

Experiences in Tribal Self-Determination: Strengthening Native Community Identity and Dealing with Public Perceptions Since the 1960's

Richard M. Wheelock, Ph.D.
Native American and Indigenous Studies Emeritus
Fort Lewis College
© April 3, 2014

Today's aging generation of Native people have had some incredibly diverse experiences with what has been called "Indian Self-Determination." So much has been written, often by Native scholars themselves, about this historical period that one can hardly produce a suitable bibliography about the policy and its implications in the space of a book-length publication. Yet it has usually been left to fiction-writers, satirists¹, poets, artists, film-makers and actors to express the human experiences this time of great change since the 1960's has thrust upon us all. Oral histories of the times will surely reveal more of what the Native people have experienced, too, adding another level of meaning to what historians and scholars have recorded in more arcane, academic terms. After all, the empowerment within Native communities and the revitalization, then the extension of indigenous thought into the surrounding global consciousness in our times has truly been a thing of terrible beauty, perhaps more suitable for expression in terms Native ancestors relied upon: storytelling of the first order. The fact that Native peoples, both as nations and as individual targets of prior assimilation policies, have faced a life-changing, sometimes disorienting social and cultural environment is still little acknowledged in the public consciousness as a result.² It is with the hope that my own experiences can be of value to the perspective of today's Native people that I wish to add my little piece of the lived, human experience with self-determination from my own perspective with this paper.

An Intergenerational Experience of "Indian Self-Determination"

For many of us of advancing years, a sense of ambiguity about whether and how to embrace Self-Determination under the federal policy has often been a major part of our experience. From its beginning, Native people have struggled with aspects of de-colonization at so many levels of the processes of limited and incremental empowerment involved. Rebounding from poverty, cultural crisis and powerlessness began in federal policy generations earlier with the 1930's federal policy of Indian Reorganization, but self-empowerment in Native communities remained an unclear prospect as

¹One especially poignant history of the Native peoples' experiences with government policies and popular culture in Canada and the US is Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*. Minneapolis: U of MN Press, 2012. King's often satirical tone not only cuts deeply into the self-righteous a self-serving historical approaches of federal policy-makers of Canada and the US, but shows how media has contributed to misperceptions that contributed to popular support for devastating treatment of "Indians" since contacts.

² Charles Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co, Inc., 2005, is an interesting model for providing the human experiences behind the self-determination policy for those tribes with which Wilkinson has familiarity and experience. His experience and that of the Native people he worked with for many years is the focus of this engaging book.

economic forces and many of the 1950's Termination policy's original sponsors were clearly unrepentant. The threat remained that even if tribes succeeded well under self-determination, termination's forces were simply awaiting another chance to ambush them so that ending federal responsibilities and ending "special legal standing" for tribes could again be sold as the "final solution" to the Indian problem. Ending that standing would open tribal land and other assets to exploitation once again, of course, which is the actual goal of terminators, despite rhetoric about "equal rights." Thus both tribal failure and success under Self-Determination might lead back to termination of tribal authority, it seemed, especially since the original congressional statement of intent in House Resolution 108 of 1953 remained on the books until 1988, despite several US president's pronouncements and a number of laws that denounced, but did not revoke the resolution. Distrust and ambiguity have remained throughout our times, as tribal sovereignty, in practically every avenue of self-determination, has been met with resistance from non-Indian governments and economic entities. Many laws, like the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968, after all, could easily be read either way: as a strengthening basis for tribal citizenship or as a trump card over tribal sovereignty in favor of outside modes of operations and of outside jurisdictions which might assume authority over tribal "citizens."

Internally, tribal members often expressed doubts and even opposition to the "federally recognized" governments that seemed to have been imposed upon them in the take-it-or-leave it atmosphere of the Indian Reorganization era of the 1930's. In fact, there was a lot of room for cynicism, since Native people had been assured for generations that new policies, however flawed, were sure to benefit them. After all, any congressional or executive action in the US has always required attention to the many interests involved, making even the flowery pronouncements about meeting the needs of Native peoples suspect, especially as groups like the National Congress of American Indians made the content of congressional hearings more available to local Native people. One can review aspects of a number of federal laws since the 1970's that were intended to find a middle ground between tribal sovereignty and American interests. That political reality has often led to hidden agendas among federal policy-makers, forcing Native people to be extremely wary of offers of supposed federal largess which could later prove fraudulent.

With a history of arbitrary and contradictory federal policies in the background, Native people of the 1960's could hardly be expected to quickly find unanimity of support for any actions that could easily become a basis for conflicts, either internally or with nearby jurisdictions, which many feared would be resolved in favor of powerful economic and political interests in hostile courts in what has been called "judicial termination" or in congressional actions where Native leadership were likely to be coopted. But Native people have taken action despite the risks, and as has become clearer over the years since then, their overwhelming desires for tribal sovereignty have somehow kept termination threats at bay to a surprising degree today, while still leaving many confusing strands of policy yet to be worked out in today's tribal communities. The outcome of self-determination remains in doubt, of course, as tribal authority is challenged almost daily in the legal arena and as communities struggle with many internal questions about adaptive strategies for implementing their opportunities under the policy. Even today, then, several generations into the policy, tribal members are often cynical about the federal policy.

An unresolved question remains: what degree of sovereignty are Native people willing to accept in the long term quest for sovereignty implied in the 1970's term "Indian self-determination?" Since the very early days of the Red Power Movement, there have always been calls for international levels of tribal sovereignty that would completely sever any constraints on tribal nations. Others took what seemed to them to be a more pragmatic approach in local affairs, grasping at the treads of federal offerings under

the policy, and seizing the opportunities they saw under federal laws. Vine Deloria was among the Native scholars who explored the divisive challenges involved in these positions. His comments on “The future of Indian Nations” chapter of *The Nations Within* in 1984 were a good profile of that issue.³ There, he contrasted the Native positions of “self-government,” a limited prospect under federal policy, with “sovereignty” an aspiration of many Native leaders that was far more open-ended. Practically speaking, most Native Nations today have found a middle ground, one that ebbs and flows between aspirations of greater sovereignty and of practical powers of self-government that can be achieved in the specific arenas tribal nations experience daily under federal laws. Today’s fascination with “de-colonization” among Native peoples seems to explore the question in more experiential cultural and social terms as people struggle to define what is really “our way” (tsi ni yok wali ho’ tu, as is said in Oneida, for instance) in any given situation. It is a continuation of a long struggle. Native people have, since “contact” became conflict, struggled with the question of how to survive on their own terms as peoples, as well as or in spite of their subjugation by colonial regimes and, as time passed, their legal standing as individual American citizens.

Quite a few Native activists over the years have challenged the notion that tribal nations should be “domestic, dependent nations,” as the famed *Cherokee v Georgia* decision proclaimed far earlier in federal policy. Despite any mixed reaction to the federal policy in the reality of the 1970’s, rapid economic development seemed crucial, for instance, to escape the economic dependency tribes faced, providing little time for creating some kind of adaptive indigenous economic model that would support at least nominal independence from federal funding. The crucial area of economics on Native terms has been a huge practical barrier to achieving greater sovereignty for many tribes, though some notable developments are emerging across Indian country as this is written. The human experience of regaining greater authority over economic and political development among Native people, then, has been a less than satisfying process.

For many of us, helping design education processes that reflect our own peoples’ priorities and values have been among the intermediate steps we’ve found necessary for building the human capacity to establish tribal sovereignty. Creating appropriate education programs in indigenous terms that can establish the space necessary, we’ve hoped, for adaptation of tribal values into such areas as “economics,” many of us came to believe. Many of us have continued to search for ways to reach beyond Western-style education, seeking adaptive models of tribal education traditions, where ever we can find, stimulate and reinvigorate Native educational resources. Since tribalism itself is still often discouraged in the Americas and by current economic forces eager to create a proletariat, regeneration of kinship instruction, for example, has had to proceed for generations in truncated, marginalized conditions. Even today’s tribal schools have to meet regional, non-Indian accreditation processes. Such requirements to fit American standards for schools make inherent tribal systems like kinship-based instruction very difficult to implement, though creative Native educators have adapted models like the Montessori approach as an intermediate basis for intergenerational cultural development. In education, especially, innovation by tribes has clearly shown that adaptive models can be found at times under self-determination’s banner. With great good luck, future generations might gain even more latitude to continue such developments, using the tools developed by our generation’s educational strategists.

³Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

So what might today's rising generation of Native people learn from the experiences of the now-aging generation who have been at the forefront of the development of the Native response to "Indian Self-Determination" since the confusing days of the 1960's? After all, ambiguity and confusion continue to cloud today's efforts. Can future generations of indigenous peoples not only maintain and build upon the hard-won successes and redouble efforts to correct failures, but also find a way through continued and future threats to political and cultural sovereignty? George Santayana's point that we might wish to remember the past, in this case the recent past, to avoid repeating the same experiences over and over seems especially poignant, since tribal language, culture and identity seem more threatened with the passing of each generation. Tribal lands and resources remain targets for exploitation by powerful economic entities, too, of course.

As I write this paper, I struggle with another question, perhaps fundamental to my preoccupation with self-determination and sovereignty. Is human nature somehow the crucial factor in such advanced concepts? Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs,⁴ for example, seems to imply that group identity is crucial for an individual's development toward self-actualization. My media experiences and studies drew me into an inconclusive rumination over this sort of question. Western sociological concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*⁵ seem to follow in my considerations of the relationships between tribalism and today's mass society, initially stimulated by Robert K. Thomas' adaptations of Robert Redfield's concepts of small and large human social arrangements.⁶ Are humans simply destined to follow stages of development into that eventually obviate tribal identity in favor of a mass society? Are there alternatives to the current mass society that may be more supportive of indigenous values?

Despite some personal confusion over that kind of question, the practical value of maintaining specific tribal identity has become pretty immediate in my thinking. Beyond the vital personal need to find connections with human community, there are pressing issues that have completely stumped mass society. For instance, unless humans can find more "natural" social arrangements than those of mass society, where humans are steadily becoming more powerless in the face of vast and undemocratic corporate and governmental individualization, the attack on the planet, our earth, will continue. The complex relationships indigenous peoples have always shared with the elements of the earth, I believe, remain a key to survival for humans as a species. As many Native people have pointed out, it is probably futile to "save the Whiteman," to reverse the massive processes generated by modern corporate economics. But can smaller, tribal peoples, rooted in specific lands, become self-sufficient enough to maintain at least a more balanced relationship with the cosmos that supports life? I believe Vine Deloria, Jr., most directly in his *Metaphysics of Modern Existence*,⁷ was searching for answers to those kinds of questions from a far more informed and competent viewpoint than my own. Yet I, and I

⁴ Abraham [Maslow](#). (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370-96.

⁵ Ferdinand Tonnies. *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* by Ferdinand Tonnies, translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis, pp. 223-231. Copyright 1957, The Michigan State University Press.

⁶ Robert K. Thomas. "Community and Institution Among American Indians." In *Traditional and Non-traditional Services in American Indian Mental Health*. Eds. Yvonne A. Red Horse, Edwin Gonzalez-Santini, Patricia A. Toslon-Gonzalez and Sidney Bean, 316-330. Tempe: ASU School of Social Work, no date.

⁷Vine Deloria, Jr. *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Books. 1979, 2012.

believe others, are still working on such things, despite our individual limitations in resolving such questions. As a result, I'm challenged at this point of my life to consider what I can do to help keep indigenous worldviews alive in order to counter the self-destructive nature of current structures of mass society as well as to help maintain the heritage and values of my relatives. I'm not naïve enough to believe that Native American tribalism has been perfect in balancing its relationships with the natural world or in balancing the needs of individuals with those of community. Nor do I imagine that mass society can somehow emulate classic tribal models. Still, tribal systems have been a basis of experience of humans for many thousands of years. Can they somehow remain a viable part of the adaptive processes we human beings will need into the future?

In considering questions like these, I have found that it is important to acknowledge what I have not been able to accomplish in my own personal development as a tribal member. In dedicating my efforts to helping to create academic programs and even Native communications, I have not found the time to deeply involve myself in the community efforts in Oneida to regenerate the many systems of tribal tradition in my life. Though I've been able to learn a smattering of our tribal language and have tried to maintain family connections over the years, I have not taken the steps necessary to be adopted into the matrilineal kinship system of our people, for instance, a basic community-building process currently being regenerated in Oneida. If that process can be successful in drawing many tribal members into kinship relationships again, many other decolonization efforts based within our tribal community could proceed. My personal challenges in this regard are an example of the work that still needs to be done by individuals in many tribes to advance beyond the colonized model of "Indian self-determination" tribes now face. I hope to more fully develop such missing portions of my experience in the years ahead!

Since this paper represents an on-going intellectual effort by one writer, my limited perspective has to be acknowledged, of course. But I hope that may be a useful viewpoint, if the reader can appreciate a narrative that is intended to capture the essence of the hopes and dreams of a person who has been privileged to have encounters with significant individuals and events during a lifetime dedicated to the self-determination cause among Native peoples. So in the first analysis, what follows in this essay is an autobiographical sketch, a personal narrative offered in good faith as a telling of the story of one person's pathway through amazing times since the late 1960's. On another level, with great good luck (satla? swi ohak) it also may offer some subjective analysis and even some suggestions to those who seek some sense of wisdom about the road ahead. Let us see if this can become a useful approach for a person like me who hopes to continue to contribute finding the keys for a secure, satisfying future for our peoples. As writers often do at moments like these, I thank my many teachers, human and others, who have helped provide valuable ideas I may refer to. I take full responsibility for the errors in my thinking that simply confuse the issues raised below!

One Person's Struggles to Contribute to Indigenous "Self-Determination"

In the following pages, I will reflect upon experiences with three major career-building experiences I have had so far in my nearly 38-year career. For now, at a conference that brings together a number of my elders, peers and many young scholars in what has become a fascinating on-going discussion of issues facing the American Indian Studies section, I'll focus on those useful "discoveries" I think I can reflect upon from my current somewhat experienced perspective.

The three career-based experiences I'll draw from for this subjective exercise began in 1976 in Jackson County, Oregon, where I was hired to become the coordinator of a new program that combined five

school districts in southwestern Oregon under a federal grant to public schools under the Indian Education Act of 1972. The second experience was as a teacher during the first years of the Oneida Tribal School, beginning in 1979. As a crucial corollary for my teaching experiences in Oneida was my career shift from teaching in the tribal school to tribal journalism, when I became editor for our small bi-weekly tribal newspaper, the *Kalihwisaks*, in 1980. That shift to the communications function has remained a vital element of my perspective ever since. The third experience has been the return to my undergraduate alma mater, Fort Lewis College in 1982 and subsequent nearly 30 years of experience in scholarship, teaching and service will also provide plenty of material for my rambling reflections, as the patient reader will experience.

Crucial to the three career experiences were my parallel graduate academic experiences, first at the University of Arizona's American Indian Studies master's degree program, where I studied from 1982-1984, and second, at the University of New Mexico's American Studies Program, where I finally completed my PhD in 1995. At the U of A, I met and took classes from the Native intellectuals Vine Deloria, Jr. and N. Scott Momaday, already highly-revered back then. I also took classes from Robert K. Thomas, Tom Holmes and one in oral traditions with emphasis on media production from Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda. An amazing, unanticipated benefit of studying among such well-known Native people was the chance to interact with student peers, who came to this program from some pretty impressive experiential backgrounds. Quite a few of those fellow students remain influential in their fields, having since become a cadre of mutually supportive intellectuals you might meet at conferences like this one.

At the University of New Mexico, which at the time I began there (I studied there intermittently while I worked at Fort Lewis College from 1987-95) did not have a Doctorate program in Native Studies (later established with the influence of many Native people, notably Gregory Cajete), I was lucky enough to take courses of special application to my interests in Native Studies from Marta Weigle (folklore), Jane Young, Jane Caputi, Philip "Sam" Deloria, Vera Norwood and Ted Jojola. My 1995 dissertation is entitled *Indian Self-Determination: Implications for Tribal Communications Policies*. I still hope to find a way to publish it one day.

Needless to say, these fine teachers and personalities of the University of Arizona and the University of New Mexico were a magnificent influence on my personal development. I could name a number of other amazing teachers and, significantly, student peers who greatly influenced my development at those institutions, but for now, this short list should give the reader a notion of how lucky I have been in graduate studies! Of course, conferences, symposia and workshops have also influenced my development throughout my adult life. Associations, friendships, and even family experiences have added to the experiences, shaping my perspective substantially.

In my search to find valuable bits of experience that could be useful to today's scholars, teachers, professionals and community members across Indian country, I found it necessary to remind myself of the policy and social climate of "Indian affairs" in which my generation found itself back in the 1970's, when my career, or rather my vocation, began in earnest. Many Native young people found their vocations at this time, largely because issues of social justice and cultural crisis became so obvious to us all in the 1960's and 70's. Amid the Civil Rights and anti-war protests, Native people began to speak out on Native issues, too, as mass media became a powerful, cross-cultural conduit for activists and policy-makers. The American Story, the on-going saga of American identity, was truly being rewritten, to some degree, to one that "...includes Indians, too..." as the 1967 song "Warm San Francisco

Night”⁸ put it. Though I soon realized that such sentiments were usually based on stereotypes, meaning Indians were little understood in the crucible of the times, I at least saw glimmers of recognition of Native worldviews and more acceptance of my own identity by some non-Oneidas. Americans, it seemed, were ready for a shift in their viewpoints that allowed room for less-fettered exploration of the implications of my tribal heritage, largely suppressed in my own development until then. Though I had been isolated from my tribal identity by policies and social forces I hadn’t considered fully to that point, I was now stimulated to participate in the intoxicating processes that would involve so many of my generation in self-determination struggles.

On that experiential level, I was among many who watched the fishing rights confrontations in Washington State on TV in nearly live coverage. The occupation of Alcatraz, the Longest Walk, Wounded Knee 1973 – media coverage of many protest events became a part of the experience base for us as we developed our own life paths as young adults. My family connections in Oneida took on new significance for me, as did my relationships with Native people of other tribes. For my wife Liz and me, our degrees in teaching suddenly became more than just credentials for jobs, they became bases for finding fulfillment along the very unclear pathway to greater self-determination among America’s indigenous peoples.

Experiences in the Urban-Rural Domain of Indian Self-Determination

In 1976, After several years of experiencing America as many did in the times of our youth by traveling and living and working in Idaho and Oregon, I had the strange serendipity of finding a job opening in southwest Oregon: the program coordinator position of the Indian Education Program (Title-A) of Jackson County Educational Service District, serving five school districts. Before my arrival there as coordinator of the program, the districts had decided to pool their student-entitlements under terms of the Indian Education Law of 1972 into one program under the county-wide entity in order to maximize the impacts of funds.

It was a dramatic experience. With a help of a number of motivated parents, administrators and a few outstanding teachers in those districts, we formed the required “parent committee,” including four representatives from each of the districts involved. Those school districts were Ashland, Phoenix-Talent, Medford, Central Point, and Eagle Point, from south to north, in Jackson County. Of great importance was the advocacy of a group of activists, including Native American people, who helped keep the early momentum going, a group who soon became known as Southern Oregon Liaison, once the Indian Education program got going in the schools. Those activists were the lightning rod for action early in the education program’s development, then shifted their focus to advocating for the rights of migrant workers, which included significant numbers of Native workers along with Hispano-Americans, and in building Native and Hispano cultural organizations beyond the schools.

It was a climate of high morale and sometimes frenzied action as many activities and events began to take place in a very short time. Media coverage of the Indian education program’s development was of immediate concern. With very little experience or formal education in news media strategies, people like me were thrust into the media spotlight, with all its intimidating and heady moments. I soon

⁸ Eric Burdon and the Animals. “Warm San Francisco Nights.” Popular Rock song, 1967.

learned in my position as coordinator that the program was seen by the public as a part of the controversial political activism of the times, subject to frequent review by often poor media coverage that could be improved by careful education of the often sympathetic journalists we met. As the initial media frenzy died down after the first year or so and the program itself began to take shape, our program began to publish its own newsletter, which was mailed to those involved with, especially parents of the students registered with the program, interested educators in the region and those expressing interest elsewhere.

The publication was dedicated to presenting our own voices in the quest of supporting the Native identities of the mostly urban Indian students involved in the program. As we developed summer camp experiences, field trip opportunities, a library of Native materials and special events for school students and teachers, we found greater confidence and support among schools across the county. But we also found underlying resistance, often based upon political reactions that many New Frontier (Kennedy administration) and Great Society (Johnson administration) programs had met and would meet in the years ahead. Of course, long-standing racism and ethno-centrism were also present, as they are today.

Though the pace of activity was exhausting, most of the members of the Parent Committee and the small staff of the program retained a very high level of confidence, especially since a significant number of parents and community members became so active in the program's activities. In our rather thorough "needs assessment," required by terms of Title IV-A of the Indian Education Act,⁹ we found that many Native students suffered from poor self-esteem, a problem exacerbated by the fact that they were from Native American families thinly scattered across the five school districts. That fact compounded the problem of understanding their tribal identities in a context of public schools of the area. One strategy we formulated was to improve the learning environment by finding a way to assert positive information about Native peoples. In-school presentations were frequent, as we made ourselves available for classroom and school assembly presentations, using newly-purchased program materials we learned of from other nearby Title IV-A program and from the well informed United Indians of All Tribes Title IV-B program centered in Seattle that also offered training sessions for us. We also relied upon the expertise of Native community members who were attracted to the program as we built up our public image. Teachers who requested such presentations, often elementary teachers, not only got a one-time boost in their units about Indian people, but often found us to be good resources for materials that would improve their own courses in the future. Yet presentations in public schools became somewhat controversial to the Washington, DC administrators of the federal funds, since they often were not sold on the idea that young Indian students in largely non-Indian classrooms would benefit from the improved learning environment we hoped would result for them. Thus, in our efforts to overcome stereotyping and misinformation that was often taught in schools about "Indians," we often had to try to win over our grant funder to the idea that moneys intended for the "special educational needs" of the Native students should be spent in these activities. That didn't slow us down, though. We even were able to host a National Geographic traveling exhibit on eagles, bringing many students from school across the county to the defunct school building where our office was housed in Medford, using the resulting educational moment to tell what we knew of the traditional position eagles embody in several tribal traditions. Creative community members even created a sound track of

⁹As Native educators may know, the proper reference for today's amended section of the law is "Title VII – A, subsection 1."

contemporary music with lyrics about eagles so that those visiting the exhibit would have another level of association for their memory of the show.

In conjunction with the new Oregon Indian Education Association, which I got to participate in from its beginnings, our parent committee and staff participated in the review of textbooks where information about Native people could be improved. Along with many other reviewers involved state-wide, we announced our own results locally, urging text selection entities to consider a number of principles be used in their considerations for textbooks in such disciplines as social studies and history, especially. Though few texts seemed satisfactory to us, we noted that similar efforts of the time across the country seemed to put publishers on notice about the issues, though little substantive change has resulted in the long run, many feel. Still, in establishing a “voice” on such issues, an important advocacy process was begun. In fact, in our early approach, we were unknowingly anticipating the “Indian education for all” concept that a number of others were also developing at the time.

A cultural center and library, a week-long Summer camp, field trips to locations of historic importance to the Takelma people (the Rouge River Indians) and the nearby Klamath people of the area, classroom presentations, after-school arts and crafts classes, and special events became elements of the program in the three years Liz and I were a part of the action. On a shoe-string budget and with a lot of volunteer support, we kept a very busy schedule. As I look back on that amazing set of experiences working with the great people of Jackson County and the over 34 tribal affiliations we found there, I realize many lessons and opportunities for development went unfulfilled. Yet some unexpected successes also resulted, and lasting impacts were made upon both the Native intertribal community in the area and upon the educational institutions that serve Jackson County. One can find some surprisingly clear antecedents for today’s institutional structures in our efforts back in the 1970’s, and the atmosphere of hope and pride among Native students, parents and other Native people and, to a less profound degree, the sensitivity of schools in the area were improved. Other later developments may have been just as important our efforts in the 1970’s, but as a starting point in Native identity development in a rural-urban environment where the Takelma Indians had historically been nearly eradicated (see *Requiem for a People* for a history of the “Rogue River” people¹⁰), and the nearby Klamath people had been terminated as a federally recognized tribe in 1954, our initiative in Indian education was revolutionary, to say the least. That may sound like an exaggeration, but given the times and the great effort by many people to understand the complexity and diversity of the American society that “...includes Indians, too,” as the song said, such small steps are the actual on-the-ground experiences that have shaped continuing developments, I believe.

As the Jackson County Indian Education program moved into its next stages of development, it became clear that it was time for me and Liz to move on. The strain of maintaining the energy that had been generated in the early days of the program had faded a bit by the third year and the need to more directly serve the academic needs of Native children demanded such programs as targeted tutoring, programmed mentoring and other direct services to individual Native students. With great hopes that the momentum of community empowerment would continue, we began to seek another way to contribute to Native survivals.

¹⁰ Stephen Dow Beckham, *Requiem for a People: The Rogue Indians and the Frontiersmen*. Norman: U of OK Press, 1971.

As luck would have it, the energy of Self-Determination initiatives of the times was also being generated by tribes. Liz and I were recruited to teach in the brand-new tribal school of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, of which I am a member. When Principal Dr. Jerry Hill met with the two of us in Albuquerque, we were immediately fascinated by the opportunity he laid out in his vision of the proposed tribal school. The fact that I would be able to learn much more about my own tribal background, of which I knew embarrassingly little, was certainly an inducement for me. Liz would be able to teach full time again, as she had in our sojourn through Salmon, Idaho and Mapleton, Oregon a few years before. For both of us, the chance to be involved as teachers in the creative atmosphere of new curriculum development and tribal community initiative was irresistible. At the tender age of our late 20's, we began another exciting experience, this time in the homeland of the Oneidas in Wisconsin!

The Tribal Domain: Experiences with Self-Determination in Oneida

In the three years of this part of my life experience, from 1979 to 1982, I was first a teacher of grades six-seven, then the editor of the tribal newspaper, the *Kalihwisaks*. Liz continued to teach in the tribal school through those years. Both were intense experiences! As teachers in the Oneida Tribal School, Onu yote aka tsi? thuwatili hunya? nit ha, Liz and I were treated to an incredible expression of tribal self-determination. The Oneida community in Wisconsin rallied to create its own school, after generations of marginalization for Oneida children in nearby public schools, where they met conditions not unlike those students sometimes felt in Jackson County, Oregon. The rich experience of learning from elders in the Oneida Language Department's classes designed for new teachers, then teaching with elders and even faith-keepers in and outside the classroom was a great confidence-builder for us, since without their help, it would not have been possible to teach the Oneida Language and cultural values that have become so crucial to the tribal school's success. The intergenerational processes, I would soon learn, were the only way to bridge the gaps Oneida kids had in their understandings of their own tribal identities.

Many Oneida youth first came to the school bringing with them an atmosphere that rivaled the so-called "alternative schools" of the times, designed elsewhere to deal with "problem students." As a result of the marginalization many young Oneidas had felt in nearby schools and from generations of crises brought on by poverty and assimilation policies, many were hostile to practically any kind of authority, making our work as educators extremely challenging. While those conditions would ease in the years that followed, at least for the first few years, students were more than a handful, making it difficult to really educate them from the cultural viewpoint we were trying to convey. Needless to say, any naïve notions we had about the creation of tribal schools were quickly set aside as we sought ways to regenerate or create effective family-based motivation systems in the community. Heroic efforts were made and, as time has passed, the OTS has become a driving force for Oneida identity. Friends and family and several Oneida scholars became a bulwark for Liz and me in this stressful yet rewarding time.

When I took over the editor's position for the *Kalihwisaks* in 1980, I was in for another special challenge and a great treat. It was a crash course in Oneida self-determination, as our tribal government was beginning to take on much more authority under the federal policy of self-determination than it had exercised in many generations. Our tribe had been through all the negative policies of the past in very direct ways. Removal, beginning in the 1820's for Oneidas, for instance, had divided those tribal members who came to Wisconsin into factions created by the religious conversion process that was almost a prerequisite to Removal from homelands in what is now New York State, where an important

remaining population of Oneidas somehow held on. The Oneida Nation in New York has struggled on for generations since, remaining not only one of the powerful examples of tribal survivals, but a potential resource for Oneidas in Wisconsin and in Canada. In Wisconsin in the 1830's, Oneidas of the First Christian Party, the Second Christian Party, the Pagan Party were expected to somehow assimilate over time into the rapidly expanding populace of the new State of Wisconsin, supposedly after a period of tutelage on the then-new 64,000-acre reservation just west of what would become the City of Green Bay. Another devastating policy for Wisconsin Oneida was that of Allotment of lands in the 1880's through the 1930's, when nearly all the tribal lands were lost to non-Oneidas, to come under the laws of the State of Wisconsin. These were devastating, traumatic intergenerational experiences, of course, and even tremendous efforts by Oneidas under the 1930's Indian Reorganization Act and the Self-Determination policy Liz and I were experiencing in the 1970's and 1980's, could not erase the community disorganization that resulted. Nonetheless, in an amazing story of recovery of lands, identity and culture, the Oneidas of Wisconsin today have somehow persevered to become a vital cultural, political and economic force in the region. When Liz and I began our work in Oneida in 1979, that recovery was just gaining steam.

The *Kalihwisaks* tribal paper was called upon to be a conduit of information between tribal members and tribal government as those struggles to regain our peoplehood began a new chapter under Indian Self-Determination. Of course, we as staff soon learned we had at least two other "communications spheres" to deal with beyond our intratribal Oneida sphere. I later came to describe this situation as a concentric image of three spheres to help communicators understand their tasks and responsibilities in media.¹¹ The second of the three spheres is the intertribal sphere that includes sources and readers crucial to our task of covering regional and national developments among Native peoples. The third is the interethnic sphere of communications included non-Oneidas of many interests, a nearly global non-Native population of policy-makers, neighbors, local governments and economic interests. To be truly successful, our little staff needed to be aware of all three spheres of communications in order to be of greatest service to our own people, as we soon discovered.

Though it was a daunting task for our staff of three, we quickly delved into the stories of tribal, local and national events and politics, while trying to reflect the cultural revitalization that was taking place with renewed vigor around us. Controversy was rampant on practically every front, it seemed. Tribal elections were, of course, highly charged, sometimes divisive processes, as they often are today. Internal capacities had to be developed to handle initiatives in economic development, land re-acquisition and management, social services and cultural revitalization. Local governments of Wisconsin were sometimes in conflict with tribal initiatives as lands fractionalized by allotment were bought and returned to federal and tribal jurisdiction under the federal policy, sometimes removing them from state and local government tax bases and jurisdiction. Local media, especially television stations and the *Green Bay Press Gazette* quickly portrayed nearly every tribal action as a conflict, with existing governments and economic interests, even when conflict was not involved, making intergovernmental relationships very difficult. At one point after controversy had arisen over tribal

¹¹ See my later dissertation where I used these "spheres" as framing devices for characterizing the news coverage of the *19 Pueblo News* and the *Kalihwisaks*. Richard M. Wheelock, *Indian Self-Determination: The Charge for Tribal Communications Policies*. Unpubl. Diss. University of New Mexico, 1995. I have used the conception in my classes and in several other scholarly works.

management of pollution sources along Duck Creek, the *Green Bay Press Gazette* printed unsigned letters-to-the-editor which expressed clearly ignorant and racist attitudes among its non-Oneida readers. I met with editors of the *Press Gazette* as a part of their own initiative in dialogue with community groups and did my best to educate them about the consequences of their unethical action. Yet through it all, a characteristic unwritten Oneida principle of moderation in responses to provocations seemed, at least to those of us on the *Kalihwisaks* staff, to consistently win the “high ground.”

In editions of the *Kalihwisaks* from those times, our news coverage looks pretty meager at times. Still, the experience of “telling the Oneida Nation’s story” as well as we could was riveting, to say the least. Our tribal contributors and sources for articles were well aware of the inherent conflicts likely to arise and sometimes helped us find effective approaches to reporting. About this time, national organizations of Native journalists like the American Indian Press Association, which would eventually become the Native American Journalists Association, began to arise, providing much-needed training and sounding boards for us as staff. Paul DeMain, who later became the editor of *News from Indian Country*, published by Indian Country Communications, Inc. near the Lac Courte Oreilles Reservation in Hayward, Wisconsin, was a special resource as I took over the editorship. Once again as I had seen in Oregon and in our tribal school’s development, a sense of heroic struggle emerged in my eyes and heart as I both observed and reported the news around me as editor of the publication, with great help from our one reporter and our secretary. We did research, photos and writing on articles, prepared them for publication on Selectric typewriters, did our own darkroom for photos, printed our paper in-house, then prepared second-class mailing and sought advertising when we had a chance; it was an intellectual, emotional and physical challenge to get the news out every two weeks!

As members of the Oneida Nation, we had a lot to do to overcome misinformation broadcast about us by outsiders, I would soon discover. We even struggled internally with the need for free press guarantees, since we were mostly funded by the tribal government. Nonetheless, we managed to publish coverage of tribal issues in as balanced a way as possible. It was a difficult position to be in at times, but any insecurity we felt as reporters and editors was overcome by our dedication to the self-determination of our people. My personal commitment to what I’d later teach in college classes about tribal journalism emerged. To me, we were striving to “provide accurate, accountable information so the Oneida People could exercise their sovereignty knowledgeably.

Though it was a brief experience of only two years, being editor of the *Kalihwisaks* was a crucial experience for me. When Liz and I decided to return to the Southwest after this stimulating crash course in tribal self-determination, we left believing that the tribe was on its way to steadily more participation in the education of its youth, more competent government administration among tribal leaders and more informed decision-making at the community level. The Oneida Tribal School, a growing tribal library and museum, improved health services, a bingo operation that would eventually grow into a casino providing the economic base of tribal operations in agriculture, and far more participation among members in tribal governance was taking place. We had noticed the amazing efforts of Oneida members in such developments as Tsyunhekwa, the traditional gardens project, and the reestablishment of the Long House, a vital part of Oneida culture that had been lost to the community during the assimilation policies of the past. We had played our small part in just the education and communications portion of those developments as we enjoyed the strengthened family ties and friendships that have remained so important to us ever since. Though it was hard to leave, we knew our roles in the self-determination process could be filled and expanded upon by other

community members. There is always the possibility that we might someday return in another capacity, of course!

The Intertribal and Interethnic Domain: Experiences as a Faculty Member of Fort Lewis College (FLC)

Since I had graduated from Fort Lewis College (FLC) in 1972 with a degree in English with a secondary school teaching credential, returning there in 1983 after the career experiences I've recounted above seemed natural to me. Liz and I had left Oneida, partly because my mother Irene had been diagnosed with cancer. She and my dad, Martin K. Wheelock, and my brother and sister had lived in Santa Fe since he was transferred there from the Aberdeen Area Office of the BIA in 1967. As we returned to the Southwest in 1983 fresh from our experiences in Oneida, we soon realized that, since Mom's terminal illness would continue for over a year, we needed to find work in our fields. Liz continued her teaching career in the public schools, eventually gaining a position as a Fifth Grade teacher in Ignacio, Colorado, 25 miles southeast of Durango, a tri-ethnic community with a significant population of Southern Ute students and students of other, mostly Southwestern tribes. We moved to Ignacio and I applied to be a student advisor in the Intercultural Center at FLC and began to teach a couple classes in Native studies in the Intercultural Department, a nascent initiative of a committee of concerned faculty and staff. Notably, my tribal journalism career was of great value, as a group of students asked me to help publish a Native student newsletter on campus. The effort began as an extra-curricular activity of the student organization, the Wanbli Ota Club and our paper championed a version of that name: *Wanbidiota News*. It later morphed into two three-credit courses, which produced six bi-weekly issues, one every two weeks, of the *Intertribal News* for over 20 years. A few of those issues ending in 2012 are currently on-line under that name.

As my career at FLC developed, I left for several semesters without pay to pursue the advanced degrees I mentioned earlier in this paper. I was lucky each time to return to my steadily advancing career path leading to an eventual tenured faculty position in Southwest Studies and finally, to Native American and Indigenous Studies. In addition to becoming a tenured faculty member, I was coordinator of NAIS when it finally became a department of the college in 2010. In my 30 years leading to that experience at the college, I seemed to have come full-circle with FLC, from being a student there from 1968 to 1972 to being an associate professor and department chair in first Southwest Studies and finally, in Native American and Indigenous Studies.

At FLC, I had always felt my best opportunity to contribute to Indian Self-Determination was what I was able to accomplish in the classroom. From my early days as a student there, the idea of an NAIS Department seemed a distant, perhaps unattainable, dream. Over my teaching career at FLC, I taught undergraduate courses in federal Indian Policy, Native Americans and the Modern World, Native people and Mass Media, Native Philosophies, the courses producing the *Intertribal News*, Indigenous Economics and writing courses supporting the department of Southwest Studies and the NAIS majors. My writing background was also useful in teaching courses in the college's Freshman and Sophomore Seminars, back when those writing courses were crucial to FLC's liberal arts approach to meeting mandated writing requirements. Though I never thought of myself as an outstanding teacher, I found ways to draw upon my experiences, the amazing formal education I had in graduate school, and a number of annual conferences and symposia in the evolving fields of Native and Indigenous Studies as motivation to keep me continually striving to move the ball for self-determination through higher education.

My experiences and education were now being put to use in the environment of higher education, one with the potential to influence emerging Native leaders and even non-Native students in profound ways. And, though my mother, then my father, too, passed away from cancer in Santa Fe by 1986, I maintained family ties with my brother and sister in New Mexico and often returned to Oneida during summer months and sometimes over the Thanksgiving break ever since. The sense that I was part of a dynamic educational development in Indian self-determination at FLC has kept me here over the years and connections in Oneida have helped ground my efforts in real-life conditions in indigenous development. I came to believe that my efforts were a significant contribution to the self-determination of the students and others I continued to meet at FLC.

But teaching and my continued scholarship wasn't to be my only responsibility. Fort Lewis College has a very large Native student population, owing in large part to its Native student tuition waiver, required by the original agreement between the federal government and the State of Colorado that turned over lands to the state that had once been a federal fort, then a federal Indian boarding school. The provision that required Colorado to admit qualified Indian students "on a par with other students" without tuition fees, remains a key element of the unique character of education at the college today. The demand and leverage steadily grew for the pursuit of a department-level program in an empowering Native Studies degree program that quite a few Native people and others who supported self-determination, both students and faculty, had dreamed of for years.

In the final few years of my career at FLC, the critical mass and the human commitment among Native American and other staff, faculty and students reached the level to support the arduous task of creating a Native Studies program. With support of FLC administrators, I was appointed to form a task force to explore the possibilities of such a program. As in my experience back in the 1970's in Oregon's Indian education program, this inclusive effort eventually centered upon the creation of a fairly large steering committee: first, faculty representatives from each of the three schools on campus: Arts and Sciences, Natural and Behavioral Sciences and the Business School, were asked to join in. Experience in Oneida, too, became useful as tribal representatives from the nearest tribes were recruited from the education offices of the Southern Utes, the Ute Mountain Utes, the Navajos and the Jicarilla Apaches, with the idea that we'd somehow include other tribes later. Representatives from key student services, and library and information services of the college were also recruited along with two student representatives and a Native American alumni member. Ex-Officio members from administrative units and the program's faculty were also included. A unique 18-member committee resulted that eventually helped create the momentum on campus for appropriate curriculum and procedures for the development of the new major and minor, then the actual department of Native American and Indigenous Studies. I documented what would become the Native American and Indigenous Studies Advisory Board's efforts carefully¹², with an eye toward providing future researchers with a record of the sometimes intense conversations that led to the creation of NAIS at FLC. A number of controversies were dealt with in addition to the more mundane duties of advising the college as the program was developed, giving the Advisory Board a role in the campus politics surrounding the process.

¹² Records of the development of the NAIS degree program and department are stored in the department office. I have also kept many duplicates in digital form and as hand-written notes in order to back up those records.

As coordinator, I was now truly challenged to meet my responsibilities as a faculty member and to deal with the many tasks of the budding program, including the hiring of new faculty and design of curriculum. Gaining the needed approvals for a new major/minor degree from FLC's curriculum committee, administrative units and its board of trustees, then the Colorado Commission on Higher Education was among the challenges. Once again, it was a rare opportunity to be a part of something that seemed to me to be a major step in self-determination for Native people: the education of leadership to take on the many tasks that Native peoples will face into the future. One major point I found I had to relearn was just how little one person can take credit for in such an endeavor! College people in general are "smart," often accepting very little leadership beyond the spelling out of major goals. Subcommittees could complete tasks that one person could never hope to accomplish, though someone nearly always had to handle the organizational details, paperwork and budget.

Of course, not everyone across the campus supported our efforts and we dealt with a number of administrative problems partly resulting from resistance from a few members of existing departments which felt threatened by the development of a new degree program that might compete with them for students. It was a reminder that for many Native initiatives in the self-determination era, it has been a struggle to find a niche in already fully developed economic, educational and even social arrangements in order to proceed. If new funding can become available to remedy the competition for scarce resources in such situations, intramural scuffles might be reduced, but as people often note, existing power structures rarely give up their authority without resistance!

Today, the college can boast of a number of services to Native peoples beyond its new NAIS academic program, including its long-standing services of the Native American Center, which evolved partly from the Intercultural Center I first worked for at FLC. Outreach programs like the Upward Bound summer bridge program, have demonstrated the college's commitment to its Native student population and their communities. A special connection for me throughout my experience was with the Teacher Education Division, especially its Native American program in teaching that was especially active a few years ago because of committed faculty members in that program. There are many student organizations, too, that include Native students. Several are dedicated specifically to indigenous initiatives that change with their student participants, proving that a sense of community is often created among Native students, even in this undergraduate, liberal arts college where approximately 800 individual Native students of 145 tribes are part of the 4,000 student population, about 16%. In many ways, such programs and the efforts of students, staff and faculty across campus helped create the space for our initiative in Native American and Indigenous Studies at FLC. The college is one of six "Native American Serving" non-tribal colleges in the US. According to FLC's list of core values under its mission and vision, the college recognizes its "...historic mission to educate the Nation's Native Americans within the liberal arts framework."¹³ The statement is both an acknowledgement of commitment and a challenge to the school's faculty when it comes to how Native viewpoints are included and characterized in the classrooms of the 30-some majors programs of the school.

For me, the arduous paperwork and administrative tasks had to be accomplished with heroic, but only part-time secretarial help. Orientation of new faculty and steadily growing administrative details

¹³ For more on the overall commitment to Native American students at Fort Lewis College, see information on the website, including <http://www.fortlewis.edu/Home/About/Mission,VisionCore.aspx>. Accessed 3/20/14.

became additional responsibilities for me as coordinator above and beyond my full-time, four-course teaching load. Even with help from our one new faculty member and three “affiliated faculty” from other departments, the stress and long hours began to take their toll. I became emotionally and physical exhausted and was happy to turn over the job of chair of the NAIS Department as the need for the dynamic Native American and Indigenous Studies Advisory Board ebbed. I retired soon after the NAIS Advisory Board was dissolved, completing my “transitional year” in 2012. By then, the new NAIS Department was established, after years of hard work by many Native people and their supporters.

Though I have stepped back from that arduous set of tasks, I am hardly “retired” from my commitment to Indian self-determination and tribal sovereignty! After two years of personal reorganization, during which I have struggled to regain physical fitness and find new directions in scholarship, I am now embarking on another yet unclear pathway to my work in Native self-determination. Of course, I hope to draw upon the many experiences I have tried to document so far in this paper. Perhaps readers can help and/or join an intergenerational process that begins with discussions I hope to help stimulate as we reflect on the hard knocks and great accomplishments since the 1970’s that can truly empower Native people into the future.

Relying Upon Experience: The Continuing Vocation of Seeking Indigenous Self-Determination

At a July 26, 2007 session at the Second Annual Vine Deloria, Jr. Memorial Symposium, scholar, activist and president of The Morning Star Institute, Suzan Shown Harjo, spoke of Vine Deloria, Jr.’s legacy in terms we all understood.¹⁴ She said of Vine that he found ways to help Native Peoples in a significant way, beyond his huge tasks in policy-analysis, advocacy, teaching, writing and development of Native thought. Suzan said that Vine offered to listen to Native activists and/or intellectuals, help them think through their positions and applied strategies, then “watch their backs” to the best of his ability as they moved to find solutions to issues they faced. Though I don’t imagine I could offer such insightful mentoring for Native activism as Vine or Suzan have done, I do hope I can continue to find ways to support continuing positive developments through my writing and scholarship. Only time will tell how that might be accomplished, but several enticing developments I won’t mention here may offer me and others of my advancing age a chance to continue to move the ball. The idea of “think tanks” in topics concerning self-determination for indigenous people is especially interesting for someone whose life vocation has been dedicated to such study. Also, I am aware of the insightful efforts of people like LaDonna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs, and Barbara Morris, who have recently published *Re-Creating the Circle: The Renewal of American Indian Self-Determination*¹⁵ after years of work in mentoring Native scholars and in exploring ways tribal traditions can again become the basis of true tribal sovereignty. I know theirs and other initiatives in scholarship with continue to keep things moving, providing effective models for developing Native thought.

¹⁴ Comments of Suzan Shown Harjo, President of The Morning Star Institute. “Why Vine Deloria, Jr. is Important,” Second Annual Vine Deloria, Jr. Memorial Symposium. NW Indian College, Lummi Nation, Bellingham, WA., July 26, 2007.

¹⁵ LaDonna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs and Barbara Morris, eds., *Recreating the Circle: The Renewal of American Indian Self-Determination*. Albuquerque: U of NM Press, 2011.

In the brief time since my retirement, I have volunteered as a board member for the non-profit Southern Ute Cultural Center and Museum near my home in Ignacio, Colorado. And, I have contemplated my on-going desire to contribute to self-determination from a new perspective for me as an older, perhaps somewhat wiser, Native scholar. In embarking upon another level of participation from my perspective as a long-time advocate of self-determination through education and communications, I hope I will find ways to be of value in continuing efforts of people like those who attend this section, the American Indian Studies section of the annual WSSA conference; those involved in the Vine Deloria, Jr. Memorial Symposium at Northwest Indian College; and in other, still nascent scholarly endeavors supporting the sovereignty of tribal nations.

But for now, my continuing dedication to Native self-determination has reached another milestone. I'm in a position to reflect upon the incredible experiences and education I've had and to try to offer some observations and, perhaps, some appropriate approaches for those deeply involved in today's on-going expressions of Indigenous self-determination. It should be understood that it takes some effort to review one's own career trail, viewing the seemingly endless events and encounters of one's experience to try to perceive significant elements in the far broader quest for greater self-determination for Native peoples. Admittedly, it's a self-conscious review that may be of greater importance for my own personal development than it will be valuable for others! Hindsight is so much clearer than foresight, of course, though my admittedly limited perspective remains a problem. I have to admit that many ideas below are still in the development stage, so I'll reserve the right to reconsider anything that sounds like I'm taking a firm position on things. In this case, there is always the hope that even when a person is clearly incorrect in his/her analysis, valuable directions might emerge. So here we go-

Self-determination and Tribal Sovereignty are group processes

Not everyone has the same working definition of self-determination and tribal sovereignty, as I've mentioned in my discussion of Vine Deloria's comments on the terms. We all know people who seem pretty self-righteous about what is appropriate on a scale of "true Indianness" we've fashioned from our experience or lack thereof. Surely, we've probably all voiced opinions that are pretty judgmental of other Native people's "authenticity," their apparent level of commitment to what we believe is "Indian enough." Here lies one of our key issues in the daily work of self-determination, since in the final analysis, self-determination and sovereignty are group concepts that can be undermined by endless scuffles over relative qualifications of group members. Self-development of individuals is crucial to the process, of course, but the group process, the ideas of community, kinship and political organization require cooperation beyond the competition that arises in personal development. Obviously, this crisis has been going on for humans since time immemorial, even within traditional cultures. Perhaps a remedy can be found in tribal models like ceremony and rites of passage, where the crisis of individual vs. community is channeled in some interesting ways that might be useful today.

On a related note, we've probably all noticed that in our personal lives, behaviors that make us successful in mass society can be quite inappropriate within tribal and even intertribal communities. This is one of those challenges that must be acknowledged among ourselves in some meaningful way. Otherwise, we'll continue to "out-Indian" each other while urgent community development needs go unmet. Maturation among individuals seems to be at least a partial solution, but the demands of our work and the constant enticement of surrounding mass society make it difficult to be consistent on our community commitment, since so much time is demanded by our jobs and the bureaucratic responsibilities that are likely to require us to attend to mass society's demands. It's interesting to note

that today's ceremonies, powwows and tribal social dances offer some salve in this constant crisis as opportunities for informal caucus, but we still are our own "best enemies" at times even there, as we find new ways to erect boundaries against each other. Sometimes we have to struggle with completing viewpoints to get to useful directions, but clearly, we will have to think of other strategies here beyond making negative judgments about each other that can create great harm and trauma. It's one of those balancing processes, I suppose, that can only be dealt with on the ground, by people of good will who really seek positive results. Those are very nearly Vine Deloria's exact words from his observations about the future of Indian nations.¹⁶

But even though individuals clearly differ over priorities of what's acceptable and what needs to be changed immediately to meet pressing needs for Native peoples, most of us operate in a relatively pragmatic way. For instance, while each of us may eschew some technological devices that seem to create great cost to traditions, we still find ourselves making use of those devices for strategic reasons. Adapting innovations to our group needs takes time, as Robert K. Thomas seemed to imply in his analysis of "nativization" and what we mean in our reference to "indigenization" today. Yet technological changes happen so rapidly in our immediate environment, we as individual sometimes simply have to hold our noses and dive in. I use this example because it demonstrates the dilemmas we each face daily in pursuing tribal self-determination, often not giving our seemingly inconsistent behavior a second thought. In adapting to cultural dissonance as we do, we are following another of the strategies Thomas delineated, that of "compartmentalization."¹⁷ As individuals, we simply separate our Native value system from certain aspects of daily demands in order to make it through the day, then return to our indigenous behaviors when appropriate.

Group processes like indigenization need to be considered somewhere along the way, so that we don't continue to be fragmented by new innovations that have not been factored into our group processes. This isn't a new issue, but reminding ourselves of our need to remain peoples as well as individuals is an on-going process we should consider so young people can clearly see they have resources within our group identities for innovation. One interesting strategy I have heard of is that tribes can use their own languages to name innovations like "computers," finding the proper term in tribal language that becomes broadly applicable among the associations and relationships tribal languages so clearly convey. It's just one approach: Perhaps you can offer others!

Group Processes: Being Carefully Pragmatic is not selling out

This is a touchy one, connected as it is with the very personal challenges we all feel about our compromises between individual successes in mass society and our responsibilities in our communities. Self-determination has meant that we have had to organize in innovative ways to accomplish community-wide goals. In taking action to help form groups like advisory boards to pursue self-determination, we face a slightly different level of crisis than our non-Native friends do, since

¹⁶ Vine Deloria, Jr. "The Future of Indian Nations," *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

¹⁷ Robert K. Thomas. "Community and Institution Among American Indians." In *Traditional and Non-traditional Services in American Indian Mental Health*. Eds. Yvonne A. Red Horse, Edwin Gonzalez-Santini, Patricia A. Toslon-Gonzalez and Sidney Bean, 316-330. Tempe: ASU School of Social Work, no date.

successes and failures of organizations we create to meet community needs reflect a greater risk to our individual and group identities. We essentially “go on record” as supporting certain objectives in certain ways, the comfort of being among the critical, less involved Native people we may have hoped to bring into the process. In a way, it’s the paradox of social organization of our times. Getting the “right people” into the organization process is crucial, of course, but criteria for selection remains pretty sketchy, right? Especially in intertribal and interethnic environments, we often simply have to steel ourselves and get very strategic, trying to accomplish short-term goals that contribute to overall sovereignty, relying expeditiously on the synergy of our group before entropy sets in.

Tribal boards and councils are also subject to the same crises, of course. The fact that tribes are often extremely diverse these days has to be considered, especially where colonial forces have held sway for generations. In searching for some kind of unanimity of purpose and consensus in decision-making based upon reciprocal interactions, tribal members often appeal to tradition, yet find that fragmented structures remaining from earlier times are less than functional. As I view the development of community dialogue in Oneida governance, I am heartened to see reinvigoration and use of tribal language that evokes community identity in governance and civil justice systems that reveal hard work among our people on this situation.¹⁸ Only time will tell if this strategy can succeed, but from my perspective, it is an encouraging dynamic. Perhaps internal, intratribal developments like those in Oneida will result in the strengthening of broader, intertribal efforts as people find ways to extend processes into that arena. First, though, we’ll have to find a way to better succeed in the “on the ground” experiences of regeneration and adaptation within tribal communities. That will take some time and probably some hard knocks, but in case we think it’s time to give up on such things, we should remember how much has been accomplished by good people since the self-determination policy began! As always, our first motivation has to be for the benefit of our Peoples.

Group processes in Indigenous terms involves consideration of ideas like reaching consensus, which can only arise consistently when people are mutually interdependent, allowing reciprocity in a kind of indigenous marketplace of exchanges on policy issues. Otherwise, people have little motivation to compromise their own interests with those of others. The complexity of shifting our modes of operations from the bureaucratic models we’ve learned to use over the past several generations to more traditional approaches such as kinship-based structures continues in many emerging tribal and intertribal groupings, often in admittedly experimental ways.

Of course, we are not near to escaping bureaucracy in our daily operations, no matter how much we hope to reinvigorate traditional group processes. So we have to be pragmatic in our work in today’s bureaucratic environment. I believe a key point in any new initiative of self-determination is to pragmatically assess who “we” are and where our human resources for development lie. In a number of cases I could cite in my own experience, that “grounding” was at least partially lacking, often as a result of pressing timelines, creating headaches as we met barriers we probably could have anticipated with some systematic research. I realize that group efforts like those I have been a part of can sometimes be de-railed by an intimidating accounting of obstacles that may be encountered, but some thought to

¹⁸The Oneida Nation in Wisconsin’s website includes a statement of the vision, mission and core values at <http://www.oneidanation.org/uploadedFiles/CULTURAL%20HERITAGE%20FY2014.pdf>. Accessed 3/30/14.

“plan B” approaches can be useful. Native program developers have a special responsibility here in providing careful analysis of conditions!

Acknowledging Human Nature and Intergenerational Trauma

My own “take” on human nature has sometimes inspired me, yet sometimes greatly disappointed me! In efforts to organize people to take on the responsibilities of self-determination and sovereignty, I’ve experienced both the synergy and the entropy that motivational speakers frequently refer to. It clearly takes a lot of mutual respect among people to bring out the best efforts of a group, but establishing that respect among such diverse and often “fully-deployed,” distracted people in today’s social environments is tricky. Many are already jaded by past experience in group activities of many kinds. I noticed that when I relied upon small intertribal and interethnic student groups to produce media products in my classes in Native Americans in the Mass Media, many of those groups quickly fell into entropy on the first task of getting organized. Some groups, though, were just as quick to succeed in their efforts, finding skills among members in a very cooperative way. That example is probably a poor parallel to the many small and large group efforts that are necessary for tribal self-determination, but they indicate to me the complexity of the kind of work the people in our American Indian Studies section today are engaged in. Herding cats is far less complex than expecting humans to be attracted to the hard work of self-determination, then find shared goals upon which to act, then execute intermediate objectives toward meeting larger goals. I sometimes have felt that in our naiveté, we expect too much from people; at other times, I think we need to be as demanding of ourselves and others as possible, given the urgency of our work. Obviously, most of us need training on facilitating group dynamics in traditional ways, but it’s clear that people, including ourselves, are pretty unpredictable over the long haul. Patience and other human virtues are crucial, of course. We have to be able to recognize and value each other’s personal gifts and challenges. We also have to wade through our own and other’s missteps with as much grace as possible, so people don’t give up. This sounds corny, but maintaining a humble, open approach to group processes is crucial, I’m sure we all agree. Good luck on this one; it takes practice and perseverance to succeed in group efforts, especially if you are perceived as the “leader,” a damning label, to be sure.

Realizing the trauma we’ve experienced as peoples is vital to our work, too. Even the most privileged and elite of us, and I use those terms advisedly, has to deal with the devastating history our peoples have been through. I recall my own reactions to discovering the depth of the wrongs that were committed against Oneidas. I have seen college students react angrily to their own studies of American Indian policy, too. For many of us, there’s a deep wound that goes unexpressed for years, only to surface as anger from what seem to be relatively minor provocations. For me, media stereotypes of “Indians,” when used in certain ways, are simply debilitating, calling forth an embedded rage I can’t exactly explain. My only remedy has to been to express my objections as clearly as I can in ways I hope will do some good, though it’s rarely possible to feel satisfied with the result, since perpetrators of those stereotypes often fail to see any harm. That’s just one example, but I know many Native people harbor similar frustrating moments with pent up feelings that are so common among us. It’s as if we’re unexpectedly affronted by the very attitudes that our ancestors have felt throughout the American Story’s development. Living with the fact that most non-Native Americans will never question the propriety of past Indian policy and that many will continue to express attitudes that are clearly dismissive of Native thought remains a crisis for many of us. Anger also comes as a result of the

realization that groups like the Citizens Equal Rights Association, known as CERA, still preach genocidal policies towards Native peoples.¹⁹ This national organization directly attacks many aspects of tribal identity as they seek “equal rights,” somehow seeing themselves as victims of the continued existence of tribal nations. They are with us now, trying to convince other Americans that the legal protections that still remain for tribes are unconstitutional and must be abrogated. It is a direct challenge to our existence, one which we have to weather with magnanimity, somehow!

Channeling intergenerational rage into activities that demand endurance has been my best remedy. I often think that my preoccupation with physical fitness, as futile as that preoccupation may be, has had positive outcomes for me in both physical and emotional ways. In getting demanding tasks done, I’ve also sometimes consciously reminded myself that I am doing the work for the very People who suffered so much over the generations. Whatever your approach to trauma, whether it’s the intergenerational kind or a more immediate, lived crises you’ve experienced, I hope you are successful in turning those internal processes to your advantage! On the larger scale, I hope that realizing others around us in Native America are dealing with similar patterns can make us more empathetic and supportive, rather than hardened, manipulative and jaded. I benefitted a lot from seeing Charlie Hill perform on the Johnny Carson Show many years ago. I only wish I had such an effective sense of glib humor to share! Perhaps expressing a confident, happy personality as Charlie did can be the ultimate consolation for people still occasionally haunted by what has been called intergenerational trauma.

Of course, the trauma hasn’t ended for Native peoples. Broken homes and addictions are still symptoms of the powerlessness, disorientation and poverty many Native people face. Our work in self-determination should always recognize these human costs that have been the legacy of assimilation for generations and which continue today. In creating the intellectual space we’ve sought in academia, for instance, we can hope our students will not only be better armed to deal with the hopelessness and trauma in their own lives, but better able to extend their service to their wider communities. I’ve been blessed to see a number of students take their academic experiences into their chosen fields with the express purpose of healing their communities in some way. That has been my greatest reward for the many hours of sometimes frustrating work I’ve had to face in academia.

Staying Healthy and Avoiding “Burnout”

Truly creative approaches are always of great value, yet there are also great costs to individuals who seek innovation as they take on the tasks of self-determination. I don’t think I’m breaking any news to readers when I say our work is stressful. Dealing with “burnout” and the martyr syndrome (when does a warrior become a martyr?) should be an important part of our training for all those involved in aspects of self-determination and tribal sovereignty, I suppose. I began my vocation in self-determination for Native peoples with the sense of urgency we probably all still share. The need to push forward at all costs can lead not only to the stress that destroys one’s health, but to mistakes that are hard to retract, since errors are often made with such emotional investment in times of stress. Cycles of stress can sometimes be anticipated and planned for. At other times, one is likely to devoutly decide to see some initiative through at all costs, since opportunities for gaining a foothold for the future seem to be so

¹⁹CERA is active in Wisconsin and continues to challenge nearly every action of the Oneida Nation. To see an example of their amazing rhetoric, see their website. <http://www.citizensalliance.org/>, Accessed 3/30/14.

fleeting. In such cases, the cost to us as individuals seem insignificant compared to those of our ancestors or of others who suffer in our communities today. When our work becomes frenzy, though, we have to be able to find our way out of the maelstrom. Most college campuses have established mental health services to help students; some provide such services to administrators, staff and faculty, too. When those aren't available or don't fit the need, how do we find ways to help our fellow warriors and ourselves?

Sometimes, we simply have to give up on a portion of our stressful load, hoping our constituents will understand and support us. I've know I've failed in the past to offer support for colleagues or students who were in desperate straits, fearing my intervention might just add to their crisis. In a several cases, my support was spurned by those who probably could have used my help, no matter how unsure I was in offering it. Perhaps we need to establish networks to help out when we see our peers in the throes of burnout. I've found that sometimes, only the long view is comforting: someday our dreams may become reality, but as Martin Luther King said, "...I may not get there with you..."²⁰ It's a kind of wistful optimism that at least captures a sense of hope in a wasteland of despair that can otherwise result. I offer this short section in this paper because I know practically all of us will experience a feeling of hopelessness sometime in our careers as a partial result of our intense dedication. I hope that one of the benefits of our generations-long struggle in academia, has been the establishment of a few more appropriate resources among ourselves for meeting this on-going crisis of stress.

Finally, there can come a time when one simply has to get out of the way and find another way to participate. We are part of an intergenerational process, after all. And, competent folks are likely to be nearby to fill our spot if it is really a significant function. I like to say that it's important to get out of the way when "the People are coming through," meaning at times, some of one's best efforts are too slow or off the mark anyway and an organic process of group action is about to take place. In my view, letting go can be rewarding anyway, since the impact on one's ego can be somewhat dispelled by the realization that others can now take your work beyond your real or imagined limits. So we should endeavor to enjoy life, no matter what. We have to be more than survivors, more than victims. We need to flourish when we can and enjoy life, so the next generation gets a positive model - a chance to take up the battles with a kind of joy in joining in an intergenerational endeavor. After all, young people aren't likely to be interested in what appears to them to be drudgery. Enjoying life is the best revenge/reward, as they say, and having a "bushy tail" may be the best remedy for the stress that comes with continuing battles for self-determination!

Life-Long Learning and Teaching

It's a humbling process to be involved in education systems over the long term. One probably learns more as a teacher than in any other environment, it seems to me. If any wisdom has somehow passed to me, it has been because I've met so many astounding students and so many stellar teachers. It has often been difficult to say which are students and who are the teachers. Though I've called upon as a teacher in higher education to be an expert in my field, I have to admit that academia and formal education

²⁰ Martin Luther King, "I've been to the Mountain Top." Speech given at the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike. Memphis, TN, April 3, 1968. You can read his inspired speech at http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/documentsentry/ive_been_to_the_mountaintop/. Accessed 3/30/14.

processes in America barely scratch the surface of the kinds of knowledge people will need to succeed in the long term with indigenous self-determination. At this point of my own life, I can still say I have more to learn than to teach.

In the even larger domain, the human population and human appetites on the planet have grown beyond sustainable levels. Even with the best technologies and anticipated “discoveries” of anyone’s imagination, climate changes have already shown we are powerless to stop further, likely catastrophic natural reactions to human impacts on the planet. Now that’s humbling.

How do we teach and learn responsibility, maturation, wisdom about such things in these times? My experience in the Oneida Tribal School showed me a glimmer of hope for education within tribal communities. I know students and alumni of Fort Lewis College, too, who are diligently searching for solutions or at least survival techniques. I meet young people, my peers and elders almost daily who seem to hold keys to today’s challenges. I only hope we have the time for their efforts to bear fruit. The work of those I’ve known in my generation continues to amaze me, though. If we haven’t succeeded in reversing the crisis created by colonial attitudes toward nature and natural peoples, we have at least maintained what we can from our traditions and adaptations for consideration of future generations. I don’t consider myself a religious person, but in the presence of the natural beings and forces of the cosmos, I hope and pray we human beings can find a way to live in harmony. I am convinced Native and indigenous thought and ways of life hold crucial understandings for the future, even if those understandings have barely survived among us!

And Finally, Some Concluding Thoughts

For many of us who have met in conferences like this American Indian Studies section of the WSSA Conference for many years, it may seem like little has been accomplished in many areas of self-determination. We still concern ourselves with some of the same issues over and over. America’s own identity, for instance, has always been hostile, albeit subtly at times, to tribal identity. Many note that America’s fragile identity is still hostile toward tribalism – “we still practice our religions in fear” as one speaker in the book *The Sacred* put it.²¹ Tribal nations are still considered “domestic, dependent nations.” Native people in initiatives today must anticipate the reactions of our neighbors and their governments as we proceed with needed development of sovereignty. But that may be a problem of seeing only through the eyes of our generation. The development of tribal government, tribal-initiated economic systems, tribal health systems, tribal education systems, tribal colleges may remain in question, but the obvious dramatic shift in authority to tribal nations has been remarkable in our times.

“Students” my age can recall discussions in classes like Robert K. Thomas’ *Dynamics of Indian Society* in the 1980’s American Indian Studies Program at the University of Arizona where tribalism was contrasted with mass society, for example, and see the roots of the intellectual processes that have since challenged the propaganda about “advanced” societies displacing “inferior” tribal communities. We can recall Tom Holm’s and Vine Deloria’s approaches to the two-part Development of Federal Indian Policy, where we gained an intergenerational view of not only the federal policies, but the

²¹ Joe Littlecrow, Northern Cheyenne, from *Wassaja*, October, 1973. Quoted in Peggy V. Beck, Anna Lee Walters, Nia Francisco, *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life*. Tsaiile: NCC Press, 1996, p. 162.

responses and initiatives of Native people over time. Our seminar in advanced Indian studies, which brought Tom Holm, Vine Deloria and Bob Thomas together in the classroom with students, forced all of us to bring our own sometimes rapidly developing ideas into the open. A group of us created a mock radio play that urged people to take our cultural values seriously in a class on Native American Oral Traditions taught by N. Scott Momaday. Our culminating Master's theses were guided by the need to develop among us the tools for moving forward in many fields to empower Native people beyond what seemed a narrow, perhaps temporary opening in America's Indian policies. It was clear to us that this graduate program was intended to instill the needed confidence and competence among a cadre of students who could help create the space for indigenous development on Native terms.

For many of us lucky enough to fall into its grasp as students, the University of Arizona program in the 1980's was empowering, helping us to overcome our own uncertainties and cynicism about the value of tribal culture and to overcome our inexperience and insecurity about engaging in the intellectual discourse on Native self-determination. We were "deployed" by our own circumstances as we graduated, often with letters of recommendation from the faculty, a cadre of graduates hoping to spread the confidence in Native ingenuity we had gained across the networks our careers would create. In our scholarship, we had been encouraged to look beyond the biases of "the literature" and look for sources in our work among the communities we worked with, beyond the doors of the institutions we worked in. It was heady stuff!

We're older now. Though I am beginning to wonder whether I still can find a way to be useful for Native self-determination, I find encouragement in Onondaga faith keeper Oren Lyon's comments about our intergenerational experience. He was asked by Bill Moyers in a 1991 hour-long interview²² why he continued to struggle for tribal survival and prosperity into the future when it seemed clear that the struggle was futile in the face of modern society. He replied that so long as the young people took up the struggle and sought their traditional roots, the struggle wouldn't end. He also hinted that those who become leaders should recall his own uncertainty in another documentary when he said, "...we don't know if we are of the quality of the leaders of the past; perhaps we are not."²³ He went on to imply that we all have to take up our responsibilities, with a note of urgency, in the on-going efforts to keep our peoples strong, whatever the future holds. I had the pleasure of meeting Oren years later in 2010 at the Vine Deloria, Jr. Memorial Symposium so ably organized by Steven Pavlik at Northwest Indian College, Lummi Nation in Washington State (He also spoke there the following year, but regrettably, I could not be attend!). Though the years had weathered him since those film documentaries, he was still meeting his responsibilities. Among his continuing ambitious initiatives, he was/is even involved in a challenge to the Doctrine of Discovery, as a key person among others aiming to take that battle to the Vatican to get the doctrine denounced, since that is where its historical roots lie. His continued vitality should inspire us all.

²²Bill Moyers interview. *Oren Lyons the Faithkeeper*. (1991). The video production of the interview is available on-line at <http://billmoyers.com/content/oren-lyons-the-faithkeeper/> . Moyers and Company, Public Affairs Television, Inc. 2014. Accessed 3/30/14. I encourage readers to view that interview in the context of intergenerational indigenous self-determination!

²³ *Winds of Change: A Matter of Promises*(1990). Videorecording. PBS Videos, Alexandria, VA.

Now, the processes of tribal and individual development in “Indian country” have evolved beyond the earlier scope of the even those huge challenges that early 1980’s AIS program in Arizona was designed to meet. Many of us are joining in decolonization efforts at the indigenous, international, global level. Most of us are at least educating ourselves in that global confrontation with today’s “culture of conquest” which is now based mainly upon economic, corporate colonialism, the logical heritage of colonialism’s earlier roots. I don’t have to ask if we are ready to take on such a huge intellectual challenge, one that clearly has implications for all people. At the same time, we must not lose our focus on purely local dynamics that are the pressing concerns of our own communities. We’ll need to keep our eyes open, watching both local and global events! Some of us have found ourselves separated from our community relations, largely by the forces we’ve allowed to take us away, but there is still time, there are still the coming generations. Will those generations still seek their traditional indigenous roots? For people like me, the question is: Will our generation, and those of the future, be of the quality of earlier generations who helped me and my generation find our roots?