The Indian & Education

By

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Looking Through Indigenous Eyes:
American Indian Studies
Native Worldview & Philosophy &
Traditional Teaching Methodologies

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When reading historical accounts of the attempts to "educate" the American Indian, it is difficult, to say the least, to determine whether the process is indeed that or some form of retribution for being born outside the dominant culture. Take for example, the following boarding school incident that I described in my multi-generational family narrative ***Back to the Blanket: A Native Narrative of Discovery*****.** In this scene, I describe an encounter between my father, James, and a nun at the St. Mary's Mission Boarding School in Red Lake, Minnesota:

> By the time his [James'] consciousness had returned to the classroom, the students were standing in turn and reciting the vocabulary words from the top of the page, moving up one row and down the next. The sequence of recitation stopped at the student directly in front of him. The small, dark-skinned boy slowly rose from his desk, not standing too much taller than when he was seated. He stood there silently with his chin resting on his chest.
> Sister Dominica only hesitated for a moment. "*Agaj…Agajikiin…Agajishkiin"* She stumbled over the syllables in his Ojibwe name. "Why can we not go back to a time when you all were given good Christian names?"
> The boy's eyes were aimed at the floor, and there was shame in his expression.
> "It's such a nuisance to have to pronounce such gobbledygook. Who is going to want to pronounce that name when you leave here?"
> She slapped the pointer down on the front desk and moved closer towards the boy. "Pronounce the next word young man!" She gazed out over the top of her thick spectacles; the lines in her forehead deepened.
> "Ba – Ba – Bar – Bar – eees."
> Immediately, the pointer cracked against the desk. "Listen to what you are saying. Think for goodness sakes! What on heaven's Earth are *bar-eees?"* She mocked his incorrect response.
> "Try it again!"
> "Ba – Ba…" The little boy stood leaning on his desk, his hands were shaking. James could see his knees beginning to buckle and immediately leapt to his feet.
> "The w – w – word is b – b – berries, Sister D – D – Dominica…berries!"
> The crotchety nun raised her eyes to look directly at James. "And who, may I ask…*asked you*?"
> James knew that he had overstepped his bounds once again, but did not offer back an explanation.
> "Both of you hold out your hands. Since you want to help so badly, he will share your penalty for speaking out of turn."
> Still feeling a little of the sting in his right palm from the morning incident, James extended his left.
> "And you, *Agaji ...!"*
> As soon as the small boy motioned his hand out, the pointer struck each hand in rapid succession. James grimaced, and a puddle of urine began to flow out of the pant leg of Agajishkiins (Starkey, Jr., 2007, p. 652).

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So, one is left to ponder here: How did what began as a somewhat “mutual” relationship between the Indigenous people of this continent and the conquerors of the New World go from that beginning point, to the scenario above where the “Three R’s” were presumably “Recrimination, Repudiation and Eradication,” and finally to become an accepted curriculum of the modern day university campus? The road was long and hard fought.

In the Beginning … There Was Colonization

Given that there were an estimated ***18 to 54 million*** Indigenous people living in North America at the time that Columbus “discovered” it; and that they had existed there for thousands of years; and their societies were able to function economically, socially, and politically, one can therefore assume that there must have been some form of “education” to pass along cultural necessities as well as the skills to continue to make the society vibrant and viable. Practices were in place all along whereby new generations became full members of society.

“From the first attempts at educating American Indians, the goal has been to change them” (Anderson, T. A., Kickingbird, K., Deloria, V., Jr., Bluedog, K., Fuchs, E., & Havighurst, R., 2008, p. 2). There seems to be little doubt that the conquering Western European nations almost immediately upon contact sensed that what they were witnessing here in the New World was not acceptable to their own culture. Subsequently, their efforts to “change” the Native population manifested itself in the guise of ***“education.”***

“Formal education of Native Americans began when Europeans sought to convert them to Christianity and educate (“civilize” as they defined it) the Native peoples of this hemisphere” (Thornton, 1998, p. 79). Though the first attempt at this process is credited to the Spanish on the island of Cuba, the French, the English and the Americans all took their successive turns in applying the principles of Christianity to this virtually “virgin” territory.

In the 1500s, the Spanish, intrigued by the appearance, customs and cultures of the Caribbean Natives, began the recurring practice of transporting a select number of Indigenous individuals back to the homeland, where the people would ogle over the discoveries of the New World and purchase written accounts of the descriptive exploits of the various explorers, all at the expense of the captives who often died due to the diseases they encountered in Europe or of heartbreak from being wrenched away from their loved ones: the most famous displacement being that of ***Pocahontas*** who was taken back to England by John Rolfe, where it was purported that it was Pocahontas herself before dying there “calling for the building of schools and churches to educate those Barbarians in Virginia” (Thornton, 1998, p. 80). Hmmm!

Piqued by the explorers’ own descriptions and the unusual appearance of the Natives, the European community “sought to integrate Native Americans into their study of human

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history, society and culture" (Thornton, 1998, p. 91). The Europeans saw the Indigenous people paraded before them as representing the ***lower stages of their own social history***, and therefore proposed that by examining the Native Americans, they could study the roots of their own past – a fairly "enlightened" though erroneous form of scientific thought. However, close scrutiny of the visual appearance of the captives must have eluded them in that there was a substantial amount of homogeneity in their observations as noted by Spanish explorer and author Antonio de Ullola: "If you have seen one Indian, you have seen them all" (Thornton, p. 91). Of course today, there is a substantial amount of scientific evidence indicating the vast diversity in the Native population of the Americas. Later in the 1500s, the ***Spanish Jesuits*** began extensive efforts in earnest to educate/Christianize the Indigenous people in what would be considered the Southeast United States today as well as in what is now California.

As the European exploration expanded and the population exploded in North America, so, too, did the attempts at educating the Native population. In the 1600s, the ***French*** began schools along the St. Lawrence River, again, the focus being the ***conversion of the "heathens***." The ***English*** as well, as the colonies developed, began efforts to provide a sense of security and calm by teaching the Indians to speak English, ***using the Bible*** as a means of common ground. Presumably, speaking English and having the same religious outlook would keep the savage beasts under control as if they were out of control in the first place. In the "Virginia settlement, education was in the hands of ministers for the purpose of maintaining discipline and controlling Native Americans" (Spring, 2005, p. 19).

If the Spanish could be viewed as the initiators of education and Christian conversion of the Indigenous people, the ***English*** intentionally took the practice to the ***proverbial next level***. The "Indians could not be Christians until they first ***abandoned Native habits*** and ***accepted civilized customs"*** (Thornton, 1998, p. 80). These circumstances then became the standard by which the English education would be judged. Of course, the ambiguous nature of the subjective terms "Native habits" and "civilized customs" euphemistically became the foundation of subsequent policies that assaulted the Native cultures and set in motion the eventual unraveling and decline of tribal life in Nations with which they came in contact. This became a very serious and lethal diversion from the early path of simply trying to bring the heathens into the fold, as is poignantly indicated in this Massachusetts General Court Order in 1646: "Any Christian or pagan wittingly and willingly denying the true God, or his creation of government, shall be put to death" (Spring, 2005, p. 25).

With the advent of the 1700s, the policy foundation remained the same, but a new approach was emerging. Many of the ***Christian mission schools*** and ***early colleges*** of the period began to write into their charters a component that would see the Indians receiving an education there, the intent being to ***train an elite group of Natives*** who would then teach their own people civilization and salvation – the emphasis *was* "salvation." Schools such as Harvard,

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William and Mary and Dartmouth all had charters that committed them to the cause. Dartmouth, having been one of the earliest colleges to be known for its commitment to Indian youth in "reading, writing and all parts of learning which shall appear necessary and expedient for living." Though the intent to provide an education was apparently there, the thrust of such a practice was not as successful as desired. In 1744, an invitation to the Iroquois Nation located in the New York Colony was extended for them to send six young men to attend William and Mary College in Virginia. One of the sachem chiefs politely responded but in a most revealing manner:

> Several of our young people were formerly brought up at the Colleges, but when they came back to us, they were bad Runners, ignorant of every means of living in the Woods, unable to bear either the Cold or Hunger, knew neither how to build a Cabin, take a Deer, or kill an enemy, spoke our Language imperfectly, [and] were totally good for nothing. However, if the Gentlemen of Virginia will send us a Dozen of their Sons, we will take great Care of their Education, instruct them in all we know, and make *Men* of them (Thornton, 1998, p. 81).

From this response, it is clear that for as much as the English power structure wanted to convert the Indigenous masses to Christianity and therefore educate them, the masses were equally as reluctant to partake in the eradication of their "Native habits" to take up the more "civilized customs" of the New World. Or more simply, to put it bluntly: "Native Americans demonstrated little interest in being educated and converted by the colonists, but the English persisted in their attempts" (Spring, 2005, p. 22).

This give-and-take continued through the end of the 1700s. Attempts to educate the Indian were largely focused on the ability to understand the Bible, to live a pious life, and, ultimately, to obtain salvation. But as the 1800s dawned, a new orientation with respect to the Indian emerged – one which had been advocated by Eleazar Wheelock, the founding father of Dartmouth, decades earlier: ***Remove children from their contact with the tribal Traditions of their families and place them in boarding schools for cultural conversion.***

The First Culture of Curriculum

It is clearly documented in historical accounts that the Western European powers that came to the New World were primarily interested in three objectives: (1) ***securing new colonies for the homeland;*** (2) ***obtaining the riches that were found there;*** and (3) above all, ***spreading the influence of Christianity throughout the world.*** It is not difficult to understand, then, why from the outset, that Christian conversion of any encounters with unbelievers would be of paramount importance. Therefore, the initial way of dealing with the Indigenous population

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was a reflexive action: introduce and inculcate our perfect lifestyle which is thoroughly grounded in Christianity.

"Becoming human inevitably involves the development of character (including self-discipline, spirituality, and compassion) and the cultivation of intellect and rationality" (Joseph et al., p. 54). There are clear indications in most historical accounts that all three of these criteria existed in the Indigenous populations without the introduction of Christian principles, otherwise, their societies would not have endured thousands of years.

So, the beginning of the efforts to educate the Indigenous people was one primarily of ***inculcating the Gospel*** to insure the salvation of the heathen souls of the New World. However, with the advancement of *Manifest Destiny*, the burgeoning White population, and the insidious need for Indian Land, a new bent with regards to Indian education would be needed.

A Curriculum Culture Shift: Government and Mission Schools

Prior to this time, Indian treaties had been a source of political posturing, ending regional conflicts and acquiring desirable Lands on a small basis; however, most of these legally-binding agreements contained clauses that provided for ***schools, money and teachers***. This previous oversight would usher in a new era in the attempt to Anglicize and Christianize the Native populations as well solve the "Indian problem." During this new ***Treaty Era***, ***1778 – 1871,*** all subsequent agreements would involve the ceding of Land – large portions of Land.

By providing congressionally sanctioned treaties, ***Article VI, Section 2 of the Constitution***, the United States (U.S.) entered into binding contracts that were considered the "supreme law of the land":

The description above describes a unique relationship between the U.S. government and the Indian people with whom the treaties were made. This so-called ***"trust relationship"*** inherently contains the federal responsibility for ***preserving, protecting and guaranteeing Indian rights and property.*** In order to accomplish this, they must provide a wide range of services. First, the government must fulfill all ***treaty provisions***; and second, they must fulfill a general commitment to the tribes to ***improve social and economic conditions.***

Point two above was the proverbial foot in the door. Taking the afore-mentioned Eleazar Wheelock premise of removing children from their contact with the tribal Traditions of their families and placing them in boarding schools for cultural conversion seemed like the panacea for Indian education – beginning with the initial idea to convert Indians from hunters to farmers, even if the tribal structure had no connection whatsoever with the agrarian lifestyle. Indian farmers would require less land, thus, leaving more of the formerly Native Land open to White settlers as was provided for in ***Homestead Act of 1862***.

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The necessity of removing the children from their tribal environment and placing them in boarding schools would accomplish the previous century's goal of ***spiritual salvation*** as well as ***assimilating*** the American Indian into the dominant culture, therefore, accomplishing the goals of improving "social and economic conditions." It is essential that one must completely understand the somewhat benign sounding precept of "assimilation" to comprehend the thrust of this next attempt at "educating" the Native American. Inherent in this definition used by the U.S. government is what would amount to as a complete immersion into the American mainstream and a resultant ***cultural genocide*** of all Indigenous culture.

The scenario had been set for ***mission and government schools***. The original institutions were supported by companies, philanthropists and religious groups, and then later joined by a concerted government effort, whose charter was to "separate children from their cultural background and force them into America's mainstream" (Anderson et al., 2008, p. 2). The cry of the mission school effort was "Native Americans could attain equality with Euro-Americans through proper training" (Thornton, 1998, p. 83).

The initial Indian schools were placed on reservations, which by Wheeler standards, did not completely accomplish his objective of removing Indian children from their tribal influences. Some were ***day schools***, where the students would either return home after the schooling hours or on the weekends, but this conceptual framework was not as successful as desired. Assimilation was not occurring, at least not fast enough, to satisfy the powers that be. The children were still exposed to the "detrimental" influences of their families and tribe. However, these schools were the prototype for what was to follow.

The curriculum was designed primarily for elementary and secondary students, providing some ***basic skills in the academic subjects***, such as arithmetic, grammar, spelling and geography in the early morning hours. The depth and breadth of the academics were kept at a ***rudimentary level***, for it was widely believed and "demonstrated" that the Indian student could not engage or comprehend any pursuit beyond the most fundamental aspects.

In the afternoons, there was a heavy dose of ***agrarian vocational and technical training*** though again, only at a denigrating level. Boys received instruction in farming techniques, animal husbandry, and mechanical applications; girls learned the essentials of homemaking, cooking, cleaning, sewing, and child care. Of course, ***daily church attendance and catechism*** were essential components of the boarding school experience. It is imperative to add that the schools themselves could not have existed without the forced labor of the children. "Boarding schools were supported by the labor of the students" (Spring, 2005, p. 233). Typically, the schools were understaffed, and therefore, the maintenance, repair and daily housekeeping operations were basically accomplished by a small cadre of staff members who directed the students.

When this system failed to provide the desired results, the ***off-reservation school***

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evolved. Wheelock's conceptualization would be attained. The earliest attempt at this concept was the brain-child of Richard H. Pratt in 1879 with the ***Carlisle Indian School*** in Pennsylvania. Pratt, a former military officer, included in the usual mix of ***Indian school curriculum*** a strong dose of ***close order drill and military discipline***.

Prior to the opening of Carlisle, a group of Native Americans had been sent to the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, now Hampton University in Virginia; however, the predominant student body there was made up of African Americans for which the original charter of the school was intended. In rapid succession, several other solely Indian institutions were created, such as the first North American Indian College, Bacone College, founded in 1880, and Haskell Institute, now Haskell Indian Nations University, established in 1884 in Lawrence, Kansas. One must keep in mind that these institutions were not "colleges" in today's sense of the word. They were clearly built on Pratt's Carlisle model emphasizing the divided day, focusing on basic academic skills, manual labor, agricultural education, military discipline, and student supported operation.

In addition, accounts of ***rampant emotional, sexual and physical abuse*** in these institutions are well documented. Personal corroboration can be provided by my own father, as well as by workers in the field, such as Oliver Lafarge and Joel Spring in *The American School*: "Children were flogged with ropes, and some boarding schools contained their own jails." Indian schools were "penal institutions – where little children were sentenced to hard labor for a term of years to expiate the crime of being born of their mothers" (Spring, 2005, p. 233).

A report in 1903 found that there were ***221 government schools*** on reservations (93 boarding schools and 128 day schools) in addition to numerous schools provided by states in Indian Territory. A closer scrutiny in the subsequent two decades, revealed a seriously flawed and failing system by those who came in contact with it, and by the early 1920s, a determination was made to investigate the problems (National Indian Education Association, 2009, p. 2).

The Brookings Institute began a major study under the auspices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1926, and in 1928, produced what has been referred to ever since as the ***"Merriam Report."*** The findings of this landmark report cited that Indians were ***receiving a poor quality of services,*** especially health and education, from public officials who were supposed to be serving their needs. In addition, the ***deprivation and abuse of Indian children*** attending those schools was brought to the government's attention. The committee's final summation noted that the whole Indian problem was an educational one, and it therefore called for redirection of the education of Native Americans (Alaska Native Curriculum Project, 2008).

This legendary report was the turning point for the culturally-genocidal government policies that had been in place for the previous 400 years. The 1930s would bring about a

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period of change that would amount to an ***"Indian New Deal"*** such as that advocated for the general population by Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Though the process was slow, a new emphasis was gradually put in place that was ***more sympathetic to Native American cultures***, incorporating aspects of Native American history and culture into the curriculum of schools that were locally placed on Indian reservations to service the resident tribe.

The Second Culture of Curriculum

The Indian students need to be educated to know the world as it is, not to improve it or even to deeply understand it" (Joseph et al., 2000, p. 33). How true this culture rang for the Native American students of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries. The Indian students were thought to not have the ability to comprehend typical curriculum pursuits of the public schools and were therefore "deemed unsuited for academic work" (Joseph et al., p. 34).

The boarding school curriculum was "dumbed down" so that the individual student would experience tasks at the level that could be easily acquired. Having established that as the baseline, the emphasis was then placed on teaching what ***farming skills*** would be necessary and obtainable by the average Indian student, and then pushing him or her towards it with whatever means suitable. Unfortunately, much of the time that meant ***punishment or abuse***. The "successful" graduate, after years of assimilation in the school, would then be prepared to accept his acreage and experience the "success" of the American Dream – a prosperous American farm that would contribute to his personal well-being.

By establishing the lowest level of performance, the rudimentary elements of tasks and skills could be accomplished by ***repetitious performance***, establishing a "thoroughness" and "reliability" to the routine of daily learning, chores and activities which would eventually lead to the successful operation of the family farm. Dormitory disciplinarians watched and dictated such things as personal hygiene and overall neatness of self and personal space with military precision as is noted, again, in my narrative.

By ***marching students*** to meals, class, church service, structured athletic activities and afternoon chores, the "moral significance" of neatness, promptness and punctuality were honed to perfection. One must also remember that Christian values were drilled into the heads of the students on a daily basis.

No matter what the tribe was, its locality, or its Traditional perspective, the Indians were seen as a monolithic group of people, much as the Spanish had assumed earlier. Whether one was a desert dweller, ocean-going whaler, nomadic plains hunter, or a woodland trapper, all were assumed to have little understanding of personal prosperity or societal necessity. All tribes were historically successful in their approach to surviving, and the greatest impediment to their success according to the Western European tradition was viewed as their ***dependence***

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on each other. The boarding school provided that solution. Mix together different tribes, ***forbid the use of language or cultural ceremonies, alienate and pit the students against each other,*** and one can manipulate them into becoming successful, productive, agrarian members of the free-market system. The ***collaborative, cooperative mind-set*** could be either drilled or beaten out of the masses.

The belief that economic and technological trends are "immutable and essentially uncontrollable" (Joseph et al., 2000, p. 32) was the perfect mind set and fit for the Native student from the viewpoint of the boarding school administration. If one can assume from the outset that all students will be farmers working their own plot of land, and that there are a finite set of skills to do that, then the nature of the task at hand is simple. ***Teach those "immutable"*** skills and provide laborious repetition until a certain amount of "controllability" is achieved and the tasks are accomplished.

Schools have a vital role in the country's economic future; the predominant thought with regards to what is needed in the society has direct input into the school culture; schools can ameliorate the effects of social and economic inequality; and there are students, who for reasons of ability, background or disinclination, do not take to conventional academic schooling are all components that made up the boarding school experience.

As we have seen, the Native American has had little input or significance in their own education. The U.S. government policies of *Termination, Relocation,* and the activism of the 1960s changed that equation forever.

Another Curriculum Culture Shift: Taking AIM at Decolonization and Self-Determination

> Native Americans remain among the least-understood groups, not only within the general public, but also among university scholars, admin, and policymakers – the central themes of sovereignty, self-government, land, and culture are not well understood (Champagne & Stauss, 2002, p. 6).

The decade of the 1960s presented an unprecedented period of time in American History. Angered with a raging war in Southeast Asia, oppressive government policies with regards to ***Civil Rights***, and inequities with the plight of women, American social activism became the cry from the streets of cities and neighborhoods. Though not as vociferous, there was an evolving voice from the reservation as well that was fed up with failed systems and recurring onerous policies that threatened the very existence of Indian tribes across North America.

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Even in the first few decades of the *Twentieth Century*, there were some "college-educated Indians who began speaking out on Native issues, critiquing federal Indian policy, debating issues of American Indian identity, and seeking to preserve Indian cultures" (Kidwell & Velie, 2005, p. 1), much as contemporary programs focus on today. In fact, the ***Society of American Indians*** was founded in 1913, and though it existed less than a decade, it was successful in raising critical Native issues that continue to involve contemporary leaders today. The foundation was laid for Indigenous people to begin to consider the fact that they could conceivably gain access to the institutions of higher learning.

One such attempt to gain access was initiated in 1914 by Senator Robert Owens of Oklahoma. At the urging of a number of activist Indians, Senator Owens introduced a resolution in Congress to establish an ***American Indian Studies*** (AIS) Department at the University of Oklahoma (Wheeler, 2001, p. 103). And though unsuccessful in his attempt, the door had been opened and the seeds planted that Native Americans could not only obtain access to the college campus, but in so doing, ***gain some control over curriculum and determine how Indians would be taught,*** and in addition, would teach others about the Native experience. Indigenous demands for a voice would be heard.

The early decades of the *Twentieth Century* saw a massive movement off the reservation, and consequently, the population of Indians across America took on a significantly "urban" appearance. ***Abject poverty*** still held most reservations in its grip, and the schools found there were ***lacking in funds*** to maintain them and hire qualified teachers and administrators. At least, the boarding school influence had been diminished, though not completely eliminated. But because of the migration off of the Rez, the ***public schools*** became a significant force in educating Indians, both on and off the reservation. Though the public schools of the 1940s and 1950s did little to recognize the existence of the modern Indian, or even pay tribute to any contributions they had made, a path had been set that led to the access to the junior college, college and university to those students willing to negotiate the system. Moreover, in the public schools, the terribly racist, restrictive attitudes about the learning capabilities of Indians found in the boarding school experience, as well as the punitive methods used to enforce learning were not to be found there in any significant amount. However, one must not kid oneself: Racism was still lying just below the surface.

As more minority students found their way to post-secondary education, student activism, including those protests by White students, focused attention on the racist attitudes of society and college administrations specifically on the social inequity evident in the low enrollment numbers of African American, Latino and Indian students on college campuses. Spurred on by minority activists and groups, such as the ***American Indian Movement (AIM),*** clear voices could be heard above the din, and either through pressure of these activist groups or a sense of social responsibility, the "establishment of academic programs that focused on

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specific racial or ethnic groups" began to slowly emerge (Kidwell & Velie, 2005, p. 3). "Students became important decision makers in their own education and educational institutions as ethnic study courses found their way into the curricula, departments, and degree programs" (Thornton, 1998, p. 87). Lest one forgets, ***Affirmative Action*** goals had been put in place after the ***Civil Rights Act of 1964,*** and programs relevant to Indian interests would attract Native students thereby ***boosting enrollments of those underrepresented*** on campus as dictated by law but also would increase university coffers. So perhaps, the goals were not as lofty as first thought; however, this small, but significant, inroad had possibilities of beginning to embrace an idea of social diversity on campus, and subsequently in American culture, and to open the door to a "growing acceptance of AIS as a legitimate field of intellectual inquiry, and even perhaps as an academic discipline" (Kidwell, 2009, p. 3). Much of what was established in the beginning was reactionary and unstructured in response to the campus militants; consequently, there was little thought given to a guiding focus or design: Rhetoric was the order of the day for the early programs, and during succeeding years, the ***Red Power Movement***, and expressions of Indian nationalism, dictated the mood on many campuses as the programs channeled remedial courses to keep them there. Some busied themselves trying to formulate a Native American revolutionary ideology, while others structured courses whose content seemed preoccupied with an ***exaltation of Indian virtues*** rather than a ***measured evaluation of Indian cultures past and present.*** Indifference on the part of many college officials, or outright resentment triggered by the Indians' forced entry on college campuses, resulted in minimal administrative perception of the singular problems of the new Indian departments (Duffie & Chavis, 1997, p. 436).

What was for sure was the early ***Native American Studies*** programs arose from a rejection of traditional curriculum that ignored or grossly misrepresented Indigenous people, their cultures, their belief systems, their political structures, and their rightful place in history.

Accompanying the various university course offerings, texts were needed that expressed an Indigenous point of view. Native scholar-authors emerged from obscurity, such as ***Vine Deloria, Jr.*** and ***M. Scott Momaday***. Their writing in such texts as ***Custer Died for Your Sins, We Talk, You Listen,*** and ***House Made of Dawn*** became staples of courses and created controversy in their audacious assertions that Indians were people too with thoughts and ideas of their own. Shortly thereafter, Deloria's 1972 ground-breaking treatise on Indian religion, ***God Is Red,*** espoused the position that Indians were of place and not time, that underlying communalism and environmental cohabitation were fundamental precepts of Indigenous ways of life. These were ideas that immediately began to shape pivotal changes in society and grew to guide subsequent Native inquiry decades later. Simultaneously, the linear world of Western-European culture was awakened by Black Elk's extolling of his ***"Circular Philosophy"*** that offered probing

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insights into a different way of viewing the world and perhaps providing alternative solutions to societal issues and problems.

Often the fledgling programs were compelled to call upon ***non-Indian faculty*** from various academic departments to offer Indian classes or to introduce Native subject matter into their non-Indian courses. This then began the practice of ***compartmentalizing the study of Native Americans into various departments*** such as anthropology or history, which is at great odds with many scholars who feel that AIS is in and of itself an academic discipline.

With the subsequent increase in the number of Indian people with undergraduate, graduate and professional degrees, there was an emergence of AIS as an academic discipline" (Jose, 1985, p. 36).

Even the early advocates of the AIS university programs sensed that their approach to the topic was ***multi-disciplinary*** at the very least, ***holistic*** if you will, and not one-dimensional. Though much of the early discussion, research, and writing about Indians had taken place predominantly by non-Indians and within the confines of a specific discipline, those involved with taking these first steps were uncomfortable with this mind-set. The challenge was then to develop the curricula from a ***distinctive Native American perspective***. This would be diametrically opposed to the previous approach where information had been mined from the current college disciplines – anthropology, history, literature and the arts primarily – where Indians had been seen as stereotypical objects, such as "hostile savages in the past or as poverty- stricken, drunken individuals in contemporary communities" (Kidwell & Velie, 2005, p. 4). So, one of the key objectives was to create its own unique, intellectual foundations by looking deeply within the Native experience through ***the eyes of Elders*** and to examine the people from an approach that blended together the various components of Indian life: economics, social relations, Traditions, politics and religion among others. This was a Traditional approach.

Advocates of this stream of thought firmly believed that, "Indian views of history are so distinct from the concept of history in Western European cultures that non-Indians can never understand them" (Kidwell & Velie, 2005, p. xi). In a sense, this was somewhat problematic. Should ***Native American Studies*** represent a distinct cultural viewpoint, and if so, can it be understood by students from other cultures? This was not unlike other minority groups who experienced the same soul-searching. Should Native scholars reject non-Indian scholarship altogether? And should a completely counter-historical narrative from a Native perspective be undertaken? Fortunately, a compromise was undertaken, and many of the AIS programs of the 1970s survived and even thrived. These initial programs have led to new courses and new approaches to the study of American Indians as well as the empowerment of Indian students and the Native Community at large.

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Keep in mind, that even today, there are those who still discredit and disparage the perspective that *American Indian Studies* is a unique discipline. The earliest concern was that AIS could not carry its own weight because it did not have its own distinct methodology. And furthermore, it lacked the “principles of objectivity, empiricism, and logic” (Thornton, 1978, p. 13). Of course, from whose perspective are these principles viewed?

Other criticisms reflecting paternalistic Western ideology insisted that AIS was not a “legitimate area of concern” and the knowledge associated with Indian Studies could not pass the scrutiny of collegiate standards. It was the naysayers contention that since much Traditional Knowledge that had been acquired by Indian people and passed down over the centuries was done through tribal Oral Traditions that in some way this does not pass the litmus test for academia, and therefore, it is only “tacit theories and knowledge” (Jose, 1985, p. 36). This so-called “mystical” wisdom is considered to be unscientific and somewhat like astrology and not able to stand up to the test of time like “classical bodies of Western knowledge” (Jose, p. 36

Beginning in 1969, the wave, or at least a ripple, of Indian programs began at the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in ***American Indian Studies***. The university’s goal was to “build a curriculum that would educate the university’s general student audience about the complexities of the Indian experience” (Champagne & Stauss, 2002, p. 147). Sitting directly in the heart of Ojibwe Country, at times a racist hot spot, this was a formidable challenge. Quickly to follow were programs across the country, such as the *University of California, Berkley; Washington State University; Humboldt State*; and the *Universities of California, Irvine and Riverside* respectively. All of these university programs were a mix of multi-disciplines and Indian and non-Indian faculty. Although many academic administrators and university faculty members expected AIS programs to disappear relatively quickly, and some of the courses did, those with a committed faculty and clear vision began a new kind of scholarship, whereby Indian faculty members continued to grow, and objectives and course offerings reflected a genuine ***Native American perspective***.

“First, American Indian Studies is [should be] an ***endogenous*** consideration of American Indians (i.e., the study of American Indians originating from inside Indian cultures) (Thornton, 1978, p. 7). Prior to this, the Native American had been examined from an external perspective. It would seem self-evident, given this position, that important insights never previously encountered into understanding the Indigenous people would be immediately forthcoming from such an approach. It made clear sense that ***who better to ask and tell about Indians than Indians themselves?*** One thing was for sure: an Indian probably would not refer to himself as being primitive or savage. As well, American Indian Studies must consider various components of Indian societies, together, not fragmented by existing disciplines.

As has been the strident complaint of most public school curriculum, the world does not operate along strict disciplinary lines, and compartmentalizing knowledge is unrealistic and

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gives it a jaded presentation. Indigenous cultures, unlike their Western counterparts, are basically ***undifferentiated systems***. Components of the society, religious, familial, economic, political, and educational, are closely related and melded together. The most obvious example is that of the separation of church and state which does not occur in the Indian culture. Consequently, a ***holistic approach to AIS is of paramount importance***.

To be fair, it must be clearly understood that challenging post-secondary Native curriculum, really all Native curriculum, is a daunting task in that fundamental "truths" as they are understood now will have to be drastically changed. And after all, ***reconciling*** commonly held ***assumptions about a colonialist America*** is at best a traumatic, tumultuous endeavor for all parties involved. What is taught presently very often does not include Native Worldview and interpretation, nor does it honestly teach about the onerous ***cycle of survival*** which Indians have had to endure under deliberate policies of cultural repression and eradication.

Many post-secondary institutions in the United States have initiated programs as well to balance the need for providing counseling and support services for Native students, as was needed in the early days, with courses aimed at ***combating the colonialist policies*** and ***attitudes of a dominant culture***. Most programs, such as those at the *Universities of California-Davis and Berkeley,* the *University of Arizona*, the *University of Oklahoma*, the *University of Montana*, and the *University of North Carolina-Pembroke*, offer introductory and federal policy courses which analyze the structure of the historical relationship between First Nations tribes and the United States government. Aimed at undergraduate and graduate students, courses pertain to the "preservation and understanding of Native American cultures, including Indigenous languages, literatures, religion, philosophy and art" (Duffie & Chavis, 1997, p. 440).

In looking back, then, over the past fifty years of AIS, three waves of emphasis are clearly evident:

> ***Wave One:*** In the 1960s through the 1980s, anthropologists primarily took what might be called a "stones and bones" or "leather and feather" approach to teaching *about* American Indians, stressing mainly the material culture of pre-contact Indian life, covering such topics as migration routes, arrowhead typography, and subsistence patterns, ignoring lived experiences or current issues of Indigenous people;
>
> **Wave Two:** Beginning in the 1990s and with a more robust Indian faculty, university courses began discussing topic that were more important to the Indian Community as a viable entity, covering issues such as the history of federal Indian policy and law, Indian education and health, but the approach still had more of an indoctrination with no student input;

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> **Wave Three:** With the turn of the Twenty-first Century, a recognition that it was important to present students with a certain knowledge set *about* Indians, attempts began to bring a balance to the discussion by listening to the students' interests, and on a much deeper level pushed the envelope of knowledge *about* Indians. Expanding the knowledge set included Indian "ways of knowing" which has come to be known as ***Indigenous Knowledge*** (Adapted from Gross, 2005, p. 123).

Within the literature, there is a strong current that clearly delineates establishing ***American Indian Studies*** and research within its ***own disciplinary structure*** and that preeminently uses the Indigenous experience as its underlying theme focusing on law, policy, Sovereignty, and Land and resource issues.

Such precepts as race, class, ethnicity, nation analysis, and cultural investigation are viewed by Native scholars as ***ineffective for providing a holistic approach*** that centers on Indian communities and interpretations. In the beginning, ethnic studies was touted as the course of choice, until its shortcomings as a discipline were debunked for various focus issues but primarily as Duane Champagne points out: "This point of view distinguishes Indigenous studies from ethnic studies, where in the latter a central theme is a study of the processes of assimilation, inclusion, and identity" (Champagne, 2008, p. 84).

A crucial point to comprehending this train of thought is that all these academic categories have a considerable amount of value at stake in advancing the Western and American experience of equality and inclusion, vis-à-vis ***assimilation*** into the United States society, which has never been a goal of Indigenous people. Bucking such American stalwarts as equality and inclusion is problematic at the very least. These concepts, in fact, run counter to Native aspirations of ***Land reclamation*** and ***preservation, Self-Determination*** and ***Sovereignty,*** and the ***reclaiming of language and culture.***

There is a strong implication as well that not only Human relations are included but deep connections with all Animate Beings, as well as, Inanimate Beings that make up the Spiritual Realm of existence which themselves are of equal importance. Try as they may to counter the reality, Western nationalism is firmly grounded in secular constructs; whereas, the Traditional Native American expression of social collectivism is deeply-rooted in a Spiritual, religious if you will, Universe.

Precepts of Western epistemology, such as those mentioned above to explain the Indigenous experience, fail miserably to inculcate an understanding of what it means to see ***through Indigenous eyes***. A methodology that realizes the short-sightedness of such an approach and that accounts for the values and aspirations of many Indigenous communities as well as their own interpretations of what is good for the individual and group must be advanced

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if we are to make inroads towards correcting colonialist policies and viewpoints and achieving social justice for the American Indian.

The Native scholars and educators over the past several decades have clearly spoken as to what is needed in terms of Indigenous curriculum. Today, the message is strong and clear: "The development of AIS is essential to the survival of Indian peoples as culturally distinct, sovereign entities. The message that we must decolonize ourselves, our communities, academia, and mainstream society resonates loudly today" (Cook-Lynn, Holm, Red Horse, & Riding In, 2005, p. 169). It is this researcher's opinion that any curriculum that is eventually deemed essential for presentation in an AIS program should be compatible, that is appropriate, with a worldview that reflects an Indigenous perspective of existence.

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