

FROM TRADITION TO SURVIVANCE: POSTINDIANS NARRATING SURVIVANCE AND RESISTANCE

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Abstract: *Native American activist, scholar and writer Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name... Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy” (Vizenor1994, vii). Vizenor makes a distinction between the words “survival” and “survivance,” the latter being more complex. He claims that “[n]ative survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry.” In fact, Vizenor does not like to be labeled “Indian” because the term is a “colonial invention of victimry,” and he prefers to be called “Postindian.” The Postindians today are fighting against colonial misrepresentation and colonialization. Along this line, the word “survivance” comes to mean survival plus resistance, or survival plus endurance, and an act of survivance is an indigenous self-expression in any medium that tells a story about Native Americans’ presence in the world of today. Survivance stories are creative acts of resistance to domination, oppression, and termination. This paper argues that Native Americans are changing the way they are viewed in the mass media. They are no longer the “leathered-and-feathered vanishing race.” Luther Standing Bear, a traditional Sioux, is a good example of a “Postindian” who did not become a victim. He kept going despite the circumstances, he taught, he wrote books and told his story of survivance.*