Their use of the word "rez" suggests an attempt to overcome the former punitive system by providing a seemingly fresh account of reservations. However, conditions on Arnold's rez remain dire due to the prevalence of alcoholism and poverty, an indication that things have not changed on reservations. The tribe's mistreatment of Arnold for leaving his reservation remains consistent with those who challenge colonial discourse. As Bill Ashcroft points out, "[s]tatements that contradict the discourse cannot be made without incurring punishment."