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Enlightenment thinking and writing for developing concepts of nature that have led to its exploitation.

While Deism is generally understood to be a historical movement, some Westerners today refer to themselves as deists. Moreover, while Deism, by definition, resists "organization," many individuals without claiming the term, hold essentially deist views, upholding a belief in God, while denying revelation and miracles. Some organized forms of Deism do persist. The World Union of Deists, for instance, promotes Deism as a rational religion that is appropriate to the contemporary period. They also emphasize Deism as a "religion of nature." This current emphasis counteracts earlier critiques of the Enlightenment legacy and, to a certain extent, rehabilitates older deist concepts of nature which, while scientific, were not wholly disenchanting.

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Further Reading

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- Turner, James. *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985.
- See also: Book of Nature; Natural Law and Natural Rights; Natural Theology.

Deloria, Vine, Jr. (1933–)

The 1960s civil rights movement had an enormous impact on American Indian communities, not least in sparking the career of Vine Deloria, generally considered the leading intellectual figure among twentieth-century American Indians. Deloria has been a prolific author and – for over twenty years – professor at two public universities, making an important impact on scholarly and broader public understandings of native interests and perspectives in fields such as law, political science, religion, and anthropology. In addition to advocating a strong defense of tribal sovereignty and native rights over against mainstream American culture, he has consistently argued that native outlooks on the environment constitute an important critique of American values, and that tribal land-use practices demonstrate an important alternative to American practices toward the natural world.

A member of the Standing Rock Lakota (Sioux) tribe, in

South Dakota, Deloria inherited a long family tradition of "being involved in the affairs of the Sioux tribe" (Deloria 1969: 263), including a father (Vine, Sr.) and grandfather (Philip) who were both important native leaders in the Episcopal church, a great grandfather (Saswe) who practiced as a medicine man within the Yankton Dakota tribe, and an aunt (Ella) who, as an author trained in ethnography and linguistics, wrote a number of important volumes on Lakota/Dakota culture. Although Deloria, Jr. studied theology at Augustana Lutheran Seminary, he eventually did his graduate work in law – at the University of Colorado – after serving as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians from 1964 to 1967.

As a student of both law and theology, Deloria's early work appeared in the years marked by a resurgence of militancy within native communities, such as the occupations of Alcatraz Island (1969) and Wounded Knee (1973), and the "Trail of Broken Treaties" (1972) – which resulted in the occupation of the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Washington, D.C. With publication of *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), Deloria issued a series of biting polemics against official American Indian policy and underlying public attitudes and prejudices.

In *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (1973), Deloria developed a sustained critique of the weaknesses of Christianity in contrast with American Indian tribal religions. Key to this critique is the claim, reminiscent of the perspective of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, that Western religious traditions have developed their understandings of human life based more on temporal as opposed to spatial orientation. Native American religions, by contrast, are place-specific, concerned more with maintaining communal and individual well-being within a particular piece of land than in providing salvation at the end of history. Christian religion, for Deloria, thus proved an exercise in alienation when Europeans brought it to the Americas, in effect removing it from its original environment.

Christianity shattered on the shores of this continent, producing hundreds of sects in the same manner that the tribes continually subdivided in an effort to relate to the rhythms of the land. It is probably in the nature of this continent that divisiveness is one of its greatest characteristics, a virtually uncontrollable freedom of the spirit (Deloria: 1992 [1973]: 145–6).

In subsequent work, such as *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (1984) and *Tribes, Treaties and Constitutional Tribulations* (1999) Deloria addressed the continued dilemmas tribes faced in dealing with the legal system, the web of racial stereotypes, and the forms of official knowledge through which Americans have insured the continuing subordination

of Indians, and accomplished the expropriation of their lands. For Deloria, the legal/scientific/political administration of Indians and tribal land reflects the same differences in worldview that he first sketched out in *God Is Red*.

In arguing that the tribes, many of whom have retained important though strained cultural links to their lands in spite of colonizing pressures, could “speak meaningfully to the modern world,” Deloria has provided younger Indians with a role model of a publicly engaged intellectual with a relentless critique of American society. The heart of that criticism, though darkened over time, is that tribal values and practices offer much-needed correctives to the fundamental ideas animating industrial society. In questioning the marginalizing design he finds shaping mainstream anthropological practice regarding Indians, he asks, for instance, whether

the festivals by which people reestablished relationships with the natural world [could] provide us with a vehicle for making our concern about the environment an actual change of behavior instead of a vague sense of warm sentiment about chipmunks? (in Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997: 220)

However, in functioning as critic, his role differs from that of his forebears, who sought to soften the impact of American society land-use aims on those turn-of-the-century Lakotas first confined to reservations. Deloria’s task has been not to soften, but to challenge those aims through creation of an alternative consensus about treaty law, about conceptions of the sacred, and about the future place of Indians in American society. His expertise in both law and religion has enabled him to play a crucial role in a variety of land-claim and land-use cases brought into the courts during the last decades of the twentieth century, and in the process to amend the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, which the high courts unanimously found insufficient to provide tribes with protection of traditional sacred sites. While serving as a critic of American legal culture, he has also consistently advocated the alliance of Indian and non-Indian in efforts to protect the environment. For Deloria, all Americans have an interest in the land claims which tribes have brought to the bar. “No real progress can be made in environmental law unless some of the insights into the sacredness of land derived from traditional tribal religions become basic attitudes of the larger society” (Deloria 1999: 213).

Although much of Deloria’s career has been taken up with addressing the practical and political dilemmas facing Indian tribes, he has consistently sought to analyze the conflict of worldviews underlying the contests between tribes and Western institutions. In such works as *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (1979), and more recently in *Red Earth/White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (1995), Deloria has challenged

the deepest assumptions about nature, God and truth animating modern Western culture. In these works, the knowledge claims of Western science, and the taken-for-granted-superiority of Western technology, take a thrashing for their reduction of nature to the malleable and controllable, a thrashing grounded as much in the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and methodological suspicion of Berkeley’s anarchistic philosopher of science Paul Feyerabend, as in the reconstituted tribal traditions that Deloria hopes to preserve. Scientific theory, Deloria has argued, has yielded not so much the authoritative account of nature, but rather “the folklore of materialistic industrialism” with “no basis in fact” (Deloria 1999: 275). His willingness to attack scientific consensus as well as Western religion has earned him many opponents, some of them other American Indian writers. Deloria has consistently played the heretic, however, not simply out of a polemicist’s desire to disturb the orthodox. Instead, he has held to a rather traditional Lakota conviction that though nature remains an intractable mystery, any possible progress in meeting human needs requires epistemological humility, and in the case of modern society, a good deal more humility than religion or science have been able to retain.

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Further Reading

Biolsi, Thomas and Larry J. Zimmerman. *Indians and Anthropologists: Vine Deloria Jr., and the Critique of Anthropology*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997.

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See also: American Indians as “First Ecologists”; Law, Religion, and Native American Lands; Manifest Destiny; Mother Earth; Noble Savage; Sacred and the Modern World, The; Traditional Ecological Knowledge among Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

Delphic Oracle

The Delphic Oracle, the most important religious center in the ancient Greek world, owed its existence to a unique natural setting. The Greeks themselves believed that the oracle derived its power from a number of geological features: a cleft in the rock; a spring; and a gaseous exhalation. A nearby cave and a second spring were also linked to the prophetic tradition at Delphi.

Nature visibly dominates Delphi. The temple of Apollo