We write as the editorial collective of *Critical Ethnic Studies: A Reader*, published by Duke University Press in 2016. Until July 2015, Andrea Smith had also been a co-editor, and served as the collective’s liaison with Duke. Although Smith’s name does not appear as a co-editor of the volume, we feel compelled to make this statement given how the initially highly constructive, followed by highly destructive impact of her editorial, research, and pedagogical practice has cast a long shadow over the work of multiple Critical Ethnic Studies (CES) projects since the organization’s inaugural conference in 2011.

There remain questions from many colleagues and students regarding the forms of accountability demanded of her from groups like our editorial collective. On July 4, 2015, in the midst of renewed controversy surrounding Smith’s self-identification as Cherokee, we sent her the following email, respectfully seeking clarity, honesty, and a direct and perhaps public response to significant questions posed by numerous Native/Indigenous scholars and community/tribal members:

Dear Andy:

We are writing as your colleagues and co-editors in a collective attempt to respond to the recent flurry of criticisms, attacks, and increasingly public exposure surrounding the apparently long-running controversy over your self-identification as a Cherokee and/or Indigenous person. We decided to write to
you as a group in order to convey the fact that we have no desire to participate in this discourse, but nonetheless find ourselves implicated as your fellow editors for a book that is poised to attract wide attention among scholars and activists, including Native and Indigenous intellectuals.

We do not wish to make this situation any worse for you or others. However, we respectfully request that you directly respond – ideally publicly or, if you prefer, internally to our collective – to these swirling challenges, criticisms, and attacks in a manner that brings some clarity to the matter. We believe that your sustained silence over this issue will only exacerbate the most toxic aspects of an already painful and difficult situation – one that is undoubtedly causing you extreme stress.

As an editorial collective, we want to protect the political and intellectual integrity of this project, to which we have all devoted an enormous amount of energy. Most importantly, we wish to protect the authors who have contributed to this collection, many of whom are undoubtedly also distressed by the events of the last couple weeks. Thus, we ask that you openly address this controversy by Friday July 17, in order to protect the project, its authors, and your co-editors from undue collateral damage resulting from these ongoing criticisms and perceptions of your conduct. The project stands for so much more than any individual person, political problem, or controversy, and we believe that we must hold ourselves responsible to its vision.

Yours,
David, Dylan, Jodi, Nada, Shana, and Sarita

Within four minutes we received a response from Smith. Rather than offering clarity and a direct response, she dismissed the issue, characterizing the questions and criticisms as lies and attacks motivated by personal animus. She also resigned from the editorial collective. At no point in our email to Smith had we asked or suggested that she step down; she stated that her decision to do so was an attempt to resolve the issue. However, in so doing, she deflected the issue expediently without having to hold herself accountable to the principled clarity we were requesting.

We note Smith’s quick decision to step down from this project – without having been asked to do so – in relation to at least one other co-edited book project. As recounted in the May 2021
A New York Times Magazine piece, for example, a previous project on Native studies “fell apart,” due to Smith’s refusal to explain herself. Certainly, many complex factors are at play, and each project has its own unique contours and specific context of production. Yet what suffuses every project is the important and potentially vexed question of power dynamics within and between the editors and contributors, especially when the project includes a mix of senior faculty, junior faculty, and graduate students. The CES editorial collective was composed of three senior faculty, two widely respected untenured junior faculty, and one independent scholar. We collectively agreed that we shared the responsibility of seeking accountability and transparency from Smith, and a commitment to move forward with the project while holding ourselves accountable as editorial stewards of its vision.

We offer the present explanation in order to contribute to the collective knowledge of efforts made to request accountability from Smith – efforts that predated this volume and, unfortunately, continue today. As we propose in the Reader’s introduction, the project of Critical Ethnic Studies and its constitutive fields remains, in part, one of exhortation. We again invite all to practice and expect the same.

Nada Elia, David M. Hernández, Jodi Kim, Shana L. Redmond, Dylan Rodríguez, and Sarita Echavez See