

'INDIAN BLOOD' OR LIFELOOD?
AN ANALYSIS OF THE RACIALIZATION OF
NATIVE NORTH AMERICAN PEOPLES

by

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ABSTRACT

The racialization of Native Americans has distorted their individual and collective identities. As a mechanism of Western imperialism, “race” has contributed to their dispossession, disintegration and deculturalization. Racialized oppression continues at federal and tribal levels through the usage of racial terminology and in blood quantum policies, leading to the fragmentation, marginalization, stigmatization and alienation of Native individuals. As such, race and blood quantum pose a threat to the survival of tribes. Tribes have within their means indigenous alternatives to race and blood quantum and will need to revitalize these indigenous practices and principles if they are to safeguard their survival as autonomous cultural and political entities

CHAPTER ONE
“RACE,” COGNITIVE IMPERIALISM AND THE SURVIVAL OF
TRIBAL INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES

For North America’s indigenous peoples and their descendants, colonization has left lasting legacies of cultural disintegration, genocide, language loss, repression of religious freedom, forced assimilation, economic ruin, and identity control. These legacies are linked by the persistence of the Western imperialist ideology of race. Race is a powerful and fundamental component of colonization in the West, because it has been used to enable and sustain oppression. Race developed within a colonial situation, evolving from an imperialist “convenience” into an oppressive and pervasive hegemony which facilitated the domination and destruction of indigenous communities and which still influences the relationship between Native peoples and the United States.¹

Racialization is the process of defining people according to race-based identity determinants and stratifying them according to a racial hierarchy. Racialization is a form of identity distortion or “othering,” as well as the usurpation of authority over the identification process. As a means for Western imperialist dominance, racialization facilitates other imperialist ends beyond identity distortion, specifically: the dispossession, deculturalization, and disintegration of indigenous peoples. Ultimately, these forms of oppression produce crises for tribes. Crisis is internally experienced oppression, a state of internal tribal debilitation which necessitates constant effort for

immediate physical survival. Crisis is also the internalization of race so that racialization and oppression are perpetuated from within Native populations in a manner that sustains the internal dysfunction of tribes. Imperialism, oppression, race, racialization and crisis are all defined and analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters.

This paper examines how the ideology of race and the Western emphasis on quantification and objectivism as “scientific” legitimizers have re-created tribes as racial entities and simultaneously placed tribes in a racially-stratified system designed to enable imperial dominance over and oppression of indigenous peoples. It illustrates how the systemic use of race language compels a racial way of perceiving the world, conceptualizing experiences and articulating realities. It demonstrates that when defined and articulated by racial language, identification becomes a process of perpetuating oppression through the recreation of a hegemonic system which denies indigenous autonomy by negating indigenous tribal identities. This critical analysis challenges the legitimacy and usefulness of blood quantum and race as identifiers today by investigating how the racialization of indigenous peoples has adversely changed the identification process from a subjective, in-group/internal, qualitative process in which tribes exercised self-determination and autonomy to a process that relies on objective, external, and quantifiable methods by which the United States and Canada have come to determine Native identity. It argues that the use of blood quantum and the assertion of race as legitimate criteria for tribal membership (or for receiving goods or services owed by the

¹ Canada and Mexico also rely on race, by in distinctly different ways. Both Canada and the United States emphasize presumed biological inheritance through blood quanta; Mexico does not.

federal government) constitute a usurpation of autonomy. Furthermore, racialization enables the destruction of indigenous cultures by fragmenting tribal communities, families and individuals and pitting these fragments against one another. Finally, reliance on race as the primary “official” identifier undermines the necessity and importance of cultural survival by displacing traditional methods of identification and tribal continuity.

Tribal identity today is more evasive and difficult to define than individual identity, as are the impacts of colonialism on tribal identity. This may account for the fact that much of the research by both indigenous and non-indigenous scholars on “Indian identity” has focused primarily on individual identity—how Native individuals self-define and how they are or are not defined as “Indian” by “informal” and “official” methods.² Such studies are useful in that they reveal insights into the impact of colonialism on individuals; however, they are less illuminating when it comes to understanding the condition of tribal identities. It is important that we do not focus just on the identity and survival of individuals; we need also to consider seriously tribal identities and how they have been affected by and resisted colonization processes.

Colonialism and racial hegemony create a state of tribal identity crisis, not just identity chaos for individuals. Race creates a non-cultural concept of “tribe” which ignores the indigenous cultural political and historical definition of tribe. Thus marginalized, tribes as indigenous ethnic entities become subordinated so that a new, imperialist racial identity can be superimposed on tribal peoples. Additionally, race serves to alienate individuals from tribes while simultaneously enabling racial

oppression. In turn, oppression of colonization causing crises which distract Native people away from collective cultural survival by forcing attention to immediate individual survival. Losing sight of tribal identities is one aspect of the crisis created by racist imperialism and racially-oriented identity oppression. For indigenous peoples and their descendants, addressing the immediate crises and survival needs brought on by colonization and oppression is essential, but the resolution of crises ultimately depends on an assertion of indigenous tribal identities that both oppose and transcend oppressive systems. Maori theorist and indigenous advocate Linda Tuhiwai Smith articulates this position when she writes:

There is a great and more immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt,... The reach of imperialism ‘into our heads’ challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity.³

There is also a great need for those of us who are not considered members of the colonized population, along with those who are, to undertake a thorough examination of colonialist processes like racialization. We need to develop in ourselves a more critical understanding of how race and blood quantum are part of an ongoing imperialist desire to achieve and retain hegemonic control. Our failure to examine critically and thoroughly racial categorization and the racist legacies of colonialism is evident in statements such as “Yeah, BQ is a problem and it’s racist and its not fair, but it’s what there is.” Saying

² See, for example, Weaver and Mihesuah.

blood quantum and membership criteria are a matter for individual tribes to decide is not altogether true. While individual tribes in the U.S. have the power to determine through their own governments whether or not to use BQ and at what level, tribal people and people outside of tribes still have the responsibility to recognize our complicit roles in the racial stratification that permeates American society and manifests itself in internal colonialism. It seems we take for granted that oppressive ideologies like race and divisive policies like BQ are natural, inevitable structures. Under the influence of racial hegemony, we forget our need and right to challenge the “orthodox” practices which have enabled imperialist oppression to succeed as it has indeed succeeded in the West.

It is too convenient for those of us who are not Native to refuse responsibility and to deny complicity by saying, “Well, I am not a tribal member, so even if I do not agree with the inherent racism in blood quantum policies I cannot do anything about it.” Such a position fails to acknowledge the larger context of racist oppression. It makes room for equally shallow and ignorant statements such as, “You don’t look like an Indian!” and “What part Indian are you?” These two statements reinforce racist objectives of oppression. The first encourages us to assume that Native people have a certain essential appearance, a phenotype that is biologically passed on unchanged from one generation to the next and by which we can determine whether a Native person is “really Indian” or not. The second comment reinforces the constant fragmentation of Native people’s identity, as if it were a given that they exist as partial people, rather than being whole people. Both statements show how ingrained racial thinking is in the West. Both are

³ Smith, p 23.

indicative of a profound ignorance of the history of oppression in this country and in its nation-building endeavors. Failure to see that such remarks contribute to the perpetuation of racism by reinforcing arbitrary racial categories is one of the things that enables racist oppression to continue under the guise of “naturalness.”

Therefore, examining the oppressive processes like race by which imperialism and colonialism perpetuate themselves (and our roles in their perpetuation) is important in an era when many people believe that colonialism is over (even while the on-going crises experienced by tribes and by native individuals is strong evidence to the contrary.) Emphasizing the urgency for greater critical awareness of the lasting impacts of racialization on indigenous peoples, Native scholar Cornell Pewewardy articulates the magnitude of race’s oppressive legacy:

The colonizer’s falsified stories have become universal truths to mainstream society and have reduced indigenous culture to a cartoon caricature. This distorted and manufactured reality is one of the most powerful shackles subjugating Indigenous peoples. It distorts all indigenous experiences, past and present, and confounds the road to self determination.⁴

On the premise that a critical analysis of race as a means for imperialism will contribute to a better understanding of the oppressive legacies of colonialism, this paper illustrates how the application of racial ideology has spanned the history of indigenous-imperialist relations in the West, enabling oppression and forming cognitive prisons

⁴ Pewewardy, p 6.

(racial hegemony and racial language) which prevent the survival and autonomy of indigenous peoples.⁵

Healing the distortions will require an understanding of the history of hegemony,...an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of those who have practiced it, an analysis of the consequences of hegemony on the behavior of victims, etc. We need to do whatever is necessary so that our children and our people accept themselves, with all of our magnificent phenotypes, as people of beauty, as natural, as normal. But to stop there is a gross mistake. To use phenotypical features, including ones not normally associated with race, as the essence of identity, is literally to remove the bearer, or the bearer's ethnic family, from time and space. Indeed, it is to remove us from the human historical and cultural process. Those are the ultimate elements in the dehumanization process and in cultural genocide.⁶

Simply put, racialization and colonization result in crisis created through oppression. If oppression is defined as dehumanization and disintegration, as well as deculturalization and fragmentation—all of which result in the crises of intratribal dysfunction and a forgetting of the tribal self—then fundamental to any remedy are the processes of reintegration, remembrance and revitalization of indigenous communities. These restorative goals are only attainable through genuine self-determination which rests in the ability to self-define. Ultimately, therefore, the survival and autonomy of indigenous peoples, individually and tribally, depends on the revival of tribal identities as

⁵ Battiste, for the terms “cognitive imperialism” and “cognitive prisons.”

⁶ Pewewardy, p11.

defined by non-imperialist, indigenous means so that an assertion of an indigenous tribal self , a distinct “ethnic family,” is possible.⁷

⁷ Pewewardy defines “tribe” as “ethnic family.” I have used his definition here because it implies the necessity of both culture and family to tribal identity. It is my position that race and blood quantum are an attempt to alienate ethnicity and culture from tribal identity and to breakdown family and kinship systems.

CHAPTER TWO UNDERSTANDING “RACE:” FROM IMPERIALIST CONVENIENCE

*Race thinking has no reason for being except for the political use and establishment of hegemony... As long as there are hegemonic rules running in the background, there cannot be clarity in the foreground.*⁸

In *The Philosophy of Science and Race*, professor Naomi Zack analyzes ‘race’ from its origins in philosophy to its use as a system of social classification and the presupposition that race is biological. Zack’s comprehensive work is useful in this paper for two reasons: to provide the reader with a sound explanation of what race is and what race is not, and to help illustrate how the imperialist ideology of race gained momentum from politically-driven nineteenth century natural sciences and how it persists long after its pseudo-scientific underpinnings have been disproved. Shattering the idea that social racial classifications correspond to phenotypes, Zack explains how phenotypes are not unique to any particular group nor to any geographical region, stating that “the apparent phenotypic differences in social races cannot be translated into scientific generalizations. There is too much phenotypic variety within social racial groups to scientifically identify those groups based on phenotypes.”⁹

Zack then addresses the idea of a hereditary basis for race, either through transmission genetics or by genealogical hereditary. Transmission genetics, the idea that

⁸ Pewewardy, p 8.

⁹ Zack, p 59.

specific biological traits are passed from parents to their children, explains how genetic material is inherited (or not) through the genes and alleles of DNA. Zack explains that only 0.2 percent of all human genetic material is different between humans; the rest is shared among all humans. What's more, 90-94% of that 0.2% of genetic difference occur all the differences occur *within*, not between, so-called racial groups.

Although an individual will have received half of his or her chromosomes from each parent, it is undetermined which half will be duplicated in any reproductive cell produced by that individual. Also during meiosis, the chromosomes sometimes twist and break and cross over, so that the resulting chromosome going into the egg or sperm has some of the individual's paternal loci along part of its length, with the individual's maternal loci making up the remainder. The same process will have occurred in the conception of the individual, with the result that a person's reproductive cell may have genetic material from her grandfather, her grandmother, or both grandmother and grandfather, even though the reproductive cell has only half as much genetic material as is present in all the other cells of the person's body.¹⁰

In other words, not all of the possible genetic material we carry gets passed on to our children; some genetic "lines" of the family may not get passed on at all. This finding is important to any discussion of race, because we commonly, and erroneously, assume that if we are descendants from someone, we contain some of his or her genetic material.

Equally important to the discussion of race and heredity is the assumption often made by proponents of race, such as many advocates of blood quantum, that culture is determined by or through biological race. Not only does biological race not exist, but it is biologically impossible for culture to be genetically transmitted. Zack clarifies this fact, stating, "There is no mechanism in human heredity whereby any of the cultural or

historical experiences associated with racial identity can be biologically inherited. Neither is there a mechanism whereby acquired physical characteristics, skills, or traits can be inherited.”¹¹ Nonetheless, observes anthropologist Audrey Smedley,

One of the basic tenets, or constituent components, of the racial worldview [is] the myth that biology has some intrinsic connection to culture... The racial worldview, with its emphasis on assumptions of innateness and immutability, makes it possible to interpret all form of human behavior as hereditary. In fact, it almost mandates such a perspective because of powerful forces within our culture that preserve and promote hereditarian ideas.¹²

Fifty years ago biological scientists disproved the “scientific” basis for race, and yet today many people’s beliefs about race, heredity and genetics are still informed by nineteenth century “scientific” explanations of race. The persistence of race in the public mind and in policy as well as the oppression created by racialization can be attributed to its hegemonic nature. One reason race and racialization persist is the assumption on the part of many people that “race is real” in a biological sense, i.e., that identity is racial and race is “in the blood.” Another reason rests in the historic usefulness of race. That is, what made race a useful “fact” in the past also keeps it useful in the present. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an understanding of why and how race has been essential to imperialism and colonialism in the West and to explore the processes by which race became hegemonic.

Imperialism assumes superiority and the right to dominate. Necessarily, imperialist entities will create justification for their own aggression, expansion,

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p 61-62.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p 62.

colonialism and resultant oppression of “subjugated” peoples, because imperialism and colonialism have one specific objective: domination. Essential for the accomplishment of that objective are the preservation of one’s own superiority, the establishment of authority and the maintenance of unequal power relations between the imperialists, their citizenry and any indigenous population. By virtue of its presumption of superiority, imperialism necessitates “othering” of the indigenous populations whom the imperial power wishes to subordinate and control.

Identity control by the fabrication, manipulation and stratification of identities serves to facilitate multiple imperialist objectives, and it is this multi-purpose aspect of race which makes it so useful to imperialism. Identity distortion and dehumanization are an initial intent, as the colonizing people must believe in their own superiority over the indigenous population. The identities of indigenous peoples must be minimized (simplified), fixed and re-articulated so as to set these people distinctly apart from and inferior to the imperialist population and to force their re-identification on and by imperialist terms. The undermining of indigenous identities by supplanting them with imperialist identities involves replacing indigenous identity signifiers and processes with new ones which are useful to the establishment and maintenance of imperialist domination. In this manner, imperialist oppression of indigenous peoples begins with identity manipulation and control. In turn, the imperialist power utilizes identity control to effect or facilitate additional imperialist objectives: dispossession, deculturalization and disintegration of indigenous communities as well as the eventual dysfunction of those

¹² Smedley, p 697.

communities. Each of these interdependent manifestations of oppression will be discussed and analyzed in greater detail later in this paper.

In order to sustain itself, oppression must become systemic so that a self-perpetuating hegemony can operate to maintain imperialist domination. Gradually and incrementally, the ideology from which oppression takes root must become systemic through a process of naturalization, so that it is taken for granted and perpetuated by the oppressed themselves. As John C. Mohawk observes, “The process of colonization involves the imaginary transformation of the unfamiliar to the familiar.”¹³ In other words, identity control (manipulation, distortion) needs a way to become hegemonic so that it can be used to the fullest extent towards the accomplishment of imperial domination. This requires that imperialism via identity control should take the form of an ideology malleable enough that it can be used to achieve a variety of desired ends, easily sustained in policy and practice, and eventually accepted as factual by the vast majority of the population (both the imperial/colonizer population and the indigenous populations). In the West, the ideology of imperialist superiority, its means and justification for dominance, and its methods for manipulation and controlling identities is the concept of race, the heart of which is the ideology of racism.

Too few people know the difference between racism (which does exist) and race (which doesn't)... Racism no more validates race that did medieval European belief in a flat Earth make the Earth actually flat. Racism acts to support and perpetuate racist systems of categorization and social evil... When sociologists tell us that race is a social reality (their caveats notwithstanding), they perpetuate the myth of race and thereby become part of the problem,

¹³ Mohawk, in *Native Americas*, p 41.

helping to ensure that the unreal is reified and that the truth becomes heresy. The analogy with flat-Earth thinking is perfect.¹⁴

Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu has developed a useful theory of how ideas, like Rainier Spencer's examples of a flat Earth or the myth of race, become "truthful" in people's minds and come to define reality. Bourdieu calls this systemic pseudo-reality "doxa." Doxa is, essentially, an arbitrary ideology or practice turned into hegemony (a self-reproducing system of control) through the process of gradually becoming "naturalized" so that this idea or ideology eventually becomes habitual and taken for granted. Using this theory it is possible to develop an understanding of how race becomes hegemonic through practice, policy and, especially, language. According to Bourdieu, "Every established order tends to produce...the naturalization of its own arbitrariness."¹⁵ Bourdieu hypothesizes that such naturalization of an arbitrary idea occurs as a result of the struggle between contradictory ideas and the domination of one over the other. From this "dialectic," Bourdieu explains, our "sense of reality" or "sense of limits" is produced, and this sense of reality controls actions in manner that prevents the resurgence of opposition.

Systems of classification which reproduce, in their own specific logic, the objective classes, i.e. the divisions by sex, age or position in the relations of production, [or race,] make their specific contributions to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product, by securing the misrecognition, and hence the recognition, of the arbitrariness on which they are based: in the extreme case...the natural and social world appears as self-evident. This experience we shall call doxa, so as to distinguish it from an

¹⁴ Spencer, p 130-131.

¹⁵ Bourdieu, p 159.

orthodox or heterodox belief implying awareness and recognition of the possibility of different or antagonistic beliefs.¹⁶

Race is an intentionally divisive and oppressive ideology, but it has become a form of cognitive imperialism, because regardless of its “arbitrariness, “race” is misrecognized as fact and functions to control our sense of reality. This hegemony of race is created by two mechanisms; language (the mechanism of dispersal, acculturation, and naturalization) and Western science (the mechanism of justification and application).

The language of race—both literal and symbolic—provides Western imperialism with a means for controlling and manipulating both indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Language has multiple controlling functions, each of which acts to reinforce the others. It determines *perception* (what we see or become cognizant of) by providing ideas of what to look for. It also controls *conceptualization* (how we think about what we see) through a set of definitions and determinations. *Articulation* (how we speak or act about what we see) can also be controlled by language. Additionally, language *reaffirms* specific values through constant usage, so that ideas become solidified in people’s minds. When “race” is the language of identification, and when such language is in constant usage, race comes to control people by converting the perception, conceptualization, articulation and affirmation of identity into racial terms which reflect and reify the imperialist ideology of race and give it its oppressive power. “Race” then becomes “real” and “factual” through language.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The language of race is especially hegemonic because, as Bourdieu's theory suggests, it displaces alternatives. In the case of indigenous identities, race language intrudes upon indigenous ways of formulating or determining identity, replacing indigenous identity signifiers with imperialist ones and thus denying indigenous processes of perceiving, conceptualizing, articulating and affirming identity. "Indeed, to speak of Native identity at all in some ways reinforces the notion that the word "Indian" describes a natural category of existence."¹⁷ "Indian" as a category initiated the racialization process, and this process was greatly aided by its formalization through science.

When 'race' appeared in human history, it brought about a subtle but powerful transformation in... perceptions of human differences. It imposed social meanings on physical variations among human groups that served as the basis for the structuring of the total society. Since that time, many [if not most] people in the West have continued to link human identity to external physical features. We have been socialized to an ideology about the meaning of these differences based on a notion of heredity and permanence that was unknown in the ancient world and in the Middle Ages.¹⁸

A recent public television documentary entitled *Race: The Power of an Illusion* traces the development of race in the United States, showing how the definition of race has changed over the last five centuries from a fairly general category of difference which was often applied to distinguish one's own population from groups of people from different national, ethnic, religious or class backgrounds (e.g. the Irish, the gypsies, the Jews, the poor) to a more rigidly exclusive system of categorization based on presumed genetic

¹⁷ Lawrence, p 2.

¹⁸ Smedley, p 693.

distinctions based largely on visible phenotypic differences.¹⁹ Jack Forbes has also traced the evolution of race and noted its shifting emphasis from differences of culture and economic standing to supposed genetic differences to which are prescribed specific cultural, moral, intellectual and cultural differences.²⁰ Beginning as early as the eighteenth century, race was associated with blood, but it was in the nineteenth century that physical and social scientists made the politically useful declaration of an irrefutable biological, blood-based basis for race. This “scientific” development concretely defined the so-called the “races” as distinct genetic population categories whose identity could be objectively determined and quantified by their blood.

During the development of the genetic theory of inheritance throughout the nineteenth century, blood was still supposed to be the medium through which germ cells traveled. Thus Darwin in his pangenesis explanation of inheritance, postulated that genetic material traveled through the blood to eggs and sperm, from the parts of the body for which it was the specific hereditary material... [However,] blood is no more than somatic tissue, which itself is largely determined by genes.²¹

The idea of racial blood was aided in its development by Darwin’s cousin, Galton, who came up with the theory of fractional inheritance, the “scientific” underpinning for blood quantum, which in turn made possible and believable the idea of “mixed-bloodedness.” According to Zack,

Galton...is best known for his influence on the development of nineteenth-century eugenics programs... [He] theorized that every person received one-half of his or her hereditary endowment from each parent, one-fourth from each grandparent, and so on. The idea that ancestral contributions were halved in each successive

¹⁹ See Pounder.

²⁰ See Forbes.

²¹ Zack, p 64-65.

generation became known as “Galton’s law of ancestral heredity.” Galton’s law was used during the nineteenth century to identify fractions of “black blood,” as in ‘mulatto,’ ‘quadroon,’ and ‘octoroon.’²²

Decades later scientists disproved Galton’s theory, showing that neither ‘racial purity’ nor ‘blending’ exist on a biological level and demonstrating that no particular genetic material can be guaranteed to be passed from one generation to another, and indeed some genetic material is eliminated in the process. Thus, such commonly used terms as “half-breed” and “Indian blood” are biologically, genetically false, as is the assumption, inherent in these terms, that racial purity or race exists. Yet by their common usage, and by the persistent use of ‘blood quantum,’ we give credence to Galton and Darwin’s ideas of ‘race’ as if they were fact, not ideology couched in scientific terms. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, such “scientific” validation for race seemed irrefutable.

The invention of blood quantum and the new scientific “proof” of biological race greatly expanded the applicability of racial identities not only onto persons defined as “black” but for indigenous peoples as well, and thus enhanced the usefulness of race for the imperialist intentions of the United States and Canada. The new racial terminology of blood quantum provided convenient opportunities for identity distortion and manipulation. Also, the scientific emphasis on blood elevated the importance of biological race as primary identity signifier (an imperialist notion) over ethnicity or culture (tribally defined and controlled identity signifiers.) In this manner, science and

²² Zack, p 65.

language of race both undermined indigenous identities and usurped the authority to define those identities. Western science, with its reliance on objectivism and quantification, reduced tribal and individual indigenous identities to measurable quantities which could be observed (controlled) by external agents who could then determine, via blood quantum, tribal membership and individual recognition as “Indian.” Quantification by blood quantum transferred the power to identify to external sources, diminishing the authority of indigenous, qualitative identification methods. Indigenous people, then, become the objects of identification rather than sole agents of their own identities. Writing on the imperialist creation of the mestizo and its effect in negating the indigenous identities of millions of people in Mexico, Patrisia Gonzalez and Roberto Rodriguez comment that when “nation-states define who is indigenous, it is often for the purpose of elimination—or it has that effect.”²³ Blood quantum policies increased enormously the power of federal authority to do just that.

Conveniently, blood quantum and biological race offered yet another boon to imperialism: the construction of distinct, discrete and “scientifically provable” identity categories that obscured the personal agency—thus personal culpability—of the federal governments themselves. Instead, it would appear as “scientific fact” that distinct races existed, and the agents who determined whether or not an individual tribal person was full-blood, half-blood or less (using their “scientifically accurate” methods like the skin-scratch test, visual comparison of skin color, observation of hair texture, etc.) were

²³ Gonzalez and Rodriguez, p 39.

merely demonstrating “natural” or “God-given” facts, not enacting a racist, politically-driven form of oppression. By removing agency from these individuals and culpability from the government and by placing the agency with science itself, the imperialist governments were able to establish a new way of thinking about the identity of “Indians” and provided themselves with a powerful tool for oppression and control.

CHAPTER THREE
DISTORTION, DISPOSSESSION, DISINTEGRATION
AND DECULTURALIZATION AS EFFECTS OF RACIALIZATION

For American Indians, the problem of identity comprehends centuries of colonial and post-colonial displacement, often brutally enforced peripherality, cultural denigration—including especially a harsh privileging of English over tribal languages—and systematic oppression by the monocentric ‘westerling’ impulse in America.²⁴

The racialization of indigenous peoples has produced or contributed to several interrelated and mutually exacerbating forms of oppression. For clarification, racialization is a mechanism of colonization, and colonization is the process of asserting imperialist authority and domination. Inevitably, racialization and colonization create oppression in the form of externally imposed elements of imperial control: identity distortion, dispossession, disintegration and deculturalization. In turn, oppression produces crisis—internally experienced oppression. Poverty and forced economic dependency, intra-tribal dysfunction, damage to individual and collective identity, internal disintegration, loss of historic consciousness, language loss, despair, and so forth are all examples of crisis. Finally, crisis generates a cycle of internally reiterated oppression and increased dysfunction such as intra-tribal racism, competition for resources and fragmentation.

²⁴ Owens, p 4.

Several historians have addressed at length all or some of the forms of oppression mentioned above in relation to colonization.²⁵ Assuming some familiarity with this history, this chapter offers an overview of racialization in order to illustrate how race becomes an increasingly rigid biological category into which Native Americans are forced by the institutionalization of racial identifiers and blood quantum policies. It demonstrates how racialization and subsequent oppression threaten indigenous tribal identity and autonomy by redefining tribes as dependent racialized political groups and directly undermining cultural identity and nationhood.

As a common identity [Indian] was imposed on Indigenous populations when settler governments in North America usurped the right to define Indigenous citizenship, reducing the members of hundreds of extremely different nations, ethnicities and language groups to a common racial identity as “Indian.”²⁶

By defining the indigenous people as “Indians” European imperialists and settlers created a category of people distinct from themselves. Over time, this grouping and the term “Indian” gained value for the colonizers by providing them with a conceptual basis for a racial identity to which they could attach their own meanings—and a boundary which these meanings could sustain. As Lawrence points out, “Indian” distorts indigenous tribal identities by homogenizing them as a uniform and over-simplified entity. Other indigenous scholars and writers, such as Jack D. Forbes, John C. Mohawk, Gerald Vizenor and Terence Douglas, have similarly deconstructed the term “Indian” in relation to the vocabulary of race, and they offer critical analyses of the necessity of

²⁵ See, for example, Jack D. Forbes, *The Indian in America's Past*, Angela Debo, *And Still the Waters Run*, and John C. Mohawk, *Utopian Legacies: A History of Conquest and Oppression in the Western World*.

racial language to colonialism. Regarding the undermining of distinct tribal ethnicities and their replacement with a generic racial identity, Douglas writes:

Terms such as “Indian,” “aboriginal,” and “Native” are mechanisms used by the settler society to reduce the status of indigenous peoples as distinct political entities or nations to that of a minority status based on race. In this manner, the settler society legitimizes its imposition of sovereignty upon the indigenous nations and justifies the oppression and manipulation of indigenous rights. The continued use of these terms not only perpetuates racist ideologies based upon flawed European philosophies but also denies the true identity of indigenous nations, an identity [or identities] based upon traditional values, culture and ideologies.²⁷

Like Douglas, Forbes asserts that racialization undermines cultural and tribal identity by forcing its substitution by race, a process which denies diversity and creates a singular definition which can then be the basis for attaching racial stereotypes:

The gradual lessening of attention to religious, cultural, and national (social) distinctions and their replacement by purported physical-biological distinctions seem part of a common trend, and a trend which has *not* been progressive but, rather, retrograde, it seems to me.

As a part of this process, “*the negro*” and “*the Indian*” were invented, and caste [race] replaced ethnicity as the chief definer of their existence.²⁸

By displacing specific cultural and national distinctions, “Indian” displaces specific tribal names and ethnic affiliations, denying indigenous diversity and creating the misleading assumption that “Indian” is a specific identity. This assumption is evident in

²⁶ Lawrence, p 2.

²⁷ Douglas, p 28. While I agree overall with Douglas, I have used the term “Native” in this paper, not to singularize diverse indigenous identities nor to perpetuate racial categorizing, but because “Native” literally means being born to a location, and in this sense “Native” can refer to indigenous populations whose cultures, histories and cosmogonies locate them as cultural entities born of this continent. My usage of “Native American” follows Forbes’ geographically-locating usage of “American” to refer to the indigenous inhabitants of North America as opposed to the citizens of the United States.

statements like “the Indian culture” or “his Indian name” which indicate a conceptualization and perception of a uniform, shared identity—an identity which does not in fact exist. Gerald Vizenor describes “Indian” as “a colonial enactment,” drawing attention to the power it gives to imperialist domination, which, he says, “is sustained by the simulation that has superseded real tribal names.”²⁹

The idea of “*the* Indian” further reduces indigenous identities into *a* singular entity which can be further stereotyped and defined by the imperialists. Such a process makes possible the presumptive reduction of indigenous peoples’ status from distinct autonomous national entities to, by the mid-nineteenth century, the immature wards of the paternal-like federal governments, sometimes referred to as “Uncle Sam’s stepchildren.” Explicit in this kind of minimization is the superiority and authority of the imperialist and the inferiority of the indigenous populations.

“*The* Indian” was frequently referred to as “the vanishing Indian,” a stereotype which conveyed the imperial desire for inevitable expansion and complete dominion of the “white race” over the continent. The “vanishing Indian” was presumably a “dying breed” of people. In addition to suggesting the demise of an uncivilized, wild, backward people at the wake of a more civilized and powerful society, this stereotype historicized indigenous identities in a manner similar to the term “noble savage.” It suggested an essentialized identity (singular), fixed in time and stagnant in culture, giving rise to the concept of “real Indian”—a judgement which became increasingly bitter and contested

²⁸ Forbes, p 9.

²⁹ Vizenor, p 6.

with the application of blood quantum policies and the increased acculturation of indigenous peoples into white American society.

In a critique of federal Indian policies in Canada and the United States, Mi'kmaw professor Bonita Lawrence observes that identity-controlling mechanisms like racial terms influenced the development of policies which denied the relation between indigenous identities and specific locations and environments and also alienated individual identity from collective identity.³⁰ This alienating and fragmenting power increases with the assumption of blood-based racial purity by creating the potential for categories of impurity or “mixed-bloodedness” and new fractional identity terminology, like “half-blood.” Attacking the pernicious idea of “racially mixed” people, Forbes notes how this racial vocabulary which identified certain individual people *as the products of mixed races* solidified linguistically the supposedly genetic boundaries between and divisions within groups:

The changing emphasis of terms for mixed people, such as hybrid, mestizo, mulatto, half-caste, et cetera, must be seen as being parallel with and part of the same process as the changing emphasis attached to the terms used for dividing up humankind.³¹

A blood-based assumption of race and the concept of blood quantum established a kind of discourse about how identity can be or is measured and how identity relates to those measurements. Identification by fractions of “Indian blood” produces a shift in the perception of identity from a qualitative, culturally-determined definition to one that is objectively and quantitatively observed as well as located in the blood. This shift is

³⁰ Lawrence, p 1.

evident by the terms “half-breed” and “mixed-blood” and in similar identifying fractions used later for enrollment purposes and on Certificates of Degree of Indian Blood. Canada made blood quantum the official “Indian” identity marker in the Gradual Enfranchisement Act of 1869, which limited “Indianness” to persons with a one-fourth blood quantum. Seven years later in the Indian Act of 1876, Canada narrowed its identity criteria, denying the identity of “half-breed” heads of household and negating the status of indigenous Indian-status women who married non-Indian men. These two policies influenced similar actions in the United States, such as the General Allotment Act in 1887 and the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934.

Using blood as the determining identity signifier denied indigenous methods of identification, excluded numerous culturally indigenous persons, and established a system of identity ranking. Although tribal rolls used blood quantum terms, initially these designations often referred to relative degrees of cultural and political assimilation.³² In her research on enrollment at the Colville Indian reservation, for example, historian Alexandra Harmon describes the process of determining membership and assigning blood quantum as a dialogue between indigenous people asserting cultural and political qualifications and federal Indian Agents trying to enforce legalistic biological quantification standards.³³ That these two sets of people did not share the same understanding of “Indian” identity is unsurprising. From an indigenous perspective, identity was relative to community participation, linguistic ability, and cultural and

³¹ Forbes, p 8.

³² Lawrence, p5.

political affiliation, whereas to the federal government, “Indian” identity rested in assumptions of fractional inheritance and the racializing concept of “Indian blood.”

These two ways of determining Native identity remain irreconcilable, and to some degree the former continues to exist even while the federal standard imposed authority above that of indigenous criteria. This split between “official” federally imposed definitions of tribe and Indian as racial entities, on the one hand, and the “unofficial” community recognition of individual and tribal indigenous identity is one explored by Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle in their essay “Indian Blood”: Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity.” Strong and Van Winkle provide an ethnographic description of traditional (indigenous) Washoe criteria for tribal inclusion and they contrast this with the ahistorical and non-indigenous concept and application of blood quantum:

Blood reckoning...fixes and delimits tribal membership with little regard for historical and cultural dimensions of Washoe social identity. Before massive disruptions and dislocations in the 1860s, Washoe identity, like that of many Native American groups, was fluid, dynamic, situational, and embedded in a matrix of social, cultural, economic, political, and linguistic practices and orientations. Kinship and marriage were organized in terms of genealogically shallow, bilateral bunches that included affines and other non-biologically related persons who assumed kin roles and their associated patterns of conduct. Kindred membership did not depend solely or necessarily on assumptions of shared substance: what was most important was the existence of named and unnamed role relationships and expectations among a set of individuals.... Non Washoe spouses...were treated as Washoes if the adopted Washoe cultural practices..., followed typical Washoe residential

³³ See Harmon.

and land use patterns..., and, probably most importantly, learned and controlled Washoe language.³⁴

Blood quantum, then, is a means by which the federal government largely circumvented indigenous systems and processes for group and individual identification, with the result being the formal re-definition of tribes as racial groups, not as indigenous cultural and political entities. Blood quantum also redefined tribal citizenry by the inclusion or exclusion of individuals on racial grounds. Strong and Van Winkle's research suggests the continued existence of "unofficial" culturally oriented definitions, and yet this identity is undercut by "official" racially defined designations. Harmon points out that at least some initial rolls and blood quantum determinations were not made solely by federal biological standards and were partly influenced by indigenous community and cultural decisions; nonetheless, these rolls, however constructed, set the baseline blood quantum documentation on which successive generations would have to rely as the "official" identification and membership process became increasingly mathematical and abstract.

That the federal governments imposed race and blood quantum at the expense of undermining indigenous identification traditions remains an imperialist usurpation of authority and denial of the right to self-definition, resulting in the destructive redefinition of tribes and individuals. As Harmon concludes, "all tribal enrollments obliged the

³⁴ Strong and Van Winkle, p 556-557.

descendants of Native people to think about where they fit in a white-dominated, racialized world.”³⁵

The utilization of blood quantum and the determination of tribal membership based on fractions created racial boundaries within tribal communities, split families, and fragmented individuals. This racialization process reconfigured tribes as racial entities and assigned fractionally-defined identities to individuals—fragmented identities to which value judgements and racist assumptions could be and were attached.

In addition to redefining individual and collective identity, racialization had significant economic impacts on Native people. From a federal perspective, blood quantum helped to establish a limited population to which it had fiduciary responsibilities and established an expectation that eventually blood quantum would force this population to self-terminate. The United States used blood quantum as a tool for dispossessing tribes and individual Native people of their reservation landholdings and, by extension, further destroyed what remained of tribal economies. As we shall see, the carving up of tribal lands also speeded up the disintegration of tribal societies.

By mid-nineteenth century, the United States, having assumed the racial inferiority of indigenous populations, had already justified their displacement and the westward expansion of settlers onto indigenous lands. Treaties between tribes and the federal government specified new territories for tribes—territories which, the treaties assured, would remain in tribal possession into perpetuity—and made promises of financial compensation (generally extremely inadequate, even in those days). In 1870,

³⁵ Harmon, p 33.

however, Congress unconstitutionally thwarted the nation-to-nation relationship between tribes and the executive branch of the federal government by ending the treaty-making era and designating Indian affairs a matter for the Interior Department rather than the War Department. In the same year, Congress ratified the fourteenth amendment to the Constitution defining all persons born within or naturalized to the United States as American citizens. However, as Forbes points out, while denying the nation-like status and powers of tribes and legislatively expressing jurisdiction over the indigenous population, Congress and the federal government nevertheless refused to identify indigenous peoples as American citizens. Thus, from a federal perspective tribes were neither considered nations with their own citizenry nor were tribal peoples accepted as citizens of the United States which had surrounded and even designated their reservation territories. Rather, they were, regardless of the U.S. Constitution and despite international treaties, forced into the inferior status of incompetent wards of the federal government.³⁶

One reason Congress shifted Indian Affairs to the Department of the Interior was a desire to settle once and for all the “Indian problem.” This problem stemmed from the fact that as white settlers moved west in greater numbers and illegally settled on tribal lands, conflicts arose between them and the indigenous people, leading to military intervention. The quest for statehood and the insatiable desire for new land fueled a sense of urgency to resolve this “problem,” as did embarrassing military atrocities like the Sand Creek massacre, and the cause was taken up by progressives who advocated

³⁶ Forbes, *The Indian in America's Past*, p 110.

assimilation via social engineering as a solution which would transform Indians into men.³⁷ Race figured prominently into the assimilationist policy by serving as a determining factor in the matters of citizenship, tribal enrollment, allotment and citizenship.

Domestic Indian policy in the United States from this point on began to be dominated by an emphasis on “Indians” rather than on tribes. The distinction is crucial. Despite the formal trappings of the treaty relationship, tribes after 1871 were often treated as if they enjoyed no collective self-governing capacity... The relationship became more classically a colonial one as the United States interfered directly with internal tribal affairs, undermined traditional practices at odds with the needs of the larger American society, and distributed tribal resources and lands to non-Indians following individual allotment of reservation lands under the 1887 Dawes Act.³⁸

The General Allotment or Dawes Act violated the treaties which the U. S. government had established with the tribes by taking away tribal authority over tribal lands.³⁹ By allotting tribal lands on the reservations to individuals and then forcing tribes to sell the ‘surplus,’ the U.S. saw a way to accomplish several goals. First, tribal members would be ranked according to blood quantum and allotted lands accordingly, and the allotments would be held in trust by the federal government. Next, Indian trust lands would change to fee patent lands (taxable, sellable) through the process of acquiring ‘civic competency’ determined largely by race. Third, Indians would eventually become citizens as they were released from trust status into citizenship status

³⁷ “Kill the Indian, save the man” was the motto of this era.

³⁸ Giokas, p 150.

via civic competency. Fourth, ‘surplus’ Indian lands would be available for white settlement. Fifth, through private property ownership and the resulting fragmentation of Indian lands, traditional indigenous culture and communities, including their political and economic structures, could be eroded. Finally, the federal government saw allotment and citizenship as mechanisms that would eventually relieve the U.S. of its fiduciary responsibilities.

The fragmentation of tribal lands occurred simultaneously with the fragmentation of tribal communities, both being accomplished by the official implementation of blood quantum identification standards. Prior to the Dawes Act, the federal government had already used blood quantum to limit indigenous land ownership, such as in the creation of “half-breed reservations” in the Osage Act of 1825.⁴⁰ Also, in a vindictive effort intended to punish the Five Civilized Tribes, who out of necessity had sided with the Confederacy during the Civil War, the United States had already implemented its allotment scheme on the basis of blood quantum.⁴¹ U.S. Indian agents, assisted sometimes by physical anthropologists and Native individuals who spoke English, created tribal rolls and assigned a blood quantum to each of the designated members.

Determination for inclusion on tribal rolls was often politically motivated, certainly racially orientated. Indians who did not speak English and who had dark skin were generally designated ‘fullbloods,’ while those with lighter skin or eyes or some

³⁹ Until 1887 only one tribe, the Omaha (in 1882) had voluntarily allotted land to individual tribal citizens; the Omaha Allotment Act was an attempt by the tribe to prevent further dispossession by the federal government and by white settlers.

⁴⁰ Desjarlait, p 1.

English proficiency were defined as half-bloods.⁴² Thus the degree of acculturation was linked to racial “indicators” and used to make assumptions about individual American Indian’s ancestry.

Fullbloods, as well as children, the elderly, and the mentally infirm were deemed “incompetent” to manage their own affairs, the judgement being made primarily on racial grounds. For fullbloods this meant that for 25 years their land would be held in trust by the federal government giving them time to acculturate. The U.S. allowed its courts to appoint guardians over other “incompetents” and these so-called guardians, who more often than not swindled, murdered or otherwise tricked indigenous people out of their land or appropriated the money generated by leasing or mineral development.⁴³ Many fullbloods, labeled “irreconcilables” or “recalcitrants” because of their traditionalism, refused allotment and enrollment.⁴⁴

Indigenous people determined to be ‘mixed bloods’ were allotted land not in trust, but in fee patent, meaning it was taxable and sellable. This status also conferred U.S. citizenship upon them. This difference was justified by the determination of their “civic competency”—a racist notion that assumed these individuals’ possession of some “white blood” was a meaningful indicator of their ability to manage their property in accordance with white society’s laws . As a result, many thousands of indigenous “mixed bloods”

⁴¹ See Debo.

⁴² See Harmon.

⁴³ See Debo, also Kvasnicka.

⁴⁴ Debo, p54-58.

lost a total of several millions of acres of land over the course of the next two decades.⁴⁵ By 1906 dispossession was such a shamefully obvious and disastrous result of allotment, that Congress passed the Burke Act, which intended that all remaining Indian lands would remain in trust for another 25 years and only after those 25 years would it pass into fee patent status. However, subsequent Commissioners of Indian Affairs did not enforce this measure. For example, during the years 1913-1921 when Cato Sells was Commissioner, thousands more American Indians lost their allotments either by forced (“dirty”) patents or by their inability to pay of mortgages they had acquired to pay their taxes.⁴⁶ This In sum, racialization facilitated this fragmentation of tribal lands and the massive dispossession and displacement of tribes, leaving large numbers of tribal population homeless and impoverished, thus increasing their economic dependence.

In 1901 the *Montoya* case redefined tribes as racial entities and undercut their status as tribal nations. Policy analyst John Giokas observes that this racial definition expressed the federal government’s change in its perception of tribes, as did blood quantum policies, with lasting consequences. “This emerging focus on race as a determining criterion for recognizing tribes would remain. It would reinforce the transition to a focus on “Indians,” i.e., individuals of the Indian race, that has become a factor in modern recognition policy and practice.”⁴⁷

By the third decade of the twentieth century, assimilationist policies and forced deculturalization efforts—such as missions, boarding schools, attempts to transform tribal

⁴⁵ See Debo, also Kvasnicka.

⁴⁶ Kvasnicka, p 248.

people into farmers, and the outlawing of certain religious ceremonies—had resulted in cumulative negative impacts on tribes, not the least of which was the loss of tribal cultural knowledge, including languages, and the widening split between generations and between traditional and acculturated individuals. By and large, tribes were in a greatly impoverished and debilitated state. This internal disintegration was speeded up with the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, a policy which also solidified the racialization and blood quantum-determined identification of Native Americans.

The IRA gave much power to the Secretary of the Interior and very little to the tribes themselves, despite John Collier's claim that its intention was to strengthen tribal self-determination. Tribes could choose to become "IRA tribes" by following criteria set forth in the Act. Such criteria included the acceptance of a constitution over which the BIA retains final authority. Prepared for tribes by Collier and his assistants, these constitutions were virtually identical for every IRA tribe, regardless of differing tribal needs and circumstances. A blood quantum standard of one-half "Indian blood" was required for tribal membership or for claiming Indian identity, thus negating self-identification and effecting a very significant "shift in emphasis from tribes as self-defining bodies to tribes composed of Indians recognized as Indians by the federal government..."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Giokas, p 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 139.

Calling blood quantum “a boon in the federal management of its Indian affairs,” Jaimes sees the Indian Reorganization Act as the culmination of centuries of racism at work:

The expressed purpose of this law was finally and completely to usurp the traditional mechanisms of American Indian governance... replacing them with a system of federally approved and regulated ‘tribal councils,’ [which function as corporations]... All in all, it was and is a situation made to order for the rubber-stamping of plans integral to U.S. economic development at the direct expense of Indian nations and individual Indian people.⁴⁹

Under the IRA, each tribe had to replace its indigenous government with a tribal council, modeled on corporate boards, thus changing the power structures within tribes and again weakening indigenous autonomy. The make-up of these tribal councils leaned heavily away from traditional leaders towards more assimilated, “progressive” members. Sometimes these political differences corresponded to supposed “amount of Indian blood,” but what was assumed to be racial superiority (“white blood” meaning “more civilized”) was really a product of social opportunity. Some so-called mixed-bloods had greater access to non-Native culture, language and education, and the government used such individuals in a way that created lasting factions between “traditionals” and “progressives,” factions which both the federal government and tribes often speak of in racial terms.

Tribal councils gave young, “mixed-blood,” semi-acculturated men the opportunity to rise to power quite suddenly. Their ability to speak English and their familiarity with American politics made them the kind of tribal councilmen the IRA

wanted in power. Traditional indigenous leaders who had gained their political and social status through years of proving themselves by indigenous means were often considered 'too backward' to be on these newly-formed, American-style tribal councils. To this day the factions created by the imposition of non-indigenous forms of governance and the resulting changes in leadership, power, and alliances within tribes continues to be very problematic for Indian communities.

One of the underlying assumptions of the IRA was that within a few decades tribal people would become assimilated sufficiently for the federal government to suspend its fiduciary responsibilities. Later twentieth century policies, like termination and relocation, hastened the demise of tribes and the deculturalization of individual Native people. Boarding schools were a prominent factor in the deculturalization and denationalization of Native people by forcibly removing them from homes, isolating them from their cultures and families, and bringing children from multiple tribes into one setting where they were "all Indians." Schools were avenues for linguistic imperialism, and Native children were punished for speaking indigenous languages. In addition, boarding schools prevented the passage of cultural knowledge, tribal histories and language from older generations to younger ones, weakening specific cultural identities.

From the late nineteenth century until nearly the end of the twentieth century, religious repression and the rise of the Native American Church contributed to deculturalization. The relocation programs of the post WWII era moved large numbers of Native people to urban areas where they formed new alliances among themselves,

⁴⁹ Jaimes, p 128.

generating a pan-Indian supra-tribal identity.⁵⁰ By the 1960s, deculturalization and racialization had so changed Native identities on tribal and individual levels and from a federal perspective that tribes were treated as racial minorities rather than tribal nations. The racial struggles of the Civil Rights Era sparked a sense of pan-Indian solidarity fostered by urban Natives' empathy with the issues of racial minorities. The Red Power Movement, American Indian Movement, and the political activism at Alcatraz and Wounded Knee called attention to racial oppression as well as to traditional values, instilling a sense of pride in "Indianness." As Vine Deloria observes, however, interest was often less in traditional indigenous traditions themselves than in their symbolic and political usefulness.⁵¹ To some extent, pan-Indianism both blurred distinctions between tribes and thus reinforced notions of "Indians as a race" and inspired a renewed effort to achieve genuine self-determination.

In the 1978 court case, *Martinez v. Santa Clara Pueblo*, the Supreme Court ruled that tribes had the right to determine their own membership by their own criteria. *Martinez* is important because it does re-affirm tribal authority and because it makes room for tribes to cease using blood quantum standards. Nevertheless, there are ways the federal government can and has circumvented this authority. For instance, the Secretary of the Interior retains power through the IRA to intervene, through official approval of tribal constitutional changes, and court have used habeas corpus to restrict tribes from

⁵⁰ See Nagel and Cornell.

⁵¹ Deloria, p 23.

banishing members.⁵² The federal government continues, inconsistently among its agencies, to apply its own blood quantum standards for determining the “official” degree of Indianness of Native individuals, issuing Certificates of Degree of Indian Blood which some agencies require as proof of identity. Federal determinations of “Indian identity” do not always correspond to those made by tribes.

The federal government...[uses]...a hybridized racial/political test which considers one’s biological measure of Indian ‘blood’ and one’s status as an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe as criteria... To be a descendant of a federally recognized tribe is insufficient when a person’s blood quantum falls below a certain measure.⁵³

By and large, the policies and events of the twentieth century solidified and reified racial identification of Native people and increased the distortion, dispossession, deculturalization and disintegration set in motion in the nineteenth century. Pewewardy describes this oppression as the destruction of historical consciousness largely through the process of racialization and linguistic imperialism, stating that the “intended effects were to break family bonds, to create individuals and isolates, to weaken the family unit and unity by divide-and-conquer tactics.”⁵⁴ Looking back, John Mohawk summarizes the impacts of racialization and colonization:

It took quite a while and a lot of boarding schools, missionaries, and corrupt public officials but the process—being colonized—has had an impact. When an individual loses his or her memory, they cannot recognize other people, they become seriously disoriented, and they don’t know right from wrong. Sometimes they hurt themselves. Something similar happens when a people become colonized. They

⁵² Tsosie, p 22.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p 19.

⁵⁴ Pewewardy, p6.

can't remember who they are... It's not that they don't have a history, it's just that they don't know what it is and it's not shared among them. Colonization is a kind of spiritual collapse of the nation. ...It produces anomie—the absence of values and sense of group purpose and identity.⁵⁵

Indigenous activist Taiaiake Alfred sees the danger in this “anomie” described by Mohawk, saying that “...the loss of collective memory is an essential requirement for creating a colonial mentality.”⁵⁶ Recall that in Bourdieu’s theory of doxa he postulated that one way hegemonic systems of classification, such as race, maintain and sustain themselves is through their reproduction and reiteration by the populations they are meant to control. When tribes utilize blood quantum and race, they facilitate the persistence of the divisive and dehumanizing power of racial oppression and empower the “greater danger...of the creeping policies that intruded into every aspect of our lives, legitimated by research, informed more often by ideology.”⁵⁷ That “greater danger” cannot be any more obvious than the hegemony of race and the policy of blood quantum. The following chapter addresses at length how oppression and racialization culminate in cycles of crisis and dysfunction within tribes, and demonstrates how race has become so entangled with survival that many individuals and tribal groups perpetuate racialized oppression at expense of family, community, cultural integrity and tribal identity.

⁵⁵ Mohawk, *NAJ*, p 44.

⁵⁶ Alfred, p 58.

⁵⁷ Smith, p 3.

CHAPTER FOUR CRISIS AND THE INTERNAL REITERATION OF OPPRESSION

In an essay “What Part Moon” Inez Peterson addresses the frequently asked question, “What part Indian are you?” Considering its implications, Peterson gazes at the moon and wonders “if people questioned what part moon they could see or doubted the moon’s wholeness when it was not full.” Nevertheless, her own response is to answer the question with a self-fracturing reply: “I think it is my heart.”⁵⁸

Why does Peterson contradict her own thinking and fall into the trap of self-fragmentation set up by a question based on racial assumptions? Why does her response, not atypical for the question, deny cultural and tribal identity as if her identity were suspended from that of her collective community? One reason is that she lives within a system of race hegemony where individual identities are defined by racial fractions, fragmented and alienated from culture and collective tribal identities and where such disjoined, racialized identities are so much a part of everyday life that people have become unconscious of the hegemony, taking it for granted as the real and natural way of things. Peterson’s response is a perfect illustration of Bourdieu’s *doxa*, of systemic oppression that goes unrecognized as arbitrary even when it does not make sense. She questions the basic assumptions of the question, her gut telling her that it expresses something not quite right, and yet she cannot mentally step outside of this cognitive

⁵⁸ Peterson, p 82.

prison to comprehend it fully or to formulate a response that either opposes or transcends race.

Although a seemingly innocuous question, it underscores the racial qualifiers initiated through federal acts and policies that define American Indian identity. These federally imposed qualifiers have strongly influenced Indian Country's perceptions of racial acceptability within tribal communities. The result is a eugenic tribal pecking order that has deeply scarred and fragmented the Indian community.⁵⁹

Within Native American populations racialization and identity distortion persist in ways that reiterate imperialist oppression. Racial hegemony manifests intra-tribally in several different ways, most prominently through the continued use and institutionalization of blood quantum. At present more than two-thirds of tribes in the United States continue to use blood quantum as their primary, sometimes only, criteria for membership. The widely-held belief in biological race and the assumed validity of blood quantum lead to an overemphasis on racial phenotype and appearance as indicators of Native authenticity and increase fears of identity usurpation. Race continues to be conflated with culture and tradition, and racism persists against lighter- and darker-skinned Native people, who are often the victims of racial stereotypes. Family and community fragmentation lead to greater dysfunction within tribes along with increased cultural loss and factions. Underlying these manifestations of race (and racism) is the crisis of forced economic dependency, cultural loss, and disintegration of the tribal collectivity—all of which force Native peoples into survival-mode individuality in a

⁵⁹ Desjarlait, p1.

competition for resources and turn their attention away from cultural, collective survival as indigenous entities. This chapter focuses on these issues affecting tribes and Native people today.

Much of the identity distortion within tribes today directly stems from the racialization and distortion inflicted by racialization in the process of imperial domination. Because of the hegemony of race, today many Natives define their own identities through blood or by other racial signifiers. As Wilson suggests, “if Indians and non-Indians subscribe to the notion of blood quantum, and by extension biological determinism, then their beliefs and action will be guided thus, regardless of historical reality. Such acceptance, however erroneously based, creates a cultural reality within which groups and individuals live.”⁶⁰ This “reality” or *doxa* is expressed in the words of an advocate for blood quantum as tribal membership criteria:

It is very important to know that we have all of this Indian blood. When you’re enrolled and have your blood quantum records, then you know in your heart that you are what you say you are. It maintains not just your culture and heritage, but your pride as a native person.⁶¹

The speaker defines Native identity as blood, using it to validate the authenticity of “Indian” identity. She makes an assumption that blood quantum protects cultural integrity and heritage. Finally, the speaker implies that a person of “less Indian blood” is or should be ashamed for that lack of racial validation. This viewpoint has some historical basis in that some “mixed-bloods” were more acculturated than some “full-

⁶⁰ Wilson, p 118.

⁶¹ Julia Davis-Wheeler, quoted by the Associated Press, 2/1/2003.

bloods” in certain instances, but such is not the case unilaterally, and it is not a valid assumption to make about Native people of today, most of whom have mixed ancestry. Nevertheless the perception that blood quantum determines or maintains one’s culture persists in the belief that by determining identity through blood quantum, enrolled members will know their culture and traditions.⁶² This conflation of blood with culture leads to the fear that eliminating blood quantum “dilutes our bloodlines” and therefore diminishes cultural integrity.⁶³

The quasi-historical myth of the traditionalist fullblood persists today in a romanticized stereotype of blood quantum as a barometer of authenticity and “real Indianness,” displacing tribes’ indigenous identification signifiers. Today such forgetfulness is evident when blood quantum is called “traditionalism”⁶⁴ and yet traditional tribal criteria, such as kinship and community participation, are overlooked. Racial labels, such as “bloods” and “breeds,” continue to imply assumed degrees of acculturation. Even though one cannot guarantee the other and neither indicates necessarily an individual’s cultural knowledge or practice, racial appearance and blood quantum continue to be primary identity signifiers. This emphasis on racial qualifiers for legitimacy illustrates how the cognitive prison of race traps many Native people.

Victims [become] pathologically preoccupied with phenotype to the exclusion of an understanding of an individual’s place in the cosmos, to the exclusion of and understanding of the evolution of the ethnic family [tribe], to missed opportunities for creating

⁶² Julia Davis-Wheeler and Velda Racehorse, *Ibid.* And, Survey respondent #8 in Irene.

⁶³ Survey respondent #10 in Irene.

⁶⁴ Pat Pierre, quoted in Selden.

stronger bonds among ethnic family members...[all of which] will lead people down the wrong pathway.”⁶⁵

Current fears of identity usurpation often tend to reinforce racialized distortions and to create divisions within tribal communities, rather than being directed at stemming cultural appropriation by people who are truly non-Natives. Some tribal members feel that just anyone would enroll if the tribe had no blood quantum requirements,⁶⁶ while others claim that elders and “real” Indians would get “pushed aside by our relatives who don’t know how to act properly.”⁶⁷ This latter fear reveals schisms which fracture families and the assumptions which are used as justification for alienating relatives from the tribe, illustrating Pewewardy’s insight regarding “missed opportunities.” Others fear that doing away with blood quantum and racial qualifiers would mean that tribal members won’t “look like “Indians” but will “look white,”⁶⁸ despite the fact that some individuals with relatively high blood quanta lack archetypal “Native” physical appearances. Identity policing and the questioning of one another’s Native identity are symptoms of identity distortion by racialization, oppression which emphasizes *an* authentic “Indian” identity which is racially determined, static over time, and visibly apparent to the observer.

In some respects, racial hegemony dictates that physical appearance should affect federal recognition as a tribe—recognition that is determined in part by race. Fears that loss of an “Indian appearance” will lead to demise of tribes is not without grounding.

⁶⁵ Pewewardy, p 11.

⁶⁶ Survey respondent #1 in Irene.

⁶⁷ Survey respondent #8 in Irene.

Given the history of Indian policy in the U.S. and Canada, it is reasonable to imagine an official termination or refusal of continued recognition if the members of a tribe were visually or physically unrecognizable from their non-Indian neighbors (that is, if their racial identities no longer placed them in the narrow racial categories the colonizing societies force them to occupy.) Ethnographer Circe Sturm suggests this fear exist even among the Western Cherokee, who do not use blood quantum for membership, and she adds that “such a response would not be surprising, considering that federal economic needs have often taken priority over Native-American rights of sovereignty and self-determination.”⁶⁹ One irony here is that through the racialization of Native peoples (individuals and tribes), the federal government and its predecessors (and the U.S. society at large) have *already* distorted and manipulated Native identities as well as usurped the authority to define and articulate identity. A second irony is that by adhering to the racial definitions imposed on them, Native peoples do risk extinction on racial grounds.

At least for now the phenotypic diversity among the Western Cherokee tribe proves that such “racially plural” tribes will still maintain recognition. However, the Cherokee are often referred to by other tribes in a less than admirable way because of their phenotypical diversity and lack of blood quantum standards. They are criticized as being too lenient, as are several Eastern tribes whose members “look White.” Again, this kind of criticism raises the question of authenticity, of who are the “real” Indians, but by the imperially-imposed, rigid racial definition. Yet, are hair, eye and skin color sufficient

⁶⁸ Mihesuah, p 211-212. And implicit (in Pierre) in Seldon.

⁶⁹ Sturm, p 203.

to make an individual “Indian?” Or is this identity policing a step along the “wrong pathway” Pewewardy warns of?

One assumption often made in defense of blood quantum is that “less-blooded” descendants are just “paper Indians”⁷⁰ because “Indian is blood.”⁷¹ In other words, blood quantum creates a potential situation in which two cousins sharing the same tribal grandparent, living in the same community, and perhaps having the same cultural upbringing, are not, under the blood quantum system, equally “Indian.” Racial identification systems assume degrees of identification and blood quantum distances individuals by degrees from the racial standard. Analyzing how blood quantum functions to create oppression within tribes, Strong and Van Winkle conclude that:

when applied to and adopted by Native Americans, this discourse of precise, objectified relatedness and distance articulates with discourses of authenticity, purity, contamination, and conflict to form an identity-creating apparatus... with tremendous potential for exclusion, stigmatization, division, and fragmentation.⁷²

These forms of oppression—exclusion, stigmatization, division and fragmentation—are experienced by Native individuals who are not considered “fullbloods.” Just the name, “mixed bloods,” suggests contamination. Worse, however, than this identity-distorting label is the intra-tribal racism many so-called “mixed-bloods” experience.

Mixed-blood Indians today are often viewed dubiously by their full-blood brethren, by non-Indians, and quite often by themselves because of past history and present concerns that they are

⁷⁰ Survey respondent #3, in Irene.

⁷¹ Sally Willet, quoted in Fogarty.

⁷² Strong and Van Winkle, p 554.

nontraditional, culturally suspect, and [possibly] fraudulent. Full bloods frequently employ subtle and occasionally pointed references to mixed bloods' minuscule blood quantum [sic], questionable motivations for identifying as Indian, and "lack of culture." Non-Indians express disappointment over physical appearances, and comment about wanting to see some "real Indians." All of this can lead to mixed bloods accepting "second-class Indianness."⁷³

In an article aptly titled "Choosing Who Belongs" journalism students from the University of Montana interviewed "mixed-bloods" living on reservations in Montana. One interviewee is a woman living on the Fort Belknap Reservation who has been denied tribal membership because her blood quantum is ½ Navajo and 1/64 less than a quarter Gros Ventre. She says she is stigmatized by some tribal members, who say: " 'Oh, you're that little half-breed...'"

At the time it didn't mean much. I never really paid attention. But later on when I was in my early teens I know what they were talking about. I realized there are distinct classes of people here and they all keep track of what family you come from and how Indian you are.⁷⁴

Another woman expresses a similar sentiment, saying that, "I'm a half-breed. This community is so small that everyone knows that. It's hard. We're really, really looked down on. But as long as you don't get too involved in things, people respect you."⁷⁵ Blood quantum identity has become so fragmentary that today the Gros Ventre (White Clay) and Assiniboine (Nakoda) tribes at the Fort Belknap Reservation members reportedly have over seven hundred possible different fractions of "Indian blood."⁷⁶ It is not unusual on many reservations for older children to be enrolled under certain criteria

⁷³ Wilson, p 123.

⁷⁴ Michele Lewis, quoted in Skornogski, p 30.

⁷⁵ Nedra Horn, quoted in Skornogski, p 31.

but younger children of the same family not enrolled because of increased blood quantum requirements or because some tribes only count “blood” from that specific tribe.⁷⁷ In many cases, these individuals have relatively high “blood quanta”, but not “enough” of one tribe’s “blood” for tribal membership. This family fragmentation leads to bitterness and discrimination within tribal communities and weakens collective tribal identity and nationhood.⁷⁸ Describing this split family scenario in a Blackfeet family, one journalist comments, “Perhaps worst of all, in culture that prizes family ties above material wealth, is the sense of being discarded by their own people.”⁷⁹

Racial marginalization is not only directed at individuals who can prove ancestry but who lack requisite blood quanta for tribal membership, such as the two women cited above or the few individuals of all Native ancestry but from multiple tribes. Lighter-skinned, life-long tribal members are also victims of racism in some instances. When the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes voted recently on whether or not to decrease their blood quantum requirements, three tribal council members voted for the amendment which would unify split families on the Flathead Reservation. In a retaliatory statement, one of the most vocal proponents of retaining the higher blood quantum said that these tribal councilpersons should be removed from office, in effect punished for voting in favor of a lower blood quantum: “Now we need to start *cleaning house* and getting some

⁷⁶ Skonogski, p 29.

⁷⁷ Skonogski, p 28-31; Florio, p1; Selden ,p 1.

⁷⁸ Jaimes, p 124.

⁷⁹ Florio, p 1.

color back into our government.”⁸⁰ Again, culture, traditional identity criteria, community participation and tribal involvement are regarded as insignificant to race and to the assumptions inherent in racial identification.

Intra-tribal racial alienation oppresses individuals of “mixed race” in different ways. In Northwestern tribes, racist judgements and marginalization tend to be aimed at Native Americans with “white” phenotypes, and terms such as “quarter-pounders” and “droplets” are used to marginalize and to put down individuals with lower blood quanta. In Southern tribes, whose memberships include more people with African-American parentage, Natives with “black” physical appearances are stigmatized and alienated from their tribes.

Several authors discuss exclusion of phenotypically black individuals from the Cherokees and Seminole tribes, noting that such exclusion includes individuals who can trace their ancestry to Cherokee or Seminole tribal ancestors, as well as some who cannot largely due to earlier generations having been “officially” classified as freedmen or slaves because of their phenotypically black features.⁸¹ Such racial definition by the One Drop Rule (hypodescent) alienates many blacks from Southern tribes. Forbes has observed that most Eastern and Southern tribes have a significant number of members with “African features” yet these individuals often have to prove to white society that they are indeed Native Americans by appealing to stereotypical images white Americans

⁸⁰ Pat Pierre, quoted in Selden, p 1, emphasis added.

⁸¹ See Taliman, Forbes, Sturm, Allen, and Harlan.

have about Indian appearances.⁸² In other instances, Natives who “look black” have their identities questioned by other Natives, even within their own tribes.

For example, in 1998 a young woman with a Navajo mother and an African-American father won the Miss Navajo contest by being the best example of Navajo life and culture. Another tribal member complained in the *Navajo Times* that “Miss Cody’s appearance and physical characteristics are clearly black and are thus representative of another race of people.” Reportedly, he also called mixed-race individuals a “threat to the tribe” and “suggested Cody focus on her African-American heritage and stay out of Navajo affairs.”⁸³ This racist judgement against a fellow tribal member on the grounds of appearances alone shows that for the person making the judgement, identity is perceived as being *just* racial, not according to cultural tradition (lineage, clan membership, language, etc.) nor rooted in a way of life. The man denies that Miss Cody can be a genuine Navajo person, and by this denial he alienates her from her family, tribe and culture—in a sense dispossessing her of her identity.

This instant racial categorization by phenotypes or appearance demonstrates how deeply the ingrained idea of biological race (racism) determines perceptions and identity definitions, the result of which is constant affirmation of racial categories by the automatic alienation of people of African descent from their ancestors and communities with Native American descent. According to Forbes, “The social politics of the Americas reflect a severe distortion as a result of racism and alienation from one’s own

⁸² Forbes, p 26.

ancestry.”⁸⁴ Through this distortion, racial stereotypes regarding appearance and identity are created and affirmed while actual identities, like a black Navajo, are judged invalid or impossible.

Among the Western Cherokee, who are alternately praised and criticized for abandoning blood quantum in favor of lineal descent, race still figures prominently into identity says Circe Sturm, author of *Blood Politics: Race Culture and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma*. Sturm observes in her research among the Cherokee that race influences perceptions of identity differently for “white” Cherokees and “Black” Cherokees, with the identity credibility of “Black” Cherokees tending to be questioned and even denied.

For white-Cherokees, having a little Indian blood has proven to be a valuable commodity, ensuring them a political identity and access to economic resources in the Cherokee Nation. The Cherokee freedmen have not fared so well, oppressed as they are by the logic of hypodescent that denies their Cherokee blood while it emphasizes their social and political blackness. White-Cherokees have actively used ideologies of blood to wrest power from other segments of the Cherokee population, while the Cherokee freedmen have been progressively stripped of their basic rights of citizenship and political representation in the Cherokee Nation.⁸⁵

In the case of the “black” Seminoles and Cherokees, it is today a matter of proving to their tribes who have rejected them that they are indeed Cherokees or Seminoles, but their exclusion on racial ground continues in spite of cultural and linguistic fluency of many. Harlan and Sturm mention the double-standard that has been

⁸³ Orlando Tom, the racist Navajo, is quoted in the Project Race website, as well as in *The Navajo Times*, March 12, 1998.

⁸⁴ Forbes, p 36.

applied to exclude some of the black Cherokees and Seminoles: while “bloods” do not necessarily question one another’s inclusion in the tribes on the grounds of cultural fluency or practice, they have criticized today’s “black Indians” as not being sufficiently culturally Cherokee or Seminole.⁸⁶

Valerie Taliman of *Indian Country Today* investigated the recently growing phenomenon of disenrollments of tribal members with specific attention to how *Martinez* is “a double edged sword.” Although the case supports tribes’ authority to determine their own membership, it has increasingly been used by tribal councils to terminate the enrollment of members who then have almost no recourse. Such retroactive disenrollments of members appears to be economically or personally motivated. In several instances not only is the tribal membership of living individuals (including tribal councilmen) revoked, but the membership of deceased persons is also terminated making it impossible for their descendants to become enrolled.⁸⁷ Blood quantum and race play a significant part in many of these disenrollment cases, some of which are being challenged in U.S. courts. One example is the retroactive disenrollment of 14 original members of the Las Vegas Paiute tribe when tribal councilmen arbitrarily decided to define tribal blood as Southern Paiute blood even though no one on the original tribal rolls was described as Southern Paiute.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Strum, p 204.

⁸⁶ Harlan, p 15; Strum, p 203.

⁸⁷ Taliman, p 8-9, 14. Also, see Harlan, p 14-15.

⁸⁸ Taliman, p 9.

Many of the tribes who have recently disenrolled significant numbers of their members are, perhaps ironically, are quite wealthy through casino revenues (like the Saginaw Chippewa) or, as in the case of the Oklahoma Seminole, were recently awarded millions of dollars in a land claim settlement. An attorney working on behalf of many recently disenrolled people in the Southwest says such actions are an abuse of *Martinez* and tribal sovereignty, “They’re kicking people out or rejecting applications for membership so they can increase their own share of the wealth. It’s so extreme, outrageous and disrespectful to use tribal sovereignty to diminish your own tribe. Disenrollment can culturally destroy a person’s mind and soul, and weaken us as Indian nations.”⁸⁹

Tribes who exclude or disenroll descendants on the basis of blood quantum or race and who claim that they are exercising their distinct legal rights under *Martinez* have nevertheless *based* their “sovereignty” in the same racist, imperialist ideology that has facilitated colonialism and conquest. This practice of using imperialist tools of division and dominance internally to dispossess one’s own relatives, in denial of tribe cultural traditions, and in an manner destructive to tribal nationhood and yet in the name of self-determination is what Forbes has termed “an irrationality of racism.”⁹⁰ Regarding this irrationality, Zack observes that:

The falsified scientific ideas about inheritance in general have been so recalcitrant in popular ideas about race. Indeed, almost all of the beliefs about racial difference that are today considered racist derive from discarded notions of human heredity in the general sense. This

⁸⁹ Dennis Chappabitty, quoted in Taliman, p 10.

⁹⁰ Forbes, p 36.

recalcitrance in matters of race is ironically tragic when perpetuated and vociferously defended by members of nonwhite groups about their own identities, in ways intending to be liberatory.⁹¹

Studying the impact of *Martinez* in subsequent court cases regarding tribal membership, Rebecca Tsosie, a professor Native American Law and Ethics, suggests,

“These cases also illustrate the current intra-tribal tensions over who is considered a tribal member and what larger social and political consequences flow from that status. There is an important cultural component to membership determinations that *ought to be* acknowledged and considered.I was struck by the contrast between these cultural views on ancestral relationships and the political and economic views that often inform contemporary membership determinations.⁹²

Most tribes are not the wealthy casino tribes, most are extremely impoverished as a result of colonization, so membership is tied to economics. Tribal councils by and large hold power of exclusion over other potential members and membership issues become highly contested with race and blood quantum being used to prevent new membership, as every new member is a potential threat/competitor for insufficient resources.

In the last couple of years several tribes have considered eliminating or lowering their blood quantum requirements. While some smaller tribes have succeeded, larger tribes have not. For example, a proposal to change enrollment requirements from one-fourth blood quantum to lineal descent failed on the Flathead reservation in January, 2003. One reason members of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes voted against the measure that would have doubled tribal population is the fear that tribal funds and services would be overwhelmed—a fear that was “pushed” by some of the pro-blood

⁹¹ Zack, p 66.

⁹² Tsosie, p 23.

quantum tribal council members.⁹³ Similarly, the Navajo tribal council refused in the spring of 2004 to lower blood quantum from one-fourth to one-eighth, citing similar economic reasons.⁹⁴

These examples indicate that some tribes do set immediate political and economic issues ahead of traditional cultural considerations, such as kinship. These examples illustrate one angle of the continued oppression of tribal people—that race continues to be utilized by tribes to exclude people who, by cultural or traditional indigenous standards might have been included, but who are not included because of the economic despair colonialism has created for tribes. That tribes continue to use blood quantum today to limit membership and eligibility for services illustrates the cycle of dependency created by colonialism and the hegemony of race, just as it underscores some Native peoples' fears that these racially marginalized individuals present would take away money or services from the “real Indians.”

Hillary Weaver argues that blood quantum, indeed any form of externally imposed identification that has the kind of power blood quantum does, forces Indians into a trap of bickering over authenticity. She challenges the “gate-keeping” activities of “identity police,” even while she understands their suspicion of outsiders who claim to be Indian but lack both federal certification and community ties.⁹⁵ More importantly, Weaver raises the issue of the divisive bitterness and destructiveness that identity

⁹³ Selden,. Also, Desjarlait.

⁹⁴ See Guidos. Also, Indianz.com, 4/23/2004.

⁹⁵ Weaver, 248-250.

policing causes at the expense of the internal cohesion and survival of tribal communities:

While we as indigenous people were busy guarding against cultural appropriation, we may have missed a much bigger threat to indigenous continuity. Indeed, there *are* some non-natives who pose as Natives and some Natives who sell traditions and spirituality for a profit, but the self-appointed “identity police,” those who divide communities and accuse others of not being “Indian” enough because they practice the wrong religion, have the wrong politics, use the wrong label for themselves, or do not have the right skin color, should also be of concern.⁹⁶

Weaver’s warning directs attention back to the bigger picture: survival of the tribal unit *as a whole*. Race and oppression obscure the need to focus on survival at the tribal level, because racialization shatters tribal populations into hierarchies of individuals of lesser and greater “human psychic worth.”⁹⁷

[They] fear that allowing all Hawaiian descendants to be equally represented in all things that effect the people would diminish their own eligibility. They fear the idea of having to share with even more people what is now limited to only a few and not the whole. It seems that when it comes to fighting for the Hawaiian rights and sovereignty, the support and work of those who are not of blood quantum is greatly desired. But when it comes to sharing in the benefits of being Hawaiian, it is felt that only those of quantum should be eligible.⁹⁸

According to Strong and Van Winkle, “‘Indian blood,’ dangerous and essentialist as it may be, is at present a tragically necessary condition for the continued survival and vitality of many individuals and communities,”⁹⁹ because it makes Native people eligible

⁹⁶ Weaver, p 251.

⁹⁷ Zack, p 107.

⁹⁸ McBee, p 1.

⁹⁹ Strong and Van Winkle, p 565.

to receive goods and services delineated in federal-tribal treaties. However, they also acknowledge that race and blood quantum redefine tribes as racial-political groups or racial-economic groups; this diminishes nationhood and ethnic family, and re-invents tribes in a manner that “both contradicts and undermines [Native] social and situational understanding of identity.”¹⁰⁰ This “tragic necessity” is a conundrum which many tribal members do not know how to solve. As one elder has said, “My position on it is blood degree may not be the ideal way to go about it, but show me another way. How do you look into somebody’s heart and determine whether they are Indian or not?”¹⁰¹

There is a great need for changing the conceptual framework used to define and identify Native Americans. For instance, when Wilson says, “Before one can address issues such as tribal sovereignty retained by various group of Native Americans, it is necessary to determine membership within Indian groups,”¹⁰² he seems to have missed the point regarding self-determination, or, as he calls it, sovereignty. The process of determining membership hinges heavily on whether or not a tribe acts in a self-determining, autonomous way (exercises sovereignty). Membership criteria and composition reflect to what extent this autonomy has been eroded (or replaced by mimicry of) imperialistic governance. Tribes cannot be self-determining if they do not have authority over defining “self.” If tribes are to continue to exist as distinct indigenous entities, they need to assert alternatives to racist and oppressive institutions

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p 559. Wilson makes a similar observation.

¹⁰¹ William Main, quoted in Skornogski, p 31.

¹⁰² Wilson, p 109.

intended for their statistical extinction. Alfred observes that race has become a cognitive prison for Native peoples, saying,

Despite all the wisdom available within indigenous traditions, most Native lives continue to be lived in a world of ideas imposed on them by others. The same set of factors that creates internalized oppression, binding people to the true source of their pain and hostility, also allows them to accept, and even to defend, the continuation of a unjust power relationship. The ‘colonial mentality’ is the intellectual dimension in the group of emotional and psychological pathologies associated with internalized oppression. Just as harmful to society as self-hate and hostility are to individuals, the colonial mentality can be thought of as a mental state that blocks recognition of the existence or viability of traditional perspectives: it prevents people from seeing beyond the conditions created by the [colonialist] society to serve its own interests. The colonial mentality is recognizable in the gradual assumption of the values, goals and perspectives that make up [the oppressive system.]¹⁰³

The notion of blood quantum, of race itself, is an example *par excellence* of colonialism’s legacy of cognitive imperialism, because blood quantum and race have become so embedded in the minds of both the federal governments of the United States and Canada and the Native peoples that these truly oppressive and imperialist concepts have for long been mis-recognized as factual and inevitable (or irreplaceable) ways of defining and identifying tribal people. To take blood quantum and race for granted as legitimate identifiers of indigenous or tribal peoples is assist in building those cognitive prisons so essential for the maintenance of the imperial hegemony of race. The bottom line, as expressed by a columnist for *Indian Country Today*, is this:

Now the blood quantum requirements are having exactly the pernicious effect on many native Peoples they were intended to

¹⁰³ Alfred, p 70.

have. Lots of children and grandchildren of tribal citizens do not qualify for enrollment... We are not talking about the pseudo-Indians who have zero native ancestors or cultural ties. These are real Indian kids and many of them speak their language, practice their traditional religion, contribute to their nation and, in fact, are the future of their nation.¹⁰⁴

This is the ultimate expression of racial oppression: the alienation of family, the dispossession of indigenous individuals by their own tribes. And yet many Native people and tribes do not yet perceive any other way of being, caught up as they are in the daily needs of survival. When oppressed people are so forced to attend to issues of hunger, poverty, homelessness, lack of employment, illness and disease, social dysfunction, displacement, etc., their survival efforts become competitively individualized and the attendance to tribal needs for ethnic survival is obscured.¹⁰⁵ As Bourdieu postulates,

Crisis is a necessary condition for a questioning of doxa but is not in itself a sufficient condition for the production of critical discourse... The dominated classes have an interest in pushing back the limits of doxa and exposing the arbitrariness of the taken for granted; the dominant classes have an interest in defending the integrity of doxa...¹⁰⁶

The crisis or series of overlapping crises suffered by indigenous people in North America can be and are readily understood to be linked to colonialism and oppression. Yet it is difficult when in a crisis condition to create the kind of “critical discourse” that can create a way to see beyond oppression to its root cause in racial hegemony. By keeping indigenous people in a state of crisis, racial hegemony forces them to focus on the immediate survival needs, shifting attention to individual survival and away from

¹⁰⁴ Harjo, *ICT*, 02/14/2001.

¹⁰⁵ See Smith. Also, Douville in Humphrey.

cultural survival. This effect of eclipsing culture and cultural survival with the urgencies of individual survival undermines any attempt at a sustained formation and articulation of a counter-hegemonic position capable of dismantling race and asserting (or reasserting) alternatives. To effect change, Bourdieu suggests that:

It is only when the dominated have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them through logical structures reproducing the social structures...and [of lifting] the institutionalized or internalized censorships which it implies, i.e. when social classifications become the object and instrument of class struggle, that the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such...¹⁰⁷

Several advocates of indigenous self-determination, including Smith, Robbins, Lawrence, and Alfred, believe that such “material and symbolic means” reside in indigenous tribal identities: in indigenous languages, histories and forms of governance, and in indigenous culture, social structures and values. Lawrence states,

To speak of how pervasively the Indian Act (in Canada) of federal Indian legislation (in the United States) has permeated the ways in which native peoples think of themselves is not to deny native people the agency to move beyond its logic. Nor does it suggest that traditional ways of understanding self in relation to other people, and the land, have been entirely effaced. Understanding how colonial governments have regulated Native identity is essential for Native people, in attempting to step away from the colonizing frameworks that have enmeshed out lives, and as we struggle to revive the identities and ways of living that preceded colonization.¹⁰⁸

Race *is* hegemonic and *does* create cognitive prisons and oppression that lead to crisis, however, the process of racialization is incomplete. One reason for that incompleteness

¹⁰⁶ Bourdieu, p 164.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

is that indigenous communities have retained throughout centuries of colonization and crisis many of those qualities that make them indigenous ethnic families. Indigenous identities, tribal identities, existed before the racial worldview, and thus exist outside the realm of doxa, making them capable of producing the material and symbolic means necessary for rejecting the “reality of race.”

¹⁰⁸ Lawrence, p 1.

CHAPTER FIVE
MATERIAL AND SYMBOLIC MEANS:
LIBERATION, RESTORATION AND AUTONOMY

What does Bourdieu mean by “critical discourse” and what are the “material and symbolic means” he says are necessary for its creation? Critical discourse is the act of articulating a counter-hegemonic position which reveals the arbitrariness of doxa, thus breaking down the hegemonic power of the doxa principle to control reality. Therefore, critical discourse is resistance. Material and symbolic means are elements of a reality which does not originate within doxa nor is it defined by doxa; as such, material and symbolic means are the ideas, philosophies, terminology, definitions, perceptions, language, practices, social structures, etc., which exist outside of doxa but have been suppressed by it. These material and symbolic means enable critical discourse; thus critical discourse is also a form of transcendence in that it is the essential first step in the process of self-determination and decolonization. It is not the only step, but it is necessary as the first step because it is the act of identifying the doxa as arbitrary and of cracking open those “unassailable superstructures”¹⁰⁹ like race so that other decolonizing and self-determining acts have a space in which to take root.

Forbes emphasizes that “authentic self-determination in terms of identity cannot take place while people exist in a state of intellectual and emotional subservience to

¹⁰⁹ Spencer, p 127.

racism and colonialism.”¹¹⁰ Ending that subservience and achieving self-determination involves using indigenous material and symbolic means to create critical discourse through three strategic stages of action: 1) a counter-hegemonic/liberation phase of identifying and breaking down cognitive prisons; 2) a restoration phase for the re-articulation of non-hegemonic, indigenous identities and realities; and 3) the exercising of indigenous nationhood and autonomy as a barrier to hegemonic resurgence.

Liberation begins with recognizing the arbitrariness of race, with a comprehension of the multiple ways in which race has functioned to serve imperialism and to oppress indigenous peoples into a state of crisis. It involves the acknowledgement that some of the crisis Native peoples experience today is generated by the reiteration of racial oppression within tribal communities and that already the use of race as a signifier of Native identity threatens survival of family, community, culture and tribal nation. AS Gonzalez and Rodriguez observe, “when nation-states define who is indigenous, it is often for the purpose of elimination—or it has that effect.”¹¹¹ Liberation means addressing head-on the fact that racial identification through blood quantum policies will lead to statistical extinction.

Spencer understands the enormous challenge of enabling cognitive liberation from race, saying: “Questioning a concept so embedded and so naturalized as race always involves the breaking up of foundations and the toppling of superstructures that appear

¹¹⁰ Forbes, p 35.

¹¹¹ Gonzalez and Rodriguez, p 39.

unassailable.”¹¹² Race presents a formidable cognitive prison, because race and the idealized notion of “Indian blood” have become so deeply entangled with Native issues of identity, economic survival, tribal redefinition, and political power. For many Native people *doing something about* the destructiveness of race presents a difficult challenge in the light of past and current crises of poverty, cultural disintegration, social disorientation, depression and despair. Ultimately, such crises will continue until indigenous people can move beyond the crisis-driven acts of individual survival and attend to collective survival as indigenous entities. On-going crises and oppression are the reason, Smith reminds us, that an ongoing and thorough analysis of imperialism is necessary.

Within these sorts of social realities, questions of imperialism and the effects of colonization may seem to be merely academic; sheer physical survival is far more pressing. The problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies and institutions to deny the historical formations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history, to all sense of hope. To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly agree with all that has been said about us. To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake communities, cultures, languages and social practices—all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.¹¹³

Smith realizes the urgency of attending to physical and psychological suffering, but instead of encouraging the survival of individuals through complicity or acquiescence (which lead to eventual collective demise), Smith advocates the necessity of resistance to survival as indigenous peoples. This resistance depends of the transformation from a

¹¹² Spencer, p 127.

state of crisis in which individuals compete with or alienate one another for individual survival to a renewed awareness of the much bigger issue at stake: survival of tribes as indigenous, autonomous, self-defining political and cultural entities. Like Smith, Lawrence, Alfred, Pewewardy and numerous other indigenous people advocate greater awareness of the processes of imperialism which continue today, and they similarly advocate cultural restoration and the revival historical consciousness as essential elements for healing and survival. Responding successfully to crisis entails both an understanding of how crisis has been created and sustained as well as an assertion of counter-hegemonic efforts of liberation. According to Robbins,

Any serious effort on the part of Native Americans to change these circumstances will therefore necessarily assume the form of decolonization struggles. And,... the process by which the colonial structure was created sheds considerable light on the means and methods that will necessarily attend such expressions of indigenous self-determination in the years ahead.¹¹⁴

Decolonization begins with freeing one's mind from a colonialist mindset. Marie Battiste evokes the concept of "cognitive imperialism," a process by which indigenous peoples participate in their own oppression by internalizing it and repeating the mode of thought of the oppressors. Writing about a series of meetings among indigenous peoples who participated in the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Battiste says, "We came to see colonization as a system of oppression rather than as personal or local prejudice. We came to understand that it is the systemic nature of

¹¹³ Smith, p 4.

¹¹⁴ Robbins, p 90-91.

colonization that creates cognitive imperialism, our cognitive prisons.”¹¹⁵ By changing how they viewed oppression, the indigenous scholars sought to find a conceptual space into which they could reassert indigenous ways of thought that would validate and strengthen their indigenous perspectives. Their hope was, is, to empower oppressed indigenous people by revitalizing indigenous thought processes and worldviews and using those indigenous frames of reference to identify how colonialism is a hegemonic system that has supplanted their own modes of understanding with an oppressive one. “We discovered that we could not be the cure if we were the disease.”¹¹⁶

Acknowledging participation in oppression, Battiste suggests, creates Native awareness of the “need to comprehend, resist and transform the crises related to the dual concerns of the effect that colonization has had on Indigenous peoples and the ongoing erosion of Indigenous languages, knowledge and culture[s] as a result of colonization.”¹¹⁷ In order to address effectively the ongoing oppression of racialization and colonization effectively, Native people will have formulate and utilize counter-hegemonic alternatives to racialization, alternatives which already exist within each specific indigenous society.

Taiiaki Alfred encourages Native people to take this action, adding:

Many people recognize the obvious injustices and misuses of power, and the absence of traditional values, in the new structures, but they can only point to the problems. The lack of any coherent strategy to solve them suggests that native people need to go beyond the divisive...politics and Western-style institutions...and develop

¹¹⁵ Battiste, p *xviii*.

¹¹⁶ Battiste, p *xvii*.

¹¹⁷ Battiste, p 5-6.

solutions for themselves from within their own cultural frameworks, reuniting themselves as individuals with their collectivity.¹¹⁸

As Alfred suggests, the solution to oppression and crisis is not a simple matter of letting go of what has been identified as harmful, but a gradual process of searching for solutions to a very entrenched and complex set of problems. Addressing racialization and identity distortion—and the oppression these imperialist actions have effected—presents a serious challenge on many fronts. Bonita Lawrence articulates the difficult position of Native people due to the institutionalization and internalization of race:

It is a far from straightforward matter to rupture the “grammar” of these [imperialist, racial] discourses once they have been put into place. Not the least of the problem is that we still live under conditions of colonization,...where traditional forms of regulating who [is] or [is] not a member of a Native society have been deliberately and viciously suppressed. In the interests of survival, communities often find it safer to maintain “the devil they know,” embracing colonial frameworks about Native identity because they represent tried and true ways of maintaining boundaries against white society. However, it also points to the extent that the “grammar” of regulatory regimes has shaped how Native identity is conceptualized.¹¹⁹

Rejecting race seems impossible; indeed several critics of racialization, such as Wilson, Strong and Van Winkle, doubt that it is possible.¹²⁰ This perception of race as insurmountable is part of the imperialistic dominance which empowers race as a cognitive prison: even though Native people witness its harmfulness, they have become too dependent on race (as have the imperialists) that they simply cannot conceive of a way to dismantle it nor can they imagine an alternative. And yet, the alternative, as

¹¹⁸ Alfred, p 4-5

¹¹⁹ Lawrence, p11.

Alfred, Smith, and Lawrence have pointed out, *already* exists within the indigenous concepts of identity specific to each tribe and defined through tribal languages, kinship terms and social structures, eclipsed as it is behind racial terminology and blood quantum policies. These indigenous concepts are material and symbolic means which provides a strategy for liberation from race.

One part of that strategy is a critique of blood quantum, its effects on tribes and individuals, and the consideration of possible alternatives from within indigenous foundations. Already many tribes have stopped using blood quanta for tribal membership criteria, and their doing so can demonstrate to other tribes that such a first step is possible. An awareness of the fragmentation, alienation and identity usurpation caused by the utilization of blood quantum motivates many Native American peoples advocate an immediate end to the use of blood quantum to confer identity in any capacity. Calling blood quantum a divide and conquer tactic, they have witnessed its destructive impacts on their societies, families and individuals. Outspoken activist Russell Means has criticized the use of blood quantum to determine Indian identity, whether it be by the federal government or by tribes.

Our treaties say nothing about your having to be such-and-such a degree of blood to be covered...[W]hen the federal government made its guarantees to our nations in exchange for our land, it committed to provide certain services to us as we defined ourselves. As nations and as people... Now we have Indian people [recognized tribal members] who spend most of their time trying to prevent other Indian people from being recognized as such, just so that a few more crumbs—crumbs from the federal table—

¹²⁰ Wilson, p ; Strong and Van Winkle, p 562 .

may be available to them, personally... We are acting like colonized peoples, like subject peoples.¹²¹

M. Annette Jaimes says Native peoples are “at a crossroads” where the choice is between asserting self-determination (beginning with regaining control over indigenous self-definition and over tribal membership criteria) and succumbing to subordination and eventual statistical extermination by blood quantum and racial mathematics.¹²²

Blood quantum presents a serious threat to tribal social and leadership structures by redefining who is and who is not a member. Jesse Taken Alive, a tribal councilman at Standing Rock, advocates traditional style tribal leadership and with it an end to blood quantum membership criteria, because blood quantum prohibits a more inclusive method of determining membership, one that is based in kinship.¹²³ The resultant loss of kin by blood quantum policies has negative effects on leadership, social and economic obligations between kin, and thus the well-being and cohesion of tribes.¹²⁴

Darrell Kipp, language instructor at the Piegan Institute, a Blackfeet immersion school, realizes the value of indigenous languages to identity, because language identifies each family member according to tribal kinship, unlike race and blood quantum which define children away from tribe—either by partial identification as not-tribe/not-Native (*e.g.* ¼ Dakota, implying ¾ not) or by alienation altogether (“too little Indian blood.”). Liberation from imperialist linguistic and identity domination is essential, says Kipp, because “Unless we free our minds, we cannot get a definition of our own. These

¹²¹ Russell Means, quoted in Nagel, p244, and in Jaimes, p 130.

¹²² Jaimes, p 137.

¹²³ Jesse Taken Alive, interviewed in Humphrey.

Blackfeet children will define us. These are our children, our relatives; they are ultimately our definition.”¹²⁵ Kipp makes a very profound and important observation here—that a tribe is defined by its children, by the people who carry its identity into the future—and yet blood quantum policies dispossess tribes of their children and thus of their future existence. Adamant that blood quantum is an issue which adult tribal members need to address immediately, indigenous advocate Suzan Shown Harjo says, “It is irresponsible for parents to disenfranchise their children [from tribal citizenship] or burden their lives with homelessness or deculturalization.”¹²⁶

Dispossessing younger generations of their tribal, collective identities and cultures by the usage of blood quantum weakens tribes by giving authority to imperialist ideology and practices while simultaneously muting or negating indigenous determination. Race changes the perception, conceptualization, articulation and affirmation of individual and tribal identity such that being a tribal member is no longer indicative of ethnic, cultural or political identity. In an editorial for *Indian Country Today*, John C. Mohawk expresses the difference between being a tribal member by blood quantum and being a citizen of an indigenous nation. “The colonists were very successful “racializing” indigenous identities such that people talk about being 25 percent of this or 40 percent of that, but one does not belong to a nation based on one’s blood quantum. Belonging to an indigenous nation is a way of being in the world. Holding a membership card is not a

¹²⁴ Victor Douville and Jesse Taken Alive, quoted in Humphrey.

¹²⁵ Kipp, p 6.

¹²⁶ Harjo, *NAJ*, p 82.

way of being...”¹²⁷ Today, shared culture or “way of being in the world” may define individuals as *indigenous* tribal persons, but this identity has been subordinated to race. Yet Mohawk, like many others, recognizes that a racialized identity is a façade, not a true identity, and that tribes as racial groups are not the same as indigenous nations.

Liberation from race means rejecting racial terminology and stereotypes, the imperialist and oppressive language that has taken over the identification process. It means discarding the fragmentation of blood quantum and refusing to accept in self-fracturing identities, which only serve to reify race and to further oppression. Getting serious about decolonization and an end to oppression requires the using the material and symbolic means of alternative (indigenous) identities to disprove racially-based misunderstandings, such as a person not looking “like an Indian” or being a “half-blood.” It means responding to divisive racializing questions such as “How much Indian are you?” with positive, non-fragmenting answers like, “All of me.” For instance, African-American Rainier Spencer gives this kind of affirmative response when he writes of his own discovery of himself as a whole person:

It was, finally, with more than a bit a of shock and disappointment that I came to realize that all my life I had—by accepting that I was black and by accepting that I was mixed—bought fully into a doctrine of white supremacy, ... I was endorsing the most subtle and pervasive form of white supremacy ever to exist. The perfect hegemony is the one you never notice.¹²⁸

Such a revelatory experience of one’s own wholeness is an act of countering racial hegemony. Jack Forbes insists that race must be rejected because it undermines the

¹²⁷ Mohawk, *ICT*,

right to self-definition and traps people with Native American and African ancestry into identification as only “black” under the One Drop Rule.¹²⁹

The arbitrary and degrading categories developed under colonialism must be totally discarded as a part of the process of personal and popular liberation... We are not “black” because of being part-African, nor are we “Indian” because of being part American. National and/or ethnic identity cannot be determined automatically by genes, and probably never has been except under modern racism.¹³⁰

Through racialization, European and Euro-American imperialists have attempted—and to some extent succeeded, at least in part—to transform indigenous societies into subordinate, colonized entities in which race is the symbolic capital necessary for political, economic and existential survival. The hegemony of race pushes Native peoples to deny or negate their own and each other’s indigenous identities and encourages the neglect of tribal identity. Surviving this oppression as indigenous entities requires not just the end of blood quantum criteria, but an all out rejection of race and the distorted identities it creates, and instead of these an assertion of self-identification by criteria that is not racial, imperialist, or oppressive. Lawrence states,

For Indigenous people, to be defined as a race is synonymous with having our Nations dismembered. And yet, the reality is that Native people in Canada and the United States for over a century now have been classified by race and subjected to colonization processes that reduced diverse nations to common experiences of subjugation. Contemporary native identity therefore exists in an uneasy balance between concepts of generic “Indianness” as racial identity and of specific “tribal” identity as Indigenous nationhood. In general, Native resistance to colonization rejects notions of “pan-

¹²⁸ Spencer, p 137.

¹²⁹ Forbes, p 34.

¹³⁰ Forbes, p 36.

Indian” identities that can, at best, only aspire for equality within a settler state framework. For Indigenous people, resisting colonial relations involves a refusal to accept the authority of Canada or the United States as settler states, and a focus on rebuilding the nations that the colonizer has sought to destroy.¹³¹

If a reinvigorated assertion of nationhood is necessary for overcoming the crises of colonization and racialization, then rebuilding the nations, as Lawrence says, depends foremost on regaining control over the identity of those nations and over the identities which belonging to those nations confers. Survival of tribes and indigenous entities, as nations, depends first on reclaiming the process of identification. In other words, Self-determination starts with self-definition. “To acquire freedom in the decolonized and dealienated order, the colonized must break their silence and struggle to retake possession of their humanity and identity,” advocates Henderson.¹³² Rejecting the language of race and all racial qualifiers (and quantifiers) is an act of restoration of tribal self. According to Terrence Douglas,

the application and use of new terminology must, at its most basic level, be the beginning of a process whereby indigenous people reassert their identity as distinct people[s]. By rejecting the old terminology and attached stereotypes, indigenous people will be able to assert an identity premised upon the traditional values, culture and ideologies of their indigenous nations.¹³³

“Only our ancestors, our elders, and our cultural teaching can define who we are. There is no government number for the belonging of a soul,” observe Gonzalez and

¹³¹ Lawrence, p 2.

¹³² Henderson, p 58.

¹³³ Douglas, p 31.

Rodriguez.¹³⁴ Freed from race, identity can be reunited with the culture, with family, with tribally specific indigenous ideas, with knowledge of histories, with a way of being in the world. Douglas emphasizes that:

If we are to know our identity and understand the history of our individual nations, let it be the identity and history told by our elders, culture and values, not by the settler society's statesmen, historians and ideologies. The understanding of such an identity, based upon traditional values, culture and ideologies is not a feel-good healing process, nor is it an attempt at political correctness. The assertion of such an identity is an inherent right of indigenous people, as self-determining people.¹³⁵

Strong and Van Winkle's research on Washoe identity revealed that there are two sets of definitions that run side by side: 1) the official, formalized definitions based on federal recognition of tribes and membership criteria such as blood quantum, and 2) the unofficial, informal definition of Indian based upon community acceptance and cultural participation.¹³⁶ Strong and Van Winkle's observation is important because while it demonstrates a specific example of traditional methods of group-inclusion being subordinated to imperialist ones, it also proves that these indigenous definitions still continue to exist. Among tribal communities at large it is not an uncommon phenomenon for an unenrolled community member who is involved in the community, speaks the language, and follows cultural protocols to be considered by cultural criteria a tribal member, even when not enrolled.¹³⁷ Such informal, subjective community-decided recognition demonstrates the persistence of culturally-oriented, indigenously-defined

¹³⁴ Gonzalez and Rodriguez, p 37.

¹³⁵ Douglas, p 31.

¹³⁶ See Strong and Van Winkle.

identification systems at the core of tribal communities—indigenous material and symbolic means which are alternatives to blood quantum and race.

Indigenous people have never lost their ethnic and tribal core. Even though modified and developed, the core is still there. Only our awareness of it has dimmed. Only our embracing of it has waned. Yet the core chooses to remain.”¹³⁸

The process of deculturalization has reduced this core. English has displaced indigenous languages, often forcibly, and supplanted indigenous kinship terminology with Western ones that do not connote the same kinds of relationships or responsibilities. Blood quantum and racialization have alienated descendants from their families and tribes, thus dispossessing them of their cultures. Deculturalization and disintegration continue to threaten survival of tribes as self-determining, indigenous societies. Nevertheless, tribes have, against the odds, maintained enclaves of cultural and linguistic strength—at the center of which are their indigenous languages.

Gonzales and Rodriguez describe language as “the placenta of cultural identity.”¹³⁹ Language transmits culture, at one providing meaning, structure and affirmation to all aspects of society. Through language people access and share knowledge, values, histories, lessons, and the oral traditions which demonstrate social and behavioral norms. Instructs and informs. As such, language is an exceptionally powerful means for the restoration of individual and collective cultural identities. Dr.

¹³⁷ *See, for example*, Skornogski.

¹³⁸ Pewewardy, p 10.

¹³⁹ Gonzales and Rodriguez, p 37.

Richard Littlebear of the Northern Cheyenne tribe describes the immense significance of his language and its capacity for individual and collective identification, saying:

“I am a speaker and listener of one of the first languages of this land—Cheyenne. I enjoy speaking this language with fellow Cheyenne speakers because embedded in this language are lessons that guide our daily lives and, thus, all that we are as human beings. We cannot leave behind that essence of our being. It cannot be legislated out of us, beaten out of us, nor snuffed to nothingness. The United States government and some schools have tried, but they have failed to suppress our language and destroy our culture.

For me, the Cheyenne language binds me to my reservation, my relatives, my culture, my fellow tribal members, and to life in general....

Furthermore, Cheyenne is the language of our hallowed ancestors, our sacred rituals, our spiritualism, and our humor. It holds within it the respectful way I approach other people; the awed manner in which I say the place names of our sacred sites,...and the reverential way in which I talk to the creator.”¹⁴⁰

Language is paramount to identity. It functions to unite each individual with the collective community and to define individual identity in relation to tribal identity. Language is important for tribal survival because “...language already has both knowledge and law enfolded in it. Without access to their Aboriginal language, Aboriginal people can neither create nor sustain a postcolonial order. They can have access to Aboriginal cultures through English, but they cannot grasp the inherent beauty of Aboriginal worldviews and language through English. They end up living a translated life.”¹⁴¹ Conrad LaFromboise, a Blackfeet man, observes, “We can go many places to learn to be a western man, a western woman. Where can we go to learn to be a Blackfeet

¹⁴⁰ Littlebear, p 10-11. (Check page numbers)

¹⁴¹ Henderson, p 10.

man, a Blackfeet woman?”¹⁴² To have a Blackfeet identity, he says, one needs to learn the language, “because language is at the center of what it means to be Blackfeet.”¹⁴³

The widespread near-extinction of Native languages has had serious negative impacts on tribes. Language loss contributes to social dysfunction, economic strife, and tribal disintegration, because it weakens the social structure of tribes through alteration of kinship.¹⁴⁴ For example, Western conceptions of kinship do not carry the same sense of social obligation and relatedness as may be present in indigenous formations of kinship. Victor Douville, a professor at Sinte Gleska University observes that in the past, when Lakota people identified and related to one another through Lakota language, “language set the pattern for respectful behavior.” That behavior, including social and economic responsibilities, was conveyed through language, especially through kinship terms, but when few people speak Lakota, those terms and obligations cannot be taught and the tribe starts to disintegrate.¹⁴⁵

Regarding the loss of indigenous language fluency, Kipp says there is a need for reconciliation between generations, for people who did not learn their indigenous language to not resent it that their parents and grandparents did not teach them.¹⁴⁶ Instead, Kipp encourages those who did not learn the language to understand the historical situation—that for a century indigenous languages and speakers were regarded as inferior and many speakers were punished for speaking their Native languages, so

¹⁴² *Quoted in* Stromnes, p 12.

¹⁴³ Stromnes, p 12.

¹⁴⁴ Douville, in Humphrey.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

much so that parents tried to protect their children from shame. “The truth we found is that they didn’t teach us the language because they didn’t want us to be abused like they were in school.”¹⁴⁷ To those who want to learn, Kipp advises:

You can now demonstrate your love for [your parents and grandparents] by protecting and shielding the language in a different way. You can begin to embrace it, to use it, to foster it, to renew it, to teach it to your daughters, to teach it to your sons.¹⁴⁸

By instructing social obligations and defining kinship, language is an important symbolic means for countering and transcending racialization. Furthermore, by being the “placenta” which transmits and sustains cultural identity, indigenous languages are a powerful means for combating the oppression of colonization, including the erasure or denial of tribal identities. “If the suppression of history is an element of colonization, then the restoration of history is the antidote.”¹⁴⁹ Language is an essential means for reviving historic consciousness, for remembering and restoring indigenous identities. Smith adds,

Coming to know the past has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things.¹⁵⁰

Indigenous knowledge, including histories, are necessary for survival as of tribes, as indigenous nations. Many Native people who recognize the urgency and necessity of indigenous language revitalization because of the relationship between language, tribal

¹⁴⁶ Kipp, p 7-8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 5.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 8.

¹⁴⁹ Pewewardy, p 12.

¹⁵⁰ Smith, p 34.

composition, and self-determination. In the words of Darrell Kipp, “We finally understood, we finally realized that the real key factor is knowledge of yourself, of our tribes.”¹⁵¹ Language is a bearer of knowledge and so it is fundamental to the restoration of historic consciousness, tribal histories and oral traditions, indigenous values and social norms, and identity. Language conveys culture, and, notes Pewewardy, “culture provides the lens that lends meaning to what we see... Our cultures tell us what things mean, and meaning is of primary importance.”¹⁵² Alex White Plume agrees, stating,

Who we are as a people is not defined by what’s on paper. It’s the language, ceremonies and relationship to Mother Earth that gives us our identity. It’s living our lives according to the teachings that make us who we are. Once we lose these things, then we’ll just be like brown white people.¹⁵³

Taiaiake Alfred says that Native people today have a moral obligation to address the survival needs of their communities, survival that depends of the resolution of crisis and the cessation of oppression and colonization.

We have a responsibility to recover, understand, and preserve these [indigenous] values,... because renewal of respect for traditional values is the only lasting solution to the political, economic and social problems that beset our people. To bring these roots to new fruition, we must invigorate the principles embedded in the ancient teachings, and use them to address our contemporary problems.¹⁵⁴

Similarly, Lawrence acknowledges that restoration of authenticity, of indigenous and traditional systems and principles, is not a matter of instantaneous and unproblematic

¹⁵¹ Kipp, p3.

¹⁵² Mohawk, *NAJ*, p 41.

¹⁵³ Alex White Plume, quoted in Taliman, p 17.

¹⁵⁴ Alfred, p 5.

return to the ways of old. Rather, she suggests, like Alfred, that within pre-colonial indigenous societies are teachings that may be useful for survival today:

It is important for Native people to critically question common-sense notion about “authentic” Nativeness, as well as ways of thinking about nationhood and tradition that suggest that they can emerge unscathed from centuries of colonization and be immediately and easily accessible to us. At the same time, survival as Native peoples demands that we challenge the erasure of Indigenous nations by embracing our nationhood and revitalizing our traditions. Indigenous sovereignty, then, must involve the different nations recreating a future truer to their pasts than the intervening colonial frameworks.

Appealing to indigenous and traditional cultural and political principles implies a kind of authenticity. “Indigenous” and “traditional” are often confused with “original”—implying a historical state of purity and constancy. This partial misunderstanding of authenticity can cloud our understandings “indigenous” and “traditional” if it is the only meaning we give to authenticity. It is, therefore, necessary to develop an understanding of authenticity (and “indigenous” and “traditional”) that does not perpetuate historicized, stagnating essentialism. This new understanding conceptualizes authenticity as historical consciousness and autonomy. According to Smith,

the belief in an authentic self is framed within humanism but has been politicized by the colonial world in way which invokes simultaneous meanings; it does appeal to an idealized past when there was no colonizer, to our strengths in surviving thus far, to our language as our uninterrupted link to our histories, to the ownership of our lands,... to our authentic selves as a people. Although this may seem overly idealized, these symbolic appeals remain strategically important in political struggles.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 73.

Needing to broaden this definition to one that can be applied in practice, Smith defines indigenous authenticity as part of the “language of critique” by which indigenous societies understand from their own perspectives the impacts of colonization and oppression. This authenticity comes from the remembering of “a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples...[with] absolute authority over our lives.”¹⁵⁶ Smith’s use of authenticity is important and useful to this discussion because it is grounded in historical consciousness (remembering “a time before”), in the memory wholeness (“we were intact”), in self-understanding (“as indigenous peoples”) and in the awareness of autonomy (“with absolute authority over our lives”). In other words, authenticity arises from self-definition, self-knowledge and self-determination.

In her essay, “Federal Indian Identification Policy—A Usurpation of Indigenous Sovereignty in North America,” Jaimes asserts first and foremost that identity is a matter of sovereignty and that by “international jurisprudence and human decency” American Indian groups “hold compelling legal and moral rights” as sovereign nations. Furthermore, Jaimes posits that it is “axiomatic that any such national identity is inherently entitled to exercise the prerogative of determining for itself the criteria by which its citizenry, or “membership,” is to be recognized...”¹⁵⁷ Following Alfred, Smith and Lawrence, we can see that there are possibilities for how membership is determined according to specific indigenous traditions. Mohawk reminds us that every indigenous

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 24.

¹⁵⁷ Jaimes, p 123.

society had its own ways defining individual and collective identity,¹⁵⁸ criteria which are symbolic and material means for resisting and transcending racialized, colonized identities.

Restoration of indigenous autonomy means redefining tribes as nations with self-defined political power and culture. Therefore, says Lawrence, “membership in Indigenous nations is something that can, and must, be strategized, clearly articulated, and in some ways reconceptualized.”¹⁵⁹ Membership, understood from this perspective, becomes citizenship and can be determined by each tribal nation’s particular (indigenous) criteria. This assertion of tribal nationhood—created through liberation from imperialist identification systems and oppressive racializing principles and sustained by the restoration of indigenous self-definition—enables tribal survival and empowers decolonization. Tsosie inquires,

Indian nations will increasingly be called upon to consider the implications of tribal citizenship and tribal membership. Are they shaped by social, political, and economic pressures? By cultural teachings rooted in Native tradition[s]? The consequences of this discussion will be significant for many generations to come.¹⁶⁰

One tribe that is having to reckon with its membership is the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. Despite having discontinued the use of blood quantum for tribal membership and relying on lineal descent, the Cherokee Nation nevertheless is involved in a dilemma regarding race. As discussed in Chapter Five, the descendants of black freedmen of the

¹⁵⁸ Mohawk, *NAJ*, p 42.

¹⁵⁹ Lawrence, p 13.

¹⁶⁰ Tsosie, p 23.

Cherokee, many of whom are culturally practicing Cherokees with Cherokee ancestry, have been denied membership or disenrolled by the tribe because they are black and cannot always prove their ancestry. Today court cases are pending to determine whether or not the Cherokee have wronged these individuals. Underneath this issue lies a much larger one which at least one Cherokee person recognizes: if the Cherokee are determined to be correct in their racial exclusion of the descendants of freedmen, then the door is open for a more rigid, racially-based definition of Cherokees and the reintroduction of blood-based membership criteria.¹⁶¹ The result of this potential action for the Cherokee nation would be a drastic reduction in their membership, in addition to the loss of control over determining it.

While Martinez protects tribal rights to determine in their own manner tribal membership, Congress, the Supreme Court and the Bureau of Indian Affairs also continue to have a say. For example, several tribes have had to petition Congress over the last decade for changes in membership criteria, and the Osage Nation in December of 2004 finally succeeded in getting Congress to pass a bill allowing for the continued acknowledgement of their tribe as well as for their ability to define their own membership according to their own criteria. What these situations suggest is that for continued recognition, tribes need to assert nationhood and autonomy and to relieve themselves of race, because one way or another, race will facilitate their termination or their statistical extinction.

¹⁶¹ See David Cornsilk in Sturm, p 194-198..

Changing demographic indicate that even a phenotypic definition of race is not a boundary that can be maintained into the future in a meaningful way (not that it necessarily was in the past). Law professor L. Scott Gould projects that based on Supreme Court decisions, the racial noose is tightening around indigenous groups necks, meaning that they must strengthen alternatives to race—such as cultural identity and nationhood—for continued recognition and survival.¹⁶² Gould analyzes several Supreme Court decisions¹⁶³ with attention to the conflicts between race, status and autonomy, and his concern is the ever increasing inclination of the Court to racialize tribes at the expense of their status as nations (undermining their autonomy and sovereignty) and ultimately their survival.

Gould calls race “the source of a profound predicament for tribes... partly because of federal policy toward tribal Indians, partly because of demographics, and partly because of the Supreme Court’s recent reconception of the source and extent of tribal power.”¹⁶⁴ Regarding Mancari (which has no Constitutional basis, grants tribes limited sovereignty based on status, and gives Congress plenary powers) and Rice (in which Justice Kennedy wrote for the majority that “ancestry can be a proxy for race,”), Gould says:

Mancari and Rice are legal metaphors for the kinds of difficulties our society has always had in its relationship with native peoples—the one affirming congressional responsibilities toward Indians when they are organized as tribes, the other disdaining groups as

¹⁶² See Gould.

¹⁶³ Such as: *Rice v Cayetano*, *Adarand*, *Morton V Mancari*, *Fisher*, *Antelope*, *Weeks*, *Colville*, *Yakima Nation*, and *Montana*.

¹⁶⁴ Gould, p 704.

being racial if instead of basing membership on ‘merit and essential qualities’ they base membership on a common ancestry. Each decision misses a revolution in demography. Being Indian is far less a matter of genetics than of genealogy.¹⁶⁵

Gould points to the ethnic and racial diversity within American Indian populations and argues that,

while some tribes may best protect their legal rights by guarding race-conscious benefits in the current law, in a day when tribal sovereignty has been radically diminished, and in which biology is softening the [phenotypical] boundaries, cultural survival for most tribes may depend on eliminating race as the essential criterion for membership.¹⁶⁶

Recognizing that “all tribes will have would-be members whose blood relationships with Indian ancestors are attenuated,” Gould argues that for continued recognition and future cultural survival, “what is surely of principal importance...is that race must play a diminished role” or be eliminated altogether.¹⁶⁷ Gould speculates there would be concrete legal and political advantages for tribes in forgoing race altogether and in asserting cultural distinction and political autonomy as boundaries of their legal identity; primarily he refers to regaining sovereignty lost in recent Supreme Court cases and suggests that broadened memberships would mean greater jurisdiction over people living on the reservations.¹⁶⁸

By eliminating race and blood quantum as criteria for membership and by relying on strengthened political and cultural identities, tribes promote their own survival. Gould

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 709.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p 710.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p 747.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p 769.

calls the changing demographic trend in which Native Americans are increasingly multi-racial the means for “a way to regain a measure for their sovereignty and assure the preservation of their cultures.”¹⁶⁹ Challenging bioessentialism, racial hegemony, and blood quantum policies are, therefore necessary step for tribes to take in the process of decolonization and survival.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p 748.

CHAPTER SIX CONSTANT VIGILANCE

To label race as a necessary but invincible evil or as a mere social construction constitutes a failure to address the underlying systemic problems it produces. Such inaction enables racialization and racial oppression to continue by not challenging the legitimacy of race through deeper analysis of its hegemonic structure and imperialist intent. We need to understand the history of Western colonialism in order to comprehend the current situation and in order to find solutions to lasting oppression. Doing this requires critical analysis of the means and mechanisms of imperialism. The cognitive prison of race entraps everyone, not just those whom it defines as “Indian.” The intention of racial hegemony is to alter the way all of us perceive one another and ourselves, because the domination has to be complete in order for the oppression to work—that is what hegemony is. This control is what Bourdieu is talking about in his theory of doxa. Cognitive imperialism is about making arbitrary and imperialist ideology seem natural and factual to everyone, so that everyone is controlled but largely unaware of this domination. One way to resist and survive the cognitive imperialism of race is to gain an understanding of how the ideology of biological race has been used as “truth” to create and justify oppression. By understanding the biological falseness and imperialist usefulness of race, people can begin to reject its use altogether and to assert powerful alternatives.

Naomi Zack outlines three paradigms of race, saying,

The ingredients of a racial paradigm at any given time would include a taxonomy of race, the criteria for membership in different races and their application to individuals, social customs and laws that pertain to race, moral beliefs about different race relations, expectations for change in social areas pertaining to race, ideologies of race, and beliefs about the connections between physical race and human psychic attributes. Because beliefs, rules, practices and formal social structures are all parts of it, a racial paradigm is not merely a symbolic system but its accompanying life-world as well.¹⁷⁰

Zack postulates that the first racial paradigm, beginning in seventeenth century and lasted until the early twentieth century, created a rigid racial hierarchy and assumed moral and biological justification for this stratification. Essentially this is the paradigm of white supremacy grounded in ideology of imperialism and reified by “science.”¹⁷¹ Recall that it was during this era that tribes became racialized through the use of blood quantum and the establishment of racial language that followed.

The second paradigm, according to Zack, lasted most of the twentieth century and is composed of scientific challenges and refutation of biological race.¹⁷² It is within this paradigm that race is recognized as a social construction rather than a biological fact, as the first paradigm assumed. Keep in mind, however, that during the twentieth century and even now, popular notions of race and federal Indian policy apparently still assume the “facts” of the first paradigm, specifically that races exist and can be quantified and measured and that this quantification can and should determine identity. Scientists of human biology and genetics have thoroughly disproved the existence of biological race,

¹⁷⁰ Zack, p 110.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p 111.

yet we continue to use the language created by the philosophy of biological race and in support of the moral justification for racism.

Zack suggests a third paradigm which rests on total acceptance that race is “biologically unreal.”¹⁷³ Initially, this paradigm involves thorough re-education for all parts of society about the realities of human biology and the non-reality of race, as scientific literacy is the goal. Secondly, it requires concrete changes in economics and politics, and these changes, say Zack depend on changes in discourse. She describes this process as:

...the practical one of rethinking, undoing, and redoing those aspects of ordinary life and discourse...which rely on assumptions that racial taxonomies and individual racial differences are real in ways that can be studied by biology. This revision will require a re-examination of received texts and the discovery and creation of new ones in many different fields. So far, the racial liberatory focus has been confined to issues of racism and reactions against it. Needed now will be concentration on the ways in which ungrounded taxonomies of race inform discourse. It will be necessary to reach a lucid understanding of what it literally and metaphorically means to use words and phrases such as these: Black, Indian, Jewish (or any kind of racial) blood, blood lines, mixed blood, pure blood, racial solidarity,...racial heritage, racial identity, or racial authenticity.¹⁷⁴

Hopefully this paper contributes to the critical analysis and new understanding advocated by Zack. Encouraging Native people to build on the past anti-imperialist and decolonizing efforts of indigenous activists, Rebecca Robbins also states that both Natives and non-Native people have responsibilities to fulfill towards decolonization:

Those of us who are indigenous to this land must now accept the responsibility of seizing every opportunity and doing the hard

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p 113-114.

work necessary to achieve the potential for liberation they created. No less must non-Indians—regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, or the story of how they got here—accept the responsibility of helping us to succeed. For only in this way can we transcend the bitter legacy we have mutually inherited, forging instead a new heritage of respect, cooperation, and freedom.¹⁷⁵

Agreeing with Robbins, Zack recognizes the need for coalitions of people to actively address the persistence of institutional and overt racism in the United States, and she sees the civil rights gained by nonwhites during the twentieth century as a slight forward change “given that the public still lives within a racial paradigm.” Stressing the need for further progress, Zack writes,

The next inch will have to be gained first within educated liberatory movements that have disabused themselves of empirically ungrounded biological notions of race, races, racial identities, and individual racial projects... We are now at High Noon, when war, terror, new projects of racialization, the complete corporate colonization of the world, and its attendant ecological depletion, demand a degree of vigilance, against which attachments to identities based on outdated science is frivolous.¹⁷⁶

Smith notes that in the West, the power to decide which Natives are or are not authentic is necessary for continued imperialistic domination, noting that the oppressors have “a very powerful tendency...to take this argument back to biological ‘essentialism’ related to race, because the idea of culture is much more difficult to control.”¹⁷⁷ Today, newly developing genetic tests which claim to be able to identify one’s “racial ancestry” very well may be one of the “new projects of racism.”

¹⁷⁵ Robbins, p 112.

¹⁷⁶ Zack, p 116-117.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, p 74.

Debra Harry, a Northern Paiute and the Executive Director of the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism, cautions that all genetic tests which supposedly “prove” Native American ancestry are highly problematic and unreliable in every way. Asserting that these tests cannot be made to really do what they say they are trying to do, Harry also remind us of the greater issue at stake:

For many Native people, perhaps foremost among these problems is that reliance on a genetic test as the arbiter of whether someone is native American or not relinquishes tribal sovereign ability to determine membership. Even taken on their own scientific terms, the tests cannot identify who is and who is not Native American. ...In reality, Native identity is based on a complexity of traditions, culture and social norms, not just biology.¹⁷⁸

Harry explains some of the many problems with the mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) tests which supposedly identify Native American haplotypes: first, these markers are not exclusive to Native Americans; second, and more significantly, mtDNA is only inherited, intact, from a person’s maternal great-grandmother, so, as Harry points out, “seven of your eight great-grandparents may be [Native American] and yet you would not be identified from this test [if your maternal great-grandmother was not Native.”¹⁷⁹ She similarly deflates the validity of the Y-chromosome test:

If a man has fifteen Native American great-great-grandparents, but his father’s father’s father’s father was non-Indian, that person will not appear to be Native American under this test. As much as 94 percent of a person’s genetic inheritance may be from Native Americans, but according to this test, one could be identified as non-Indian.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Harry, p 55.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p 54.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p 54-55.

Genetic tests beg the question: why look for genetic determinants at all if not just to prove that biological race exists on some infinitesimally small level? And for whom and for what purpose is this supposed genetic distinction useful? Clearly it would only have meaning to those who already subscribe to the idea of separate and distinct races, racial purity and by extension to racial hierarchies. That these tests are being developed says something about the direction racial thinking and racial classificatory systems are headed: back to biological essentialism, just as Smith predicted. If such tests are given validity, legitimated by being taken seriously, they will become the twenty-first century version of skin-scratch, hair-curl, skull-capacity tests used to justify continued racialization and racism. Harry challenges geneticists' claims that one purpose of their search for that one-tenth of percent of genetic variation is a desire to know the history of human populations, observing,

Some researchers...claim that contemporary indigenous populations are actually not 'indigenous' to the geographic areas they currently occupy. Such assertions are used by opponents of land claims and treaty rights, as well as contradicting indigenous peoples' knowledge about their original and histories.¹⁸¹

Recalling Bourdieu's warning that the "dominant classes" would seek to "defend the integrity of doxa,"¹⁸² it is not difficult to comprehend the imperialist usefulness in new genetic tests or race. Blood quantum has been scrutinized and proven invalid and impossible, so for race to maintain its grip, it requires a new, more sophisticated and seemingly unquestionable determinant in haplotypes. And, as in the theory of blood

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p 53.

¹⁸² Bourdieu, p 164.

quantum, the new genetic tests to determine “Nativeness” go beyond racialization for the purposes of identity manipulation and limitation. To deny on racial grounds the validity of indigenous societies’ identities, histories and cosmogonies which locate them as of this land is the ultimate act of dehumanization. Harry reminds us that the entire presumption of race as a significant identifier—even if it were biologically real—is preposterously inaccurate: “The most obvious problem here [with race] is that being Native American is a question of politics and culture, not biology.”¹⁸³

Strong and Van Winkle have said that blood is going to remain forever an important factor in Native identity.¹⁸⁴ That does not mean, however, that blood quantum and race must also persist, nor must blood continue to connote racialized identities. Tribal histories and knowledges—those indigenous perspectives which imperialists still seek to erase through increasingly abstract notions of race—already provide an alternative non-racial definition of blood. As articulated by Stephen Russell,

Every Cherokee is Cherokee in relation to the Trail Where We Cried, even the Eastern Band who hid from the soldiers so desperately that they let the Sacred Fire go out. Every Dine' is Dine' in relation to The Long Walk. Every Cheyenne is Cheyenne in relation to the massacres at Sand Creek and the Washita. The Indians of California, like the Inde' (Apache) of Arizona Territory, remember when there was a bounty on their scalps: men, women and children. These horrors mark our paths as clearly as tattoos on our arms.

This, I have come to understand is the blood that matters: the blood that was spilled...¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Harry, p 53.

¹⁸⁴ Strong and Van Winkle, p 562.

¹⁸⁵ Russell, p 74.

The blood that was shed is a reminder of similarly experienced histories in relation to colonization—this *actual* blood and these histories should not be mocked by the fictitious but genocidal weapon of racial blood. Today, and in the years to come, this blood of the millions of indigenous people who died in the wake of colonization remains meaningful. In response to this remembrance of lost Native lives and in honor of the lives of indigenous people today, another equally important kind of blood is being born in the restoration and revitalization of indigenous tribal identities. Harjo expresses this hope, saying:

We are breathing new life into ceremonies and traditions that were driven underground... We are laying our people to rest and welcoming sacred living beings into their cultural context. We are healing ourselves and freeing our families from suffocating poverty.

For many, traditions cannot be resurrected, but we all know enough to honor our past and to glean provident instructions from it... This is lifeblood of Native peoples, the essence of sovereign identity.¹⁸⁶

Russell and Harjo offer useful meanings to blood in relation to Native identity. Each of them focuses on tribal identity and the significance of blood to that. For Russell, historical consciousness is paramount: that the deaths of Native peoples are not forgotten and comprehending the significance of their suffering and sacrifice is necessary for constructing tribal identities today. Harjo looks at what makes tribes the unique and distinct societies they are, what precedes and transcends colonization and from that she has articulated a symbolic blood: lifeblood. Both of these perspectives on the material and symbolic significance of blood provide important and viable alternatives to blood

quantum and to the Western, racist, t fallacy of “Indian blood.” Perhaps such alternatives will help Native and non-Native people re-identify race as the imperialist fiction it is and inspire the support for indigenous tribal self-identification which is essential for tribal survival.

¹⁸⁶ Harjo, *NAJ*, p 82.

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