



The Nature of American Indian Tribal Governments

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It is a common notion among those unfamiliar with American Indian nations and people to think of Indians as a single group of people operating under a single government and sharing languages, customs, and religion. This could not be further from the truth. At the time of Columbus there existed in what is now the United States 600 Indian nations speaking over 300 distinct languages. Today more than 300 tribal governments are meeting the needs of their people through systems which generally combine traditional forms with standard American forms.

While there are certainly regional and even nationwide similarities among Indian government forms, it is a wise idea to take a cue from the names many Indian nations give themselves, "the people," or "the principal people" — and to consider each Indian government as a distinct entity exercising sovereign power to meet the present and future needs of its people.

The question arises, what is a tribal government like? Is it similar in function to a county government or a state government? To an independent nation? To a business? The answer is a little of all three.

It is like a national government in that it is sovereign, asserts jurisdiction over its people and land, owns land and has, at the heart of its mission, meeting the needs of its people; it is like state and local governments in that it administers many federal programs; and it is like a business in that it can manage its resources, products, and services for profit.

The power and source of Indian nations and their governments is the same today as it was before the coming of the Europeans — their inherent sovereignty. This means that the powers of tribal governments predate the coming of Europeans to this continent, the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and the adoption of the United States Constitution. The sovereignty of tribal governments has been repeatedly recognized and affirmed by the United States government through treaties, statutes, and judicial decisions.



Still, there are those who ask the question, "If the tribes want to be self-governing and self-sufficient, why do they ask for federal subsidy?" The answer is quite simple. As governments, the tribes receive assistance on the same basis that state and other local governments receive federal subsidies for road and school construction, for impact and in education, for public transportation, for urban renewal, and for other projects and services. Their purposes are the same as any government — to meet the needs of their people.

The tribes receive federal assistance for many of the same reasons that private industries receive assistance in the form of tax relief or direct funds for research and development, and payroll and overhead subsidies for participating in job training programs.

The tradition of self-government is not a foreign idea, but one of the fundamental concepts that guided the founding of the United States. As they have from time immemorial, tribes will continue to be permanent on-going political institutions exercising the basic powers of governments necessary to fulfill the needs of tribal members.

Indian Self-Government: Contemporary Forms and Structures

It is clear that there is strong historical tradition for Indian self-government. Despite the assaults against it by the United States over the years, Indian governments survive and thrive. In fact, many Indian tribes and their members are more determined than ever to pursue their own destinies as self-sufficiently as possible. These efforts are strengthened by tribal economic development activities. If the basic needs of community members are not met because of inadequate or poorly coordinated social services and community spirit, efforts aimed at increasing productivity and economic development can be seriously drained. Thus, Indian governments must mobilize both federal and non-federal resources (including their own) to achieve a balanced approach to both economic and social development.



Today, there are more than 290 distinct tribal governments which are recognized by the United States. Currently, 36 of these tribal governments are operational in Oklahoma. Of the 36, four tribal governments consist of combined tribes, i.e., the Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes. Forty distinct tribes and/or nations are resident to Oklahoma, the largest number of resident tribes of any state in the nation.

Federal recognition is a rather arbitrary designation which means a tribe is currently receiving services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or Indian Health Service and is protected by the Federal-Indian Trust Relationship. There are some 300 additional functioning tribal governments (including Alaskan Native Villages) who have a status other than federally-recognized. Some of these are recognized by the states in which they are located, others are affiliated with the federal government in a less formal manner. Many are actively seeking formal federal recognition. Regardless of their status, the purpose of these tribal governments is the same as for any government: to meet the needs of its people.

Time and impact of western civilization have taken their toll on traditional government institutions and forms. Nevertheless, the rich cultural heritage of Indian nations, which include a governmental tradition, have left their imprint on the present day workings of tribal government. Today there are almost as many distinct forms of tribal government as there are Indian nations. Most of these combined traditional forms with western forms.

The traditional way in which tribal government has been viewed is as a public sector body with responsibility for and obligations to tribal members, with concern for their economic and social well-being. In another sense, however, the tribal government may be considered a "quasi-corporation." According to this view, the tribal councils are responsible for the investment of tribal resources, for managing those resources for the betterment of tribal members, and for ensuring that long-term obligations to tribal members can be fulfilled. Thus, tribal councils have particular financial and budgetary responsibilities, including:



- Defining capitol improvements
- Ensuring an adequate revenue stream
- Making tribal investments
- Setting annual expenditures.

Constitutions and the Source of Tribal Powers

Like other nations, tribal governments operate under constitutions which generally define the source and nature of the government's sovereignty, and the form and structure of the government. In addition, they spell out the specific sovereign power that the government may exercise.

These constitutions may be written or unwritten. Some Indian nations have adopted written constitutions that primarily describe their traditional forms of government. Such are the constitutions of the Creeks and the Choctaws of Oklahoma. Many of the Indian tribes that adopted constitutions did so in the hope that more non-Indians would recognize their governments. Often this was done under the guidance and pressure of the United States government.

Forms and Structure Of Tribal Governments

Consistent with their traditional pasts, most contemporary Indian nations have democratic governments which have combined aspects of their traditional styles and institutions. The structures of tribal government have developed in response to the same kinds of factors that affect the development of any government. Population, size, land base, climate, and economic and political considerations all have had a great impact on the structure and operation of contemporary Indian governments.

The necessary minimum for tribal government is an elected council or business committee whose chief executive officer is the chairman, president, governor, or chief. Some tribes have expanded beyond mere administration and have begun to assume legal, contractual, and administrative responsibility for the many-sided aspects of modern economic and social existence. Tribal governments are improving their courts and expanding their judicial role and are more



actively encouraging and regulating economic enterprise. They are taking greater initiatives to protect their natural resources and environment and to deliver educational and social services to their people.

Indian tribal governments have not always had the opportunity to perform their governmental functions. The Bureau of Indian Affairs is the federal agency with the greatest responsibility for delivering services and for exercising the trust responsibility inherent in the federal-tribal relationship. In 1973, the Indian Self-Determination Act provided the administrative mechanism for the tribes to contract for and fully administer federal funds for services which previously had been provided by the bureaucracy. The tribes have demonstrated repeatedly that they are more effective administrators of their own programs than are their federal tutors and administrative overseers. And, of course, in 1981 Indian governments were deemed appropriate administrative mechanisms through which to design and implement a variety of community services pursuant to the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act.

Historical Concept of American Indian Tribal Governments

The Impact of Western Expansion. Much has changed in the manner and form of tribal government operations since the arrival of western European institutions on the American continent. Some of the change has been evolution, produced by the tribes themselves; the greater change, however, has been imposed upon the tribes by the direct and indirect operation of the United States government.

In the first several years of contact, tribes were, for the most part, able to retain their traditional governing forms. These were highly diversified, ranging from the sophisticated confederacy of the Iroquois, a precursor of the federal system, to informal systems of communal consensus. To characterize all tribal governments by any single generalization is factually misleading. Several general observations about Indian systems of governments, in contrast to western systems, however, are pertinent.



Most western governments are formalized institutions with voluminous sets of laws and regulations, largely related to private property concepts. Indian tribes and societies generally did not consider private property as central to a government's relationship to citizens. Communal property concepts are far more prevalent in tribal societies than are individual property concepts. Because of this, theft within tribes was virtually unknown.

Rather than the representative styles typical of western governments, tribal societies often were governed by communal systems of chiefs and elders. Leadership often was earned by performance or acknowledgment and rested upon consensus and theological grounds for exercise. Many different systems existed for resolving disputes and maintaining order. Some tribes had warrior societies which functioned as enforcement mechanisms; other tribes utilized community pressure to enforce norms. Scorn is said to have been an extremely effective method of enforcement. Imprisonment was unknown, and restitution, banishment, and death were the major punishments.

Despite the apparent respect which the United States government showed toward the political and legal rights of the Indian tribes and nations during its formative years, the growing power of the United States and the need for more and more land foreshadowed the tragedy which would befall tribal governments during the last half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. Removal, continuous war, and the reservation era reduced most tribes to *de facto* wards of the government. Traditional food supplies were gone. Tribes were placed at the mercy of the United States government.

The turn of the century saw a great decline of the traditional tribal governments. This was particularly true for the Plains and nomadic tribes whose traditional way of life was drastically altered, who fell upon the most direct military rule, and who were subject to the most oppressive of regulations. It was probably less true of the non-nomadic tribes who remained in their traditional grounds and continued to survive through the same enterprise and the same



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Our Legacy to Secrets For Success

by
Lawrence H. Hart

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at the
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Today we are focusing on "success" and will feature successful Indian education programs on this the 10th anniversary year of the Oklahoma Indian Education Exposition.

We have been conscious of the '89er observances and have referred to them. There is also much discussion on the coming quincentennial which will occur in just a few years. In the year 1492 our people discovered Columbus to be on the shores of our continent. We had already been here a long time. 500 years is just a short time when compared to the time we have been on this continent.

If one looks by decades, at the 500 year period since Columbus, we are now in the fiftieth decade. I try to look for things that are positive. I want to accentuate the positive and not dwell on the negative. The relationships our people have had with others who have come to our country have not always been good. It gives no cause for celebrating the quincentennial if we look at only the negative. In the 500 year period of history I want to suggest that there is one decade of time that is significant, noteworthy, and crucially important. And I want to further suggest that this decade serves as the basis to our legacy to secrets for success.

The decade I want to focus on is the 1830's. Four important events occurred in this decade, and I will recite them. First, George Catlin, the famous painter of Indians, did most of his painting in this decade. He painted many tribes, making nearly 350 paintings of our people. He painted tribes, and some of you are descendants of those he painted. His paintings and notes are important for the accurate portrayal of how our people lived.

I have a friend in the Rare Book Collection of the Library of Congress who tells me that a European publisher has gained permission to reproduce the Catlin paintings and to incorporate his notes in a new publication that will be available in a few years. The work of Catlin is gaining importance as time passes. Most of his works were created in the decade of the 1830's.



The second event that occurred in this decade was the establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It was established to have four major functions: (1) to provide the Indians with adequate health services and facilities; (2) to protect, conserve, and administer the Indian properties; (3) to assist the Indian in acquiring the white man's skills in vocations and professions; and (4) to prepare the Indian for rapid assimilation into the white man's culture.

A third very important event of the 1830's centers in a decision made by the United States Supreme Court in the case *Worcester v. Georgia*. Chief Justice John Marshall authored an opinion that has served as the legal basis for our unique and distinct status as Indian people. Of our people he said: "...They are distinct independent political communities retaining their original national rights as the undisputed possessors of the soil from time immemorial..." This landmark decision, referred to and quoted most often when our tribal sovereignty is discussed or defended, was rendered in the decade of the 1830's.

The Fourth significant historical event developed when a certain Frenchman made a visit to what was then the United States. Some historians say he was a Nobleman, but he also was a civil servant. He was in our country for eighteen months. He traveled along the Atlantic seaboard and went west to Michigan and south to Louisiana, observing life and taking copious notes. When he returned to his country, he wrote a book which he entitled **de la Democratie en Amerique**. **Democracy in America** has become a classic unequalled by any similar attempts since. It is a piercing analysis of life in the United States. In this classic work, Alexis de Tocqueville made an observation of our people. "They are," he wrote, "a colony of strangers in the midst of numerous people."

Alexis de Tocqueville's **Democracy in America** will be reprinted again according to my friend in the Rare Book Collection of the Library of Congress. The material for this monumental work was gathered in the decade of the 1830s.



The decade of the 1830's is our legacy to secrets for success. Let us define legacy. It means "something received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past." In other words, legacy is that which is handed down to us from previous generations.

All of us know what a secret is. A secret is information someone has which others do not have. This morning I deliberately chose to be introduced with reference to my military background. I do not often refer to it. But to understand what I mean by "secret," I have chosen to use my military experience in helping to see what the word **secret** means as I have chosen to define it.

I was reared as a child from an early age until age six by my grandma and grandpa. My mother was ill soon after my birth and was unable to care for me. As in our extended family systems I was reared by my grandparents and those were enriching years! Time and again I heard stories from our oral tradition. I was always fascinated by the exploits of the warrior societies of our people particularly the Dog Soldiers. I desired to be like them when I grew up but of course could not. I could, however, find a functional substitute.

The nearest substitute to a modern day Dog Soldier was to become a fighter pilot, for they too are a select group. It became an obsession to reach my personal goal. To shorten the story, I took my Commission in the U.S. Marine Corps. I received my "Wings of Gold" and was assigned to the Fleet as a fighter pilot. To become as proficient as I was, I had to know lots of information. This information was classified into three categories: (1) Confidential: which everyone had to know but couldn't reveal; (2) Secret: which only few could know, and (3) Top Secret: which very, very few could know. What you were allowed to know was based on your responsibility and the need to know. Though I did have Top Secret clearance, personnel in the G-2 Section revealed to me only what I had to know.

The point I am trying to make is that we functioned with information we had. It made us successful. The same is true for us as Indian people. We have our legacy — that which



has been passed down to us — and these can be viewed as secrets. They are secrets no one else has, and by them we can attain success.

A secret is something taken to be a specific or key to a desired end. I want to suggest four specifics, or keys, or secrets to our success:

- (1) We are a people.**
- (2) We have survived.**
- (3) We are distinct.**
- (4) We are unique.**

I want to elaborate on each point. First, we are a people. Each of us who are of Indian descent have a tribal identity. The particular tribe we belong to in all probability have named themselves “people.” There may be adjectives descriptive of how they view themselves as a people such as “People Coming Out of the Ground,” or “People of the Sun,” or “People of the Sacred Mountain.” We, as Indian people, possess a very strong peoplehood concept, and we need to pass this on to future generations.

Second, we have survived as a people. We have faced deliberate genocide and systematic ethnocide. It is remarkable, I often think, that we are here. Our people suffered much, and our very survival is attributable to them.

Third, we are distinct. We maintain certain values together and, without being polemic, many of these values are far superior to those of the majority culture.

Fourth, we are unique. In addition to those values we all share, we have what I want to describe as unique virtues. One of the most unique is the virtue of generosity. We share what we have.

Practically, what does this mean for you young people today? The use of the personal pronoun “I” is always in the context of the use of the third person. All of us who are Indian can say “I” — but it is incomplete until we add “am Cheyenne or Cherokee or Ponca or Choctaw or Kiowa” and



so on. But this means what you do affects your tribe. All of you young people are here today for you have succeeded, and it makes us proud!

Indian people are distinct. I want you young people to study your tribe so you know who you are. It will give strength to your self-image, and it will make you proud.

Your tribe is unique. There is no other group of people anywhere in the world like you and your people. If you are Caddo, Chickasaw, Comanche, Seminole, or Lumbee, be proud, for there is no other group of people anywhere like the one you belong to. You are unique.

You have a legacy no other racial or ethnic people have in all of these United States! And you have those secrets to become successful. The word success is on our terms, not on the majority society terms.

A recent immigrant to our country, who is a Russian thinker and writer, has written words for us to ponder. Alexander Solzhenitsyn says: "To destroy a people you first sever their roots." Deliberate genocide could not destroy us. I am a third generation survivor of the Sand Creek massacre. This massacre was initiated against our people. Researching your own tribal history will allow you to know of similar incidents. Over the years we Indian people have resisted assimilation and acculturation; we survived cultural genocide and ethnocide. I want to tell you that we have the capacity to destroy ourselves!

I have four statements directed at you young people. First, be proud to be as healthy as our people were when Catlin painted them. They were healthy and adapted so well to their environment that they lived in close harmony to the earth. Be proud to be healthy. Be alcohol and drug free. In society, to be drunk is often equated with being Indian and nothing could be further from the truth. We have always been alcohol and drug-free since time immemorial. To be sure, a number of our people are caught in the throes of chemical dependency. They have severed their roots. Do not sever yours.



Second, be proud to use the personal pronoun in the context of the third person. Be proud to say "I am Cheyenne, Cherokee, Kiowa, Otoe, Choctaw" —whatever tribe you are. Remember, though you are an individual. You are a part of a people. Do not buy into "rugged individualism" being espoused today. It is another way to divide and conquer, another way to destroy who we are as people. Rugged individualism is, by itself, destructive to our way of life. Do not buy into it and sever your roots.

Third, be proud that we as a people have contributed much to the life of our country. There is much more that can be learned from us to enrich society. Know your culture and history. Remain as Indian as possible for it enriches others. Be aware that movements such as "English Only" will destroy the beautiful mosaic of people we help to provide. The idea of "English Only" is the modern day functional substitute of an Andrew Jackson, a J. M. Chivington, or a George Armstrong Custer. Do not allow the modern day Jacksons, Chivingtons and Custers to sever your roots.

Fourth, be proud of your people as they are proud of you. Take pride in being part of a people who have a unique culture developed over many years. The phrase "We the People" in the Preamble of the U.S. Constitution is one of many contributions we have made. Vine Deloria Jr. has written and spoken eloquently that the concept of "we the people" was unknown in Europe. You are a part of a people who have a very strong peoplehood concept. Stand proud and tall when someone attempts to tell you something derogatory. Those type of people have a very low self-esteem. They want to sever your roots. Be proud. Do not allow anyone to sever your roots and destroy you!

I want to close with a quotation from someone who lived nearly 2,000 years ago. As was another person in that period of time, he was a Hebrew. The other evening, I had dinner with some very dear friends here in Norman, and they mentioned the name Hillel. Hillel was a sage. This means he was a thinker, like a philosopher. My Jewish scholar friends tell me he was not a Rabbi, as he has been referred to, but a sage. Like us, he was of a group of people who



had a very strong peoplehood concept. One of my favorite quotations are his words. These words are Socratic, for they ask for a response. One has to think deeply when one hears the words as they are so profound. I'll close with those words:

**"If not I For myself, Who then?
And being for myself, What am I?
And if not now, When?"**





Renewed Vision in Indian Education

by
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Office of Indian Education's Renewed Vision

- Our renewed vision is that in the near future, many American Indian/Alaska Native youth and adults will successfully graduate from public, BIA, private, and Tribal education programs in this country.
- Our vision is that students will graduate with pride, with confidence, and with strong self-concepts that are grounded in American Indian values, culture, and language.
- Our vision is that graduates will not only excel in the affective domain, but they will have the academic, cognitive, and critical thinking skills to be highly successful in whatever they choose to do in life.
- Our vision is that teachers and other educators will have high expectations of Indian students, respect students for what they bring to classrooms, and use teaching styles that take into account the learning styles of American Indian students.
- Our vision is that the curriculum used in schools will reflect American Indian content and integrate and use Tribal history, culture, and language to learn math, science, English, and other basic program content areas.
- Our vision is that parents will be actively involved with teachers in the education of their children. And that parents will feel confident and become influential in school decision-making .
- Our vision is that the Indian community, including Indian tribes, will become more involved in developing partnerships and linkages that bring together the school, community, tribal governments, the state, and private interests to work in concert to improve the quality of education for Indian people. Also, that education will become more of a priority with Indian communities and



that connections between education and economic development, natural resources, and other tribal priorities be strengthened.

- Our vision is that research in Indian education be emphasized even more than what it is now, and the body of knowledge be expanded to create a better understanding of teaching and learning in Indian education.
- Our vision is that the education of American Indians and Alaska Natives be treated with respect, dignity, and be recognized by all Americans as important and worthy of support and acceptance.

That is our renewed vision in the education of American Indian and Alaska Native youth and adults. I believe it is a vision that is shared by many. It will be a challenge to make our renewed vision a reality. It will be difficult and none of us can accomplish this vision alone. But I believe there is a ray of hope—a light in the dark that will become brighter if we work together toward a common vision. I believe there is an opportunity today for change to really improve the quality of education for American Indian youth and adults.

The 1990's are projected to be an exciting and challenging time for education in this country. The six national goals in education developed by President Bush in concert with the state governors indicate that by the year 2000 all children in America will be ready to start school; the high school graduation rate will increase to 90 percent; that student achievement and citizenship will be greatly enhanced; U.S. students will be first in the world in math and science achievement; every adult in America will be literate; and every school will be safe, disciplined, and drug free. The Indian Nations At-Risk Task Force has expanded the six national goals to include reading and to maintaining American Indian languages and cultures. The education of Indian students relates to every one of these goals.

It is interesting and encouraging to see that the educational reform movement of the 1980's is resulting today (in 1990) in efforts that could benefit Indian students. For example, cooperative learning is valued and recognized as



a teaching strategy that works for culturally different students; or that tracking in high schools is actually harmful to many students; or the need for more minority teachers, including American Indian, to teach in classrooms where there is an increasing mix of culturally different students; there even appears to be some consideration and movement away from judging student performance solely on achievement test scores.

There are also a lot of things going on in Indian education that provide an opportunity for change and improvement. New and permanent leadership in Washington, the Indian Nations At-Risk Task Force study, and the White House Conference on Indian Education are three happenings that provide opportunity for change and improvement.

For the first time in nearly a decade there is permanent leadership at both the Department of Education's Office of Indian Education and in the Department of Interior's BIA Office of Indian Education Programs. Even more critical, Ed Parisian, Director, Office of Indian Education Programs, BIA, and I get along, both value coordination, and we are both educators. That can only be good for Indian education in this country.

The second opportunity for change is the Indian Nations At-Risk Task Force. The Indian Nations At-Risk Task Force was announced last year by Secretary Cavazos at the NIEA conference in Anchorage. The purpose of the Task Force is to determine the condition of Indian Education today. A final report is expected in the Spring of 1991. Look at the information they have produced and the data they have gathered. It is valuable and rich, and it has the potential to make a positive difference in Indian education. At OIE, we are watching very closely as our plans are to use the results to make what we are doing better.

A third opportunity for change is the White House Conference on Indian Education that was mandated by law in 1988. The two purposes of the conference mentioned in the law are to: (1) explore the feasibility of establishing an independent Indian Board of Indian Education that would as-



sume responsibility for all existing federal programs relating to the education of Indians; and (2) develop recommendations for solutions to improve educational programs to make the programs more relevant to the needs of Indians.

The conference is a joint effort between the Department of Education and the Department of Interior. A Task Force, made up of representatives of both Departments, has been established and housed in the Department of Interior. The Task Force is currently making plans to conduct the conference in 1991. The next major step is the appointment of an Advisory Committee. A Federal Register notice will be issued soon to seek nominations to the Advisory Committee.

The world of Indian education has changed over the past 20-25 years. There are more Indian students attending public schools. There are more Indian students attending tribal schools, including tribal colleges. Today resources are scarce and justifications for program and budget growth in education are different. Actions of decision-makers today are based on outcomes or results. Hard data that clearly documents results is expected. Our challenge is to show results and at the same time, meet our renewed vision.

We are working hard in the Office of Indian Education reviewing our responsibilities to bring about consistency in our actions, to become more responsive to you, and to become an education leader in the education of American Indian people. As you know, OIE is responsible for administering the provisions of the Indian Education Act of 1988, as amended, also known as Title V - Part C of the Hawkins - Stafford Act. We plan to administer the Act in a highly professional, equitable, fair, and educational manner. Focus will be on teaching and learning and ensuring that resources reach Indian students and adults.

I would like to share with you seven initiatives that I have established for the Office of Indian Education.



Accountability - The first is accountability. We want to be assured, as we have a responsibility, that Title V-Part C monies get to students to meet their most pressing special educational and culturally-related academic needs. We want to help projects focus on teaching and learning, to be successful, and to demonstrate that success. We want to identify successful efforts and share their effectiveness with others.

Those of you who are involved in OIE's formula grant program know that we had an extensive review of the applications this past year. We are still involved in that review. We plan to continue our critical review next year. Please remember, our intent is not to tell you what to do, but to help you do what you are doing better.

Teacher Training - A second initiative is teacher training. A key relationship in education is between the teacher and student. We want to improve the quality of the teaching force for American Indian and Alaska Native students. We would especially like to prepare Indian teachers for schools located on reservations or in Indian communities where teacher turnover is high, where schools have difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality teachers, and where there is a lack of educational opportunities for degree programs in teacher education.

Parent Involvement - Parent involvement is our third initiative. Parents are a part of the teacher-student relationship, forming a triangle that enhances involvement, responsiveness, and accountability. We want to help parents understand the educational system in which their children go to school. We want to help parents get involved in the decision-making of the school.

Coordination / Partnerships / Linkages - A fourth initiative deals with developing partnerships, linkages, and coordinating with others. We will recognize and encourage different entities working together for the common good of Indian students. We want to encourage, at the school level, linkages between Title V projects and the rest of the school, e.g., Chapter 1, Johnson-O'Malley, bilingual education, etc,



and perhaps more importantly, with the regular school program.

At the state level, we want to recognize and encourage working relationships between schools, between schools and tribes, between schools and State Departments of Education. At the national level, we will encourage linkages between OIE and other programs in the Department of Education that provide funds to educate Indian people, the BIA, and programs in other agencies of the federal government.

Dropouts - A fifth initiative concerns dropouts. School attendance and dropping out of school continues to be a great concern in Indian education. The problem is complex since the dropout rate varies from school to school, and since there is no one reason why Indian students leave school. We will do what we can to focus on dropouts and assist you in your efforts to keep students in school.

Adult Education - A sixth initiative is in adult education. There continues to be a great need in adult education. This year OIE is funding a total of thirty projects nationwide. We received seventy-one applications and were only able to fund eighteen new projects. This points out a need or demand for more programs but is nowhere near the real need that exists among Indian tribes and Indian communities.

It seems that we have some excellent models in adult education. Two of this year's OIE showcase projects, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, provide excellent approaches that can be replicated elsewhere. In fact, last year the Choctaw project reported that during the past eighteen years, sixty-one Choctaw adults earned their GED certificates through the program, representing fifty-eight percent of all Choctaw adults who have a high school education.

Research, Planning, and Development - A seventh initiative concerns promoting research and data collection efforts to improve the quality of Indian education. OIE would like to recognize and use existing research in Indian



education. In addition, OIE would like to add to the base of knowledge by conducting more research and sharing the results with educators of Indian people. We are also working with OERI and NCES to ensure that American Indians are included in their national samples of students in ways that make the results reliable and usable.

Opportunity and potential exist for change in Indian education today. I believe our renewed vision can be achieved. Get involved and help make it happen.





Sharing Something Good: Teaching Native American Culture and History

by
Rennard
Strickland

American Indian
Law and Policy
Center
The University of
Oklahoma

Presented to the
Indian Nations At
Risk Task Force

U.S. Department
of Education
Hearing

Oklahoma City,
Oklahoma

The young Indian boy in Forrest Carter's beloved autobiography *The Education of Little Tree* remembers that

"Grandma said when you come on something good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out where no telling it will go. Which is right."

I want to talk about the importance of sharing — of sharing something that is good. That something is the traditional culture, values, lifeways, and languages of the American Indian. When the Heard Museum in Phoenix selected a title for their touring exhibition of twentieth century native painting and sculpture they chose "Shared Visions" because of the belief that the experiences of the American Indian have tremendous relevancy to our world as we move into the twenty-first century.

The experience of America's native peoples seen from a contemporary perspective can offer wide audiences a powerful message about cultural persistence and change. As the world moves toward the twenty-first century, the artistic and cultural visions of Native Americans can help us appreciate the dual task of preserving historic values while building new traditions. It can give us all a new perspective: A perspective which grows out of the Native American experience over the past half millennium — an experience that combines sobering truths with staunch hope that even in the face of devastating change it is possible to retain fundamental values of community, of place, and of season.

I want to make just two points. They are: (1) The study of Native American culture and history should be required of students of Indian heritage; and (2) The study of Native American culture and history should be required of non-Indian students as well.

Why do I make the argument that in an age of increased technology we should look to the culture, the values, and



the history of people whose lifeways are rooted in a different age? I do so because I believe it may be a way for our nation to rediscover that which is good in all of us.

It is important to men and women, boys and girls of Indian heritage that they study this history and culture to build pride, to build confidence, and to build understanding. It is important as an antidote to the poison which has been spilled out for almost five hundred years in traveler's narratives, dime novels, and at Saturday matinees. This unending assault on Indian self-image is illustrated in the beautiful short education film *Geronimo Jones* (1970) about a young Indian boy faced with a difficult decision. Should he trade an old Indian medal which his grandfather has given him for a new television set? He agonizes over the question and finally decides. The family gathers around the new electronic box and the first thing they see is the savage Indian of the movie western. They see him again and again and again. They see the Indian as blood-thirsty and lawless savage; the Indian as enemy of progress; the Indian as tragic but inevitable victim; the Indian as lazy, fat, shiftless drunk; the Indian as uneducated half-breed unable to live in either white or Indian world; the Indian as noble hero doomed to extinction riding to the end of the trail.

This question of false image is equally significant in the education of persons of Indian and non-Indian heritage. It transcends entertainment. I believe we have the tragic violence and bloodshed over Indian treaty fishing rights in places like Wisconsin, in part, because the non-Indian has been led to believe — indeed taught — that the Indian and Indian sovereign governmental rights are dead.

Indeed, this view profoundly impacts upon contemporary American Indian policy and shapes the general cultural view of the Indian as well as the Indian's own self-image. It can be seen from the smallest details of an everyday children's game of cowboys and Indians to the international arena where a former movie star president of the United States gives Hollywood-rooted answers to Soviet students' questions about American Indians.



Education is the key to overcoming this image. Indeed, it is our only hope. The wagon train massacre and John Wayne riding to the rescue are well known as “true events” of American history and culture. How many school children, Indian or non-Indian, have been taught the role of the American Indians in the creation of the United States Constitution? How many know that the only man to single-handedly create a written system of languages in the modern world was an American Indian or that at the same time the English were struggling over the Magna Carta, five mutually hostile Indian nations united to form the Iroquois Confederacy, or that the Muscogee Confederation was more effective as a governing force than the much heralded Greek City-States or of the American Indian origin of the dietary content of so much of the world, or of the balanced buffalo-hunting ecology of the Cheyenne, the Kiowa, and the Comanche?

There is scholarly documentation for all of these facts about Native life and culture. For more than half a century, The University of Oklahoma Press has published the Civilization of the American Indian series documenting that which we should be teaching. More recently Jack Weatherford spelled it out in **Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World** (1988). My colleagues Alan Velie, Geary Hobson, and Gerald Vizenor have told the story and gathered the writings of Native literature. Hoebel and Lewellyn recorded the majesty of **The Cheyenne Way** (1939) and Ed Wade has given us the masterful **Arts of the North American Indian** (1986). And there are not better documented case studies than in the American Ethnological Society’s **American Indian Intellectuals** (1978).

We already have excellent examples — models for what we ought to be doing in educating and educating about the American Indian. The Phoenix Union School District, under the direction of the Cherokee educator Jack Gregory and with a strong parent committee led by Jess Sixkiller, created a Foxfire program which took young urban Indians back to talk to Indian elders on their reservations. With tape recorders and video cameras in hand, the result was a renewed understanding and relationship, plus two books which the students themselves edited and published. Tragically, the program



was not continued because the district had other non-Indian use for funds.

Another example is an educational program outside the traditional school network. The Oklahoma Supreme Court sponsors an Annual Indian Sovereignty Symposium for which they provide student scholarships. The new National Museum of the American Indian of the Smithsonian has an articulated educational mission which their director W. Richard West Jr., has placed as a top priority. Finally, as a non-paid public service announcement, our American Indian Law and Policy Center at the College of Law of the University of Oklahoma has plans to develop educational programs focusing from kindergarten through college to help teach about the sophisticated rehabilitative legal and governmental philosophy of the Indian at a time, as High Forehead said, "before the blue-coats built guard houses ..." After seeing T. C. Canon's works such as **When It's Peach Picking Time In Georgia It's Apple Picking Time at the B.I.A.**, you can not help but understand what the American Indian has to say to us all.

I repeat: Sharing is important and what Indians have to share is important not just in an historic sense. I sincerely believe that at this very moment the study of traditional American Indian culture and history has great lessons for a world in change. Study of Indian law, history, culture, art, and philosophy should be required both for students of Indian heritage and for non-Indian students.

Why should we try to teach about this spirit of the Indian? What is to be learned from a remembrance drawn from the Indian? There is a pragmatic as well as a philosophical reason for seeking to find the spirit of the Indian. Our modern, changing world must understand the Indian's sense of place. The Indian spirit may help redefine the broader national image. In the process, all Americans may discover where, as a people, they want to go — at least understand the danger of aimlessly drifting. The stability of the Indian may help us all define and redefine values in this world of change.

Among the ancient customs of many Indian tribes was a



solitary, contemplative journey into the wilderness. An Indian went alone into the mountains, onto the prairie, or into the forest where he sought a vision — a mystical experience. While the quest differed from tribe to tribe, the object was the same. The outcome of the experience might be a chant for protection, a design for a shield, or a sacred and personal song. Yet the silence and the fasting and the praying always gave the Indian time to think about a vision of life — an order of being.

The Indian can teach us to order our expectations of our relationship to each other and to our world. We do not have to go to the mountains to search for this vision. All we need to do is to begin to ask the hard, the difficult, the seemingly impossible ethical questions that must be answered to establish a rational order for our direction of society.

Without such a value-oriented vision, we are not unlike the sorcerer's apprentice — or like Mickey Mouse playing the sorcerer's apprentice in a feature-length Walt Disney cartoon. We have failed to provide our students with the tools to help them search for a vision, a goal. Just as the nineteenth-century reformer's solution to the Indian problem was progress and advancement in civilization, modern Americans seem to accept any movement forward as a progressive and civilizing achievement.

Perhaps from the Indian spirit we can assert our responsibility to demand a rational order in man's relationships. The Indian has the humility to admit that he cannot win an unlimited war on nature. The white man's concept of progress as salvation can no longer go unchallenged. We must have a vision of order. Ultimate goals must be ultimate in a rational sense.

The Indian sees a peculiarly strong unity between man and his world. The Cherokees have a myth, which the Kilpatricks took as the title for a wonderful book, **Friends of Thunder** (1964), which says much about the relationship of the Indian and nature. The relationship is, at best, a precarious one; but the friendship, the oneness, the partnership are there. Loren Eiseley has written a beautiful explanation of man's relationship



to nature that he calls "The Hidden Teacher." In that essay, he describes a "long war of life against its inhospitable environment" — a war in which "nature does not simply represent reality . . . but (in which) nature teaches about reality." Eiseley relates the Plains Indian legend of an early people who were poor and naked and did not know how to live. "Old Man," their maker said, "go to sleep and get power (and) whatever animals appear in your dream, pray and listen." That was how, in the Indian thinking, the first people got through the world — by the power of their dreams and the animal helpers.

The Indian has a different way of looking at the world from the way of those who worship material progress. As the Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset noted: "Two men may look from different viewpoints at the same landscape. Yet they do not see the same thing. Their different situations make the landscape assume two distinct types of organic structure in their eyes."

Consider, for example, what we can learn from Indian art and the Indian artist. At the apex of contemporary Indian art is the wood sculpture of men like the Apache Allen Houser, the Cheyenne Dick West, and the Cherokee Willard Stone. When Willard Stone, for example, looked at a piece of wood, he had both the eye of the Indian and the eye of the artist. To him it was not timber, the first step on a new porch, but a story coming from the grain of an uncut piece of wood. One of Willard's pieces is **Young Rabbithawk**. In that wood sculpture the mystical relationship between Stone the Indian and the creatures of nature show through. The wood is smooth, and its natural formations make the bird's feathers, his face, and the heart on his chest. **Young Rabbithawk** also symbolizes the Indian as he looks out on the modern world.

In **Culture and Commitment** (1970), Margaret Mead draws the picture of older societies in which the life of the youngest generation will be almost exactly like the life of the oldest generation. She describes a society like the traditional pre-contact Indian society in which there is little change. In such a society, the grandfather figure is most important. We,



on the other hand, live in a society in which change is so rapid that none of the oldest generation has lived a life closely resembling that of the youngest generation. In such a society the value of the grandfather advisor is minimized.

In Indian society the grandfather was the teacher. Solomon McCombs, the Creek artist, has created magnificent paintings of the Indian grandfather, the storyteller, the teacher. Such a teacher would not be outdated in our changing society. The contrasting and conflicting roles of continuity and change in Indian and white society are highlighted by Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society* (1950). White American society "subjects its inhabitants to more extreme contrasts and abrupt changes during a lifetime or a generation than is normally the case with great nations." In Indian societies it is the grandparent — the grandfather figure — who supplies ideals and a sense of the continued validity of the family and the traditions of the culture. Using the Indian as the teacher would help American society through the uncertainty of modern change. We can look to the Indian as a grandfather figure for us all.

"Grandfather," a poem by the Oklahoma Cheyenne Lance Henson, conveys a sense of the continuing search for the meaning of heritage:

**the visions you never saw
still deliver me from the void
you stay now
beyond
where the snow is
no longer pain
wait for me wait for me
I will follow**

We need not become mesmerized into a new age of the noble savage, but we cannot afford to turn our back on the Indian's teaching. We need a quest for a new vision of life, a proper ordering of our expectations of science, a partnership with nature. The survival of mankind may well depend upon these decisions. How can we learn what the Indian has to offer? We can begin by appreciating the philosophy, religion, art, literature, music, and dance of the American



Indian. Why are the tales of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and the politically-minded Mother Goose a better fare for American children than the friendship of thunder and the origin of corn? The basic question is, when will we recognize Indian religion, philosophy, language, literature, and the large body of native painting, poetry, and prose? After all the Indian sings the songs of our forests, of our birds, of our souls. His world is our world. He is of America. And he is America.

D. H. Lawrence, who came to love the American Southwest and its native people, said that the Indian will again rule America — or rather, his ghost will. This has special relevance in view of something that Thoreau said: The Indian has property in the moon. By walking on the moon, we learned that our salvation must come from the earth. William Brandon, editor of the **American Heritage Book of Indians**, has prophesied, “The business of the Indian ... may turn out to be the illumination of the dark side of the soul, maybe even our soul.”

Joan Hill’s painting **Child of the Elements** shows an Indian madonna and her newborn child east against the sky and the moon and the stars in such a way that they are seen as one, a unity at once at peace with time and place. Joan Hill’s Indian woman contrasts vividly with D.H. Lawrence’s picture of the driven, frenetic American, alienated from his world and searching for cultural and political roots. Lawrence believed that the peace America was seeking could be found only from America itself. “America,” Lawrence wrote, “is full of grinning, unappeased aboriginal demons; ghosts ... Yet one day the demons of America must be placated, the ghosts must be appeased, the Spirit of Place atoned for.”

Indians are now watching non-Indian society. All Americans, Indians included, face the crisis of urban clutter, crime, debt, pollution, energy, and the environment. Events may revolutionize the non-Indian society of the “car road” more dramatically than old Indian society was transformed from the “buffalo road.” As their fellow citizens contemplate a change of life-style, the Indian cannot help but feel a touch of irony. The buffalo road and the life the buffalo symbolized



to the Plains Indian, the free-roaming deer that sustained the world of the woodland tribes were destroyed by the white man's progress and civilization. Now the white man has turned upon himself, unable to curb his wants so that he may have created a society that will in the end destroy him. This crisis is, in truth, more than an energy or an environmental one. The white man's civilization faces a crisis of the spirit, a great conflict in basic human values. The Indian experience demonstrates the impotence of government to reform lifestyles and the tragedy of relying upon bureaucracies to supply oats and ponies.

Survival is a word that describes the spirit of Indian people as diverse as the Kiowas of the Sun Dance and the Cherokee of the Kee-Too-Wah fire. The Indian has learned the lesson of building and rebuilding a civilization, of adapting, of changing, and yet of remaining true to certain basic values regardless of the nature of that change. At the heart of those values is an understanding and appreciation of the timelessness — of family, of tribe, of friends, of place, and of season. It is a lesson that white civilization has yet to learn.

In conclusion, I would once again urge that Indian philosophy, languages, arts, literature, law, government, and history be made an integral part of our educational experience, beginning with early childhood education and continuing through college and even through professional schools, such as law and medicine. For the student who is of Indian heritage it would reaffirm, re-establish and rebuild; for the non-Indian student it would offer a reasonable and rational alternative view of the world. It would help us understand and share something of value, which is right! As Grandma reminded us in *The Education of Little Tree*,

“when you come on something good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out where no telling it will go.”





Traditional Education in the Modern World

by Vine
Deloria, Jr.

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European civilization has a determined and continuing desire to spread its view of the world to non-European countries. Within a generation of the conquest of Mexico, the Spanish had founded schools in Mexico City for the education of indigenous youths and an important part of mission activities for the next 300 years was education of both young people and adults in the Christian religion and the niceties of European customs. French colonial policy dictated a kind of education in which prominent families within the Indian tribe and the French colonial families exchanged children for a short period of time so that customs would be properly understood and civility between the two groups not violated by thoughtless or ignorant actions.

English education, represented first by benevolent members of the aristocracy who gave funds to support Indian schools and later embodied in the United States government's encouragement of mission activities among the frontier tribes, represented, and still represents, an effort to effect a complete transformation of beliefs and behaviors of Indians. Education in the English-American context resembles indoctrination more than it does other forms of teaching because it insists on implanting a particular body of knowledge and a specific view of the world which often does not correspond to the life experiences that people have or might be expected to encounter. With some modifications, and with a considerable reduction in the intensity of educational discipline, the education that Indians receive today is the highly distilled product of Christian/European scientific and political encounters with the world and is undergirded by specific but generally inarticulated principles of interpretation. Because the product is so refined and concise,



education has become something different and apart from the lives of people and is seen as a set of technical beliefs which, upon mastering, admit the pupil to the social and economic structures of the larger society. Nowhere is this process more evident than in science and engineering, fields in which an increasing number of American Indian students are now studying.

Education today trains professionals but it does not produce people. It is, indeed, not expected to produce personality growth in spite of elaborate and poetic claims made by some educators. We need only to look at the conflict, confusion and controversy over prayer in schools, sex education, and the study of non-western societies and civilizations to see that the goal of modern education is to produce people trained to function within an institutional setting as a contributing part of a vast social/economic machine. The dissolution of the field of ethics into a bewildering set of sub-fields of professional ethics further suggests that questions of personality and personal values must wait until the individual has achieved some measure of professional standing.

This condition, the separation of knowledge into professional expertise and personal growth, is an insurmountable barrier for many Indian students and raises severe emotional problems as they seek to sort out the proper principles from these two isolated parts of human experience. The problem arises because in traditional Indian society there is no separation, there is, in fact, a reversal of the sequence in which non-Indian education occurs: in traditional society the goal is to ensure personal growth and then to develop professional expertise. Even the most severely eroded Indian community today still has a substantial fragment of the old ways left and these ways are to



be found in the Indian family. Even the badly shattered families preserve enough elements of kinship so that whatever the experiences of the young, there is a sense that life has some unifying principles which can be discerned through experience and which guide behavior. This feeling, and it is a strong emotional feeling toward the world which transcends beliefs and information, continues to gnaw at American Indians throughout their lives.

It is singularly instructive to move away from western educational values and theories and survey the educational practices of the old Indians. Not only does one get a sense of emotional stability, which indeed might be simply the impact of nostalgia, but viewing the way the old people educated themselves and their young gives a person a sense that education is more than the process of imparting and receiving information, that it is the very purpose of human society and that human societies cannot really flower until they understand the parameters of possibilities that the human personality contains.

The old ways of educating affirmed the basic principle that human personality was derived from accepting the responsibility to be a contributing member of a society. Kinship and clan were built upon the idea that individuals owed each other certain kinds of behaviors and that if each individual performed his or her task properly, society as a whole would function. Since everyone was related to everyone else in some specific manner, by giving to others within the society, a person was enabled to receive what was necessary for them to survive and prosper. The worst punishment, of course, was banishment since it meant that the individual had been placed beyond the boundaries of organized life.

The family was not, however, the nuclear family of



modern day America, nor was it even the modern Indian family which has, in addition to its blood-related members, an FBI undercover agent, an anthropologist, a movie maker, and a white psychologist looking for a spiritual experience. The family was rather a multi-generational complex of people and clan and kinship responsibilities extended beyond the grave and far into the future. Remembering a distant ancestor's name and achievements might be equally as important as feeding a visiting cousin or showing a niece how to sew and cook. Children were greatly beloved by most tribes and this feeling gave evidence that the future was as important as the present or past, a fact which policy-makers and treaty-signers have deliberately chosen to ignore as part of the Indian perspective on life.

Little emphasized but equally as important for the formation of personality was the group of other forms of life which had come down over the centuries as part of the larger family. Neo-shamanism today pretends that one need only go into a sweatlodge or trance and find a "power animal" and many people, Indians and non-Indians, are consequently wandering around today with images of power panthers in the backs of their minds. But there seems to have been a series of very early covenants between certain human families and specific birds, fish, grazing animals, predatory animals and reptiles. One need only view the several generations of Indian families with some precision to understand that very specific animals will appear in vision quests, sweat lodges, trances and psychic experiences over and over again. For some reason these animals are connected to the families over a prolonged period of time and offer their assistance and guidance during times of crisis during each generation of humans.

Birds, animals, plants and reptiles do not appear as



isolated individuals any more than humans appear in that guise. Consequently the appearance of one animal suggests that the related set of other forms of life is nearby, willing to provide assistance, and has a particular role to play in the growth of human personality. In the traditional format, there is no such thing as isolation from the rest of creation and the fact of this relatedness provides a basic context within which education in the growth of personality and the acquiring of technical skills can occur. There is, of course, a different set of other forms of life for each human family and so dominance and worthlessness do not form the boundaries between the human species and other forms of life.

Education in the traditional setting occurs by example and not as a process of indoctrination. That is to say, elders are the best living examples of what the end product of education and life experiences should be. We sometimes forget that life is exceedingly hard and that no one accomplishes everything they could possibly do or even many of the things they intended to do. The elder exemplifies both the good and bad experiences of life and in witnessing their failures as much as their successes we are cushioned in our despair of disappointment and bolstered in our exuberance of success. But a distinction should be made here between tribal and non-tribal peoples. For some obscure reason, non-tribal peoples tend to judge their heroes much more harshly than do tribal people. They expect a life of perfection and thereby partially deify their elders. At least they once did. Today watching the ethical failures of the non-Indian politician, sports hero, and television preacher it is not difficult to conclude that non-tribal peoples have no sense of morality and integrity at all.

The final ingredient of traditional tribal education is that accomplishments are regarded as the accomplishments of



the family and not the individual. Early training of children involved some elaborate praise of youngsters carrying out simple tasks but the praise was directed toward the family, the individual became a good representative of the family. He or she did not dwell on individual accomplishments. I find this trait a considerable handicap for many Indian students in higher education. They are extremely reluctant to trumpet their accomplishments and resumés which should be filled with items look exceedingly sparse because of the propensity of some Indian students to advertise their virtues. But it is a good trait to follow because it helps to distribute both praise and blame over a much larger group of people and again reduces the amount of blame or praise that the individual has to assimilate into his or her self.

Modern education places immense reliance on the standardized tests as a measure of the worth and accomplishments of the individual. Students preparing for college are made to feel that the task is a solitary one and that the measure of their potential is found in the entrance and qualifying tests they take. Most educators, if pressed, will admit that at best tests measure only a potential to successfully undertake a certain course of study. If really pressed to explain the requirement of test scores, administrators will sometimes admit that they require them simply because the forms they use for admission require them - there is a blank left unfilled in the form. I once had a graduate student who we admitted conditionally, since she had not taken the GRE, who was ready to graduate with an M.A. and who was told she could not get her degree because she had not taken the GRE!!

These kinds of institutional barriers become insurmountable if Indian students see themselves as solitary individu-



als and here is where the value of traditional education comes into play. We cannot change the American educational system to make it more humane - or even to make it comprehensible to everyone. But we can remember that it is primarily a measure of ability and accomplishments in the narrow field of professional expertise. It really says nothing and does nothing for the whole human being. A solid foundation in the old traditional ways enables the students to remember that life is not scientific, social scientific, mathematical or even religious; life is a unity and the foundation for meaning must be the unified experience of being a human being. That feeling can only come by remembering the early experiences of the Indian community as it seeks to establish the primacy of personality growth as the goal of life. A student grounded in that context must then always remember that he or she is not and can never become an isolated individual. The community, regardless of its condition, always provides a place for people to return.

Transforming students' perceptions of themselves and the world into a feeling of confidence is a hard task and the frustrations are great. Recently a group of us have been waging a struggle to get the human remains of Indians returned from museums and laboratories. Nothing distresses me more than to be in hot debate over whether Indians are humans and whether our remains deserve reverent burials instead of becoming "specimens" and "teaching devices" and to have an Indian person trained as an anthropologist rise in the audience and say "I'm an Indian, but I'm also an anthropologist." These people are simply the confused products of the American educational system and probably should be put out of their misery. You are always an Indian, first, last and always. You may have a degree in Anthropology, Law or Nuclear Engineering but that is your



profession, that is how you make your living, it is not you!! So your traditional education should give you guidelines on how to behave. Your first responsibility is to be a human being, an Indian. Once you accept that fact and use it as a positive factor, you can then do whatever professional tasks are required of you but you will know when to draw the line between professional responsibilities and the much greater responsibility to be a person. You can earn money but you cannot be happy or satisfied unless you become yourself first.

So there is much to be learned from a traditional education and we must see it as the prerequisite to any other kind of education or training. Traditional education gives us an orientation to the world around us, particularly the people around us, so that we know who we are and have confidence when we do things. Traditional knowledge enables us to see our place and our responsibility within the movement of history. Formal American education, on the other hand, helps us to understand how things work and knowing how things work, and being able to make them work, is the mark of a professional person in this society. It is critically important that we do not confuse these two kinds of knowledge or exchange the roles they play in our lives. The major shortcoming in American institutional life is that most people cannot distinguish these two ways of knowing and for many Americans there is no personal sense of knowing who they are so professionalism always overrules the concern for persons.

Today we see a great revival of traditional practices in many tribes. Younger people are bringing back crafts, songs and dances, and religious ceremonies to make them the center of their lives. These restorations are important



symbols of a sense of community but they must be accompanied by hard and clear thinking which can distinguish what is valuable in the old ways from the behavior we are expected to practice as members of the larger American society. In this movement it is very important for younger Indians to take the lead in restoring the sense of family, clan and community responsibility that undergird the traditional practices. In doing so the next generation of Indians will be able to bring order and stability to Indian communities, not because of their professional expertise but because of their personal examples.

The educational series of six articles by Vine Deloria, originally published by **Winds of Change** magazine, are available for \$14.95 by writing or calling:

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(AISES)
1630 30th Street, Suite 301
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303-492-8658





Indian Poetry

by
Helen
Chalakee
Burgess

For Sonny

Red faces sit side by
side in the theatre
to see the great white
buffalo tracked by
their red brother
I-Knew-Him-When.

The silver screen
flickers the stoic
face of I-Knew-
Him-When as his
familiar slender
fingers unwrap a
piece of juicy fruit...
they smile. How much
is real, how much is
hollywood, they don't
know.

I-Knew-Him-When rides
his old pick-up truck
along the dusty roads
of home, shaking hands,
scrawling his signature
on scraps of paper. He
stands in the dim corridors
of his nation and listens
to the whispers of...
I knew him when.

An easy stride carries
him across district
center campground,
fingers pointing as
they tell their children...
I knew him when.

A leadened sadness is
building with each step
as he remembers long
ago when he walked daily
with his people and no
encouragement found
its way to I-Knew-Him-When.

A riderless bay horse trailed
by a thousand whispers of
"I knew him when" were
lost to the stillness shrouding
grave creek that day.
William Sampson, Jr.
1933-1987



Este Mvskoke Forever (Muscogee People Forever)

Basketmaker, your clever flingers lace
the honeysuckle with the secrets and strengths
of our people. Your baskets hold the yesterdays
and the tomorrows of our nation.

I watched as the old woman formed
a circular base- a never ending circle
crisscrossed with outside support

. . . I could see our people overcoming
intrusion.
We intertwined with the outside world and
became stronger.

Basketmaker reached for another piece of vine-
her work uninterrupted

. . . one by one, our elders die.
At those very
moments new life is born to replenish and
continue the circle.

Silently, I watch as a form emerges from the
stringy, root-like vines

. . . and I remember the old ones saying
in the beginning our people climbed out
of the earth like ants- we are of the earth.

Swiftly, Basketmaker prepares more vines-
treating them in the rainwater for suppleness
so she can finish her work

. . . the resiliency of our people has
caused us to go forward and restructure.

Finishing, the old woman lifted her basket
and motioned me to follow her into the woods.
She knows exactly where to go. Stopping here
and there- placing a leaf, a sprig, a whole
plant, inside her woven continuum. She stoops
to dig a root, then lingers beside an ageless
cedar- carefully tearing a tiny branch to
add to her collection

. . . the medicines of our people are now
self-contained within the circle of endurance.

Slowly, she turned to me
with the faintest of smiles upon her face,
knowing she had opened my mind to the
secrets of este mvskoke, forever.

—Helen Chalakee Burgess