

Indigenous Nations Studies Programs: A Rainbow Bridge Across the Twenty-First Century?

An essay written upon the occasion of the first edition of the Journal of the Indigenous Nations Studies Program

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Introduction

As a First Nations faculty member at the University of Kansas, I am affiliated with the Indigenous Nations Studies Program in addition to my regular departmental assignment in the School of Education. The First Nations faculty have been asked to write essays that address the question, Why have an Indigenous Nations Studies Program and Journal? With this goal in mind, my first attempt was to address the question in the academic style to which I've become accustomed; e.g., using argumentation supported by citations, footnotes, and precise use of disciplinary jargon. Well into the project, I was still unable to connect the question with the points I wished to address.

I had a dream early in the next morning about the story of a woman's life that had been told to me by her son. During the time of my post-doctoral studies, I had the opportunity to teach my native language, Jagali (Cherokee) & Dijagali (Cherokee writing), to a young doctoral student whose studies were in a large English department. The young man spent much time telling me about his friend's mother's life and how difficult it had been. She was very near my own age and many of her experiences were similar to mine.

During the summer break, my student and his friend visited relatives in both the Western Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma and the Eastern Cherokee Nation in North Carolina. When the second year of our training began, my student had many stories to tell about reconnecting his life with that of his relatives. In doing so he also learned a great deal about his friend's mother. In an earlier dream I saw children whose midsections were hollow. Although I was unable to attach a meaning to this experience, I believe that the dream presented the idea of children without identities. My student's friend's mother represents one of these hollow children—children whose identities were stolen from them by relocation, alcohol, or the shame of Euro-American relatives dealing with a family member in an interracial marriage. I realized why there must be this Indigenous Nations Studies Program and a journal attached to it. For the sake of telling a story, I've chosen to tell her story in the first person. I do so because her story is our "herstories": the stories that I have heard from colleagues, friends, students, and strangers all of whom have lived with many of these experiences. Their stories are intertwined, sometimes entangled, in their interactions with the Euro-American institutions for whom they work. Identity is the solid ground upon which personality, academic achievement, and productive work are built. Identity is our language, our ancestors, our future generations, our souls. So, I (we) begin.

"You Just Haven't Found Your Voice Yet"

My doctoral advisor, a courageous woman who had fought many academic battles to achieve her full professorship (only the fourth woman awarded in the 119-year history of the university), spoke those words after I had questioned my ability to write for academic publication. Although only in the second year of my program, I was frustrated by the feelings I had about my writing. I didn't feel that I had any "ideas" that I could really express on paper in a way that other academics would understand. Guided by a sense of isolation, I continued to write in the academic style of the literature I had read during my studies.

My years of study ended successfully when I graduated with a 3.98 GPA¹ and my Ph.D. in Educational Psychology. The most difficult part of my final year was my dissertation proposal meeting. The various individuals on my committee, some of whom had years of disagreements with each other that they carried with them, spent nearly two-and-a-half hours asking me questions, some of which were not in the preview of the proposal. The dean of my school became a committee member at the time of the defense and expressed her admiration of my work, even though she did not understand all of the subtleties. Passing the defense was a formality. In the brief celebration afterwards with some close friends, I was too tired to really enjoy the occasion. But by the evening the flood of relief overtook me just before the recall of my advisor's comment began to nag in the back of my mind. Had my "voice" not been clear enough for her to understand? Or, was my dissertation not a work of my "voice?" What did people mean by "finding one's voice?"

The state in which I had lived for thirty years, in which I had raised my children, in which I had spent all of my adult life, was in a hiring freeze. Those state universities who had expressed an interest in hiring me were restrained from doing so because of the freeze. Consequently, I continued to work as a reading specialist in a central city private school whose children were 99% African American. The teaching staff was about half African-American and half Euro-American. Many of the Euro-American teachers had non-Euro-American partners and multiethnic children. Despite the poverty that surrounded the school and enveloped many of my students, the atmosphere of community that pervaded the school was a comfortable haven.

During the spring of that year, I traveled to the state in which my parents had lived. There were several reasons for my visit. My father had passed away when I was 18 during my freshman year in college, and I had not spent much time there since then. My mother, having moved back from her retirement home in Florida, was having health problems and needed someone to go with her to the doctor's appointments she had scheduled. Her primary health problem was her drinking, but she had also begun to lose weight and had lost interest in being with people. She had isolated herself in her apartment and the staff at her independent living center were concerned about her situation.

We stood before the elevators after returning from one doctor's appointment. My mother spied three elderly ladies, like herself, staring at us. Although I hadn't noticed, I would have attributed this to being what elderly ladies do for most of their days. It certainly was a favorite pastime of my own grandmother, who could tell us what was happening in every household on the block. I was about to have validated for me one of many reasons why "finding my voice" had been problematic. Much to my surprise, my mother's response was to loudly call out, "What are YOU looking at? I know she's the wrong color, but she is my daughter!" Stunning! I couldn't even think about what she meant for the next few minutes.

When we got to her apartment and after I fixed dinner, we talked. I commented that I was concerned about being able to compete in my new academic setting. Never a person to give a compliment, Mother simply stated that I would do fine because I was my father's daughter. In all my growing-up years, I had never been called my father's daughter. Quite the contrary, she had been on a constant campaign to convince not only me, but my brother and sister, that we "belonged" to her side of the family (the Euro-American side). Each of us had experienced that tug-of-war differently. For my blond-haired, blue-eyed, pale-skinned siblings it was an easy connection; for me the connection was interjected with malice directed against me by members of her family. I recall thinking that her statement that day explained some things. As I started to ask for more in-depth information, she announced she was tired and went to bed.

I left for home the next morning with nearly a ten-hour drive in which to think over these amazing events. Amazing because, as I reflected, I had always known! Only my mother's constant refusal to acknowledge the differences and her

insistence that I was like her had kept me from understanding with clarity the reality of my childhood—a childhood in a mixed marriage that worked but did not accept the differences. A childhood that had bifurcated when Senator Joseph McCarthy had decided, for the American people, that being homogeneous was far better than being happy, thus abnegating a primary constitutionally recommended pursuit.

My mother's words gave me the key to unlock memories buried in the pursuit of assimilation and achievement, memories that were buried by my father's realization that who he was might very much interfere with providing the kind of life he had hoped to give to his family. Born in 1915, the youngest of nine children, his parents were the last of a generation that lived as traditionally as their surroundings permitted. A matched marriage was arranged by their parents; my grandmother, Georgianna Olive Davis, came up from Oklahoma to marry my grandfather, John Wesley Wilkerson. At the age of fourteen and nearly six feet tall, she married my grandfather in Ducktown, Tennessee, my grandfather's parent's home district—Overhill—in a ceremony attended by the few remaining people indigenous to that district.

My grandfather, born in Vernon County, Wisconsin, in 1877, had several older brothers and sisters. His parents had left Tennessee in 1860 with eight other families to avoid fighting in another "yonega anisgeya dunvdahiha" (literally, "white men they are fighting themselves") war. They traveled to Illinois, where their first son was born, and then on to western Wisconsin, which at the time was free from the draft for military service in the Civil War—a war in which the Union fought to end slavery for African Americans even though the United States had been for generations and was continuing to be engaged in genocide of the Indigenous peoples. My great-grandfather would not engage in such hypocrisy and earned the nickname of Noble; at the same time he changed the spelling of the last name given to his family by the army secretaries in the early nineteenth century. In this way, my great-grandfather found his voice by taking his family and friends to a place where they could speak their language, continue to practice their traditions, and live in peace.

By the time my grandfather was born, many Swedes and Norwegians had moved into the valleys in the Vernon County area, pressuring the Indigenous population to move on. My great-grandparents were to remain for seven more years before they decided to move east to be closer to my great-grandfather's mother. They settled in southeastern Ohio in a hollow called Bear's Run at the foothills of the Allegheny and Smoky mountains. Back to the mountains... two day's travel to a midway point to what was to become the Cherokee Reservation. When my great, great-grandmother died in 1897, southeastern Ohio became the settling ground for our family. While the older children remained in western Wisconsin, one of whom was a deacon in the first A.M.E. church in Vernon County, the only church for African Americans and Indians, the younger children had returned with their parents to Ohio. When my grandfather married at age 17, his grandmother, whom he had not known well, was still able to attend the

wedding. Ollie and John were married above Ducktown, Tennessee, in a ceremony performed in Cherokee.

I have had fond memories of Ducktown. From the age of 5 until I was 12, my five aunties took me back to the annual reunions with our history. For a month every summer we traveled in and around North Carolina visiting cousins. The highlight of each month was time spent reliving history. For two weeks my aunties hiked with my cousin and me up the mountain terrain north of what was first a Moravian Church, later a Baptist Church, on the edge of Ducktown. Our destination each trip was a small hole in the wall that opened up into a larger, room-sized cave with a high ceiling and a small hole on its northern edge. This was my ancestor's home for several years during the 1830s and 1840s—a time during which the majority of the Cherokee were removed from their homeland in forced marches to Oklahoma, during which a quarter perished.

On the way up the mountain, my aunties gathered plants for food, telling stories of each plant, telling stories of how their great-grandmother had done this before them. She had been one of a few healers in the small group of people who fled into the caves high along the southern slopes of the Smokies. They told about the histories of families in our direct clan lines, our people as a Nation, of the Creation and the Creator, of the little people, the Great Snake, and the first man and first woman. Many, many stories were told each time in a slightly different version, with slightly different sections either lengthened or shortened according to the purpose for the telling. And, finally, the two-day hike was filled with the teasing that constantly went on between these sisters and which extended to their niece and daughters. We must have been an odd-looking group, five middle-aged women, one adolescent woman, and one young girl. All looking similar, with dark brown to black hair, dark brown eyes, nut-brownned-by-the-sun skin. Calico dresses, or calico blouses and jeans.

I cannot consciously recall my aunties talking in Cherokee but came to understand that this was the only language spoken during those months each summer. They visited with cousins and clan relatives speaking both Cherokee and English in the same way that they talked with their brothers, my father and uncles. Mother's words had triggered an intense flow of these memories. First in dreams, then coupled with conscious recall. Dreams in which people spoke to me in a language that I couldn't speak but seemed to understand became a routine experience. While my dreams were awakening much of the past, I still had memories of my early days in elementary school.

In first grade, I had been suspended because I had said something disrespectful of the teacher—that's what I remembered. In second grade, I caused a scandal because I created a Thanksgiving work of art that depicted the "real" first Thanksgiving in complex detail. I can still "see" the picture in my mind. In third grade, another incident occurred because I did my first book report on Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. Shortly after this, Mother had packed up all of her adult books and given them away to local libraries. I never knew why, but I certainly missed the books I had come to love to sit with and read. At one point

I asked Mother about these incidents and found that the first-grade disrespectful talk had been uttered in Cherokee and this was the reason for the suspension. In second grade, Mother had attributed the picture to a “vivid imagination” and charmed the teacher. In third grade, the teacher had accused my mother of doing my work. Although she could not bring herself to say why she packed up her books, I believe that, in addition to telling her not to do my work, the teacher had warned Mother that reading such books at age 8 would “ruin” me. I say this because much later on, when my own children were preteens and early teens, she once stated that the only reason I had so many problems (I was in the middle of a divorce) was because I had read too many books. Spoken in a drunken stupor, I passed her comments off as the alcohol speaking.

Eventually, my dreams in a “foreign” language and my questions about these dreams gave me the impetus for reflecting about finding my voice. By this time I was working in another city, divorced and alone because my children were grown and gone. I began a tenure-track position at a second-tier research university. With new awareness of my identity, I plunged into joining in with the activities centered around the American Indian Studies Program and the state Indian Education Association. I found other Cherokees with whom I shared many of the same experiences of an experiential duality of having an identity in a family where part of the family refused to recognize that identity and the other half worked hard to support it. As one of my new found friends, raised very traditionally on her home reservation, stated, “That sounds like a very schizy childhood.” My voice—split between two factions in my family—the indigenous voice silenced at the request of my father because of his desire to become upwardly mobile in a blatantly racist and politically charged era of the 50s—my voice—first confused then silenced. Taking me for a long walk along Snake Road near our country home in southern Ohio, he talked about how the snake must change its skin in order to survive. How our people had always learned better ways of living their lives by observing how the four-leggeds lived their lives. How he was going to have to grow a new skin—and that he needed my help in doing so—my help by no longer speaking my native language, my help by no longer talking about my people in public places, my help in living two lives, one in the public and one at home and in my heart. This was the lesson with which I began fourth grade. I had gone through a naming ceremony recognizing my age of reason two years earlier. But even given this celebration, this was a very difficult task for a ten-year-old to accomplish—to purposefully remain opaque in public, to become more and more opaque until I was, like aged eyes with cataracts, white to public perception.

It took fourth and fifth grade to work on it, to begin to listen in school, to begin music lessons, and to move across the city to a more prestigious side and into the suburbs—a place for acquiring the “American” dream. A place for growing into silence, for further losing my voice...but for those summers. In the winter following my thirteenth birthday, my father’s health began to go downhill. Having had diabetes before my birth, he was now experiencing the more severe

symptoms of his finally fatal fibro-cystic kidney disease. The summer before my fourteenth birthday, the last with my aunties, I was an even more important participant—the celebration of renaming as I became a woman was performed. Stories retold, now in the round, for I could help in the retelling, hiking, gathering, and setting of traps. Working in the old ways for two weeks to live our ancestors' lives. To reconnect with our land and language. But returning to southern Ohio was a harsh reality...the end of my childhood and my identity...the final silencing of my voice.

I say silenced because I recall that I asked Mother how to write a paragraph in response to specific questions for assignments given when I was beginning high school. I was unable to put together enough words to express thoughts, feelings, or knowledge in a coherent way. Her advice was to write like I talked at home! But she had not noticed that I no longer talked...not freely, not openly, but only to respond to questions in the briefest manner possible. I found that I could express myself through the piano, which I had been studying for several years, and realized that writing would remain a primarily important form of communication valued in Euro-American institutions and that I would have to master it somehow.

As a senior in high school, knowing I wanted to go to college and major in music, I knew I would be required to pass my college English courses. The high school English teacher that final year had guaranteed that, if we could pass her class, we would pass college English. We had to write a term paper. We had to write...we had to! Four days before the paper was due, I began, with the realization that I would not be able to do it. I had not understood this odd way of doing things in small parts, as endless details on separated cards with no relationship between the process and expected product. So, driven by my own desire to understand and achieve, I chose to do the only thing left. I found the privately published book on some esoterica about the Civil War that my father had gotten from his boss and used a chapter for my paper. Writing a gist form of the chapter, I then worked backward in developing an outline, note cards, and bibliographic references. I knew all the parts but had not been able to put them together in the expected process. I turned everything in at once, four days late. I received the paper back marked with a "D" and a note saying that "had this been on time it would have received an A." Well, I had cheated, so the "D" did not bother me, but I had taught myself what the components of writing a paper should be. The skills that I was convinced would guarantee me success in college.

I attended college at a small, religious university, a Christian denomination representing an older, more sophisticated form of services than the informality of the Moravian or Congregational services I had occasionally attended with my grandparents or one of my aunties. A college that required nine credits of religion classes, six credits of something called Western Civilization, and Music History classes seemingly focused on church music. Each of these was a trial, and many times the only way I could avoid shaming myself, and therefore my family and ancestors, was to be silent. I knew nothing about the organization, history, or

practices of the denomination that supported this university. Even more, the history taught in Western Civilization represented content that was relatively foreign to me. I had managed to gaze my way out the windows of high school and back into the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina for most of high school courses (thus my GPA). Although my adolescence had been spent in an upper-middle-class suburb attending a highly competitive high school, college represented an additional level of culture shock—finding that most of my classmates lived at home in the same way they lived in public. No one I knew had two sets of expectations, two sets of histories, two sets of identities. I began a period of rage.

At the end of my freshman year my father died from his kidney disease. My father, the last connection to my aunties, was gone, and my mother could “take over,” that is, could work more to move me into Euro-existence...or at least she attempted this. She forbade my aunties to contact me, bringing the end of an already diminishing relationship as they became older and unable to physically move well enough to hike the mountains. Mother began insisting that I spend holidays and weekends with her relatives. Although she was an only child, she had a great uncle who acted as the family patriarch. He had been superficially involved with my family from the time I was nine or so. When he first met me he declared me to be a “genetic throwback” and warned my mother not to expect too much of me. The words themselves did not mean much, but his tone and attitude were clear. After that I did not see him until my college days. His sister, my grandmother, and her husband, began to take over some of that role when I stopped spending summers with my aunties.

Although I did not get to go with them, they traveled to the Southwest every summer and brought back pictures of “Indians” to whom I bore little resemblance, but whose work in fiber, silver, pottery, and stones existed as a constant source of pleasure. They always brought back something special and boxes of slides of their trips. They had friends who traveled through Central America who would send Mayan clothing and artifacts to them, some of which I was given. Never being concerned about how I dressed in comparison to other girls, at least not until my junior year in high school, I thoroughly enjoyed dressing differently. I had this secret—stuff I could wear in public that was tied to who I was in private. But I had lost my voice, was quickly losing my native language, and was entering into a struggle to decide which ethnic identity to dislike, for that was the decision left to me by my mother’s actions.

Affected by college, a too-hasty marriage, and three children in six years by a man who was not available emotionally, I lost all sense of my identity. When lack of emotional involvement on the part of my husband turned to psychological and physical abuse, I began a long, arduous trip back into my identity as a way to combat the violence and systemic cruelty of a social and judicial system that my husband appeared to be able to control. Although I finally was able to attain full custody of my children, the idea that children would not remain with their mother was not culturally compatible, it cost me an enormous amount both

financially and emotionally.

I began attending graduate school again, a fearsome task in light of my experiences twenty years earlier in the late 1960s. At that time I was enrolled in the graduate school through the School of Music. During my student teaching, I discovered that I had the ability to teach and that children and their parents responded to me as a teacher. I decided to switch majors to Elementary Education. In order to accomplish this, I had to attend a meeting with the Associate Dean of what was then considered one of the most "liberal" state universities in the country. After briefly explaining my purpose and posing the possibility of switching, I was told, "My school does not accept your kind." I asked for further clarification, at which point the elderly, Euro-American male moved closer and stated, "You should know! Blanket niggers! Oh, we can't keep you out, but I'll make it my personal goal to see that you do not succeed because no one will hire you!" I left at the end of that semester.

Graduate school in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not much different. Oh, the tone of the insults was more subtle, more generalized. Some were almost undetectable, others were more blatant, but I survived, and at times thrived. I was determined, for my own sake, as well as to "show" the creep from twenty years earlier (although he had probably been dead some dozen years or more), that I could do the work and could get a job!

Two years after my visit with my mother, she passed. I interviewed for a tenure-track position within two weeks of her funeral while trying to balance out the needs of my siblings, neither of whom had completed college, and the requirements of my duties as trustee of my mother's estate. We all began to realize that we would finally be relatively financially secure. As a search for my identity and a task of mourning, I took five weeks to wander around Arizona and New Mexico. I stayed primarily within the boundaries of various reservations. I visited places that my aunties had referred to as being holy—the Grand Canyon was an especially important place. I thought, meditated, sang songs I was beginning to recall again, talked to myself in Cherokee, read books and newspapers in Cherokee, wrote in Cherokee, hiked long distances, and prayed. I re-awakened my identity and, in doing so, reawakened my voice.

When I began my new position, I was not the same person that had applied for the position. Now, I am Usdi Jiji, among other names given to me in my childhood. I can again recite ajina adadolisi for peace and love, for generosity and openness, for all of my people and all of the Indigenous People of the world. The wish that my doctoral advisor had asserted—that I find my voice and use it—is begun. I can live in hope and joy again. I can walk the Beauty Path and find my own ways.

Reflection

This was one mother's story up to the time that I left my post-doctoral position and myself attained my own tenure-track position. Since then I have stayed in

touch with my student. He is working on his dissertation once again after helping his friend work through the grief of his mother's suicide. When we talked last summer, I asked him what had happened to all her hope and joy. Although he did not know the details of her day-to-day life, he was able to put together many of the comments that she had made to him in their phone calls and discussions into a coherent explanation. Apparently, she had been too optimistic about her new position. She had believed that the racist, anti-indigenous, and hateful things that were said and done in her earlier years would somehow not exist in this new job because she truly believed that she would be accepted, having found her voice.

In the first two years, she had written multiple papers, several grants, and taught her classes in the best way she knew how, using the examples of her teachers and infusing the energy and perspective of her aunties into her teaching style. Coming to this new university from other teaching jobs in which she had achieved high marks on student evaluations, her new students evaluated her teaching in ways that were inconsistent and generally very low. In each class there were always a few who felt her teaching was excellent, but the majority ranked her as average or below-average. Her assigned departmental mentor's only comment was that she must improve her teaching. There were no explanations as to how to achieve this. Despite reading new books and talking to other faculty members, her evaluations improved only slightly.

When she began to discuss this with other indigenous faculty, she heard comments like, "Well, I've never gotten good evaluations because of my face," or "My students do not like to hear any message that is related to multiculturalism," or "In my department it is well known that certain faculty members who are not in favor of affirmative action either overtly or covertly coerce students into giving specific minority faculty lower evaluations. Students, in fear of retaliation by these faculty members, acquiesce to their suggestions." I think it just became overwhelmingly hostile to work in such a place. I can remember her asking once, "I have to wonder how come my advisor felt it so important for me to find my voice? The result of having done this appears to be that I am being stoned by words and actions that I cannot identify!" I know she was very upset by her sense of not being able to control her situation. I think that, in acknowledging that her future outcome was not within her control, she abandoned hope and fell into another depression. She had had a couple short bouts with depression earlier. I thought she had managed to get past them. I do not know if I will ever be able to understand what happened, certainly not forgive the circumstances she must have been in, and it makes me really give a lot of thought to whether or not I want to even begin a career in academia. I find I am continuously asking myself, "Is Western civilization really civilized? Does it really have any understanding of humanity? Do mainstream academics really represent individuals who create new knowledge or are they individuals who codify only acceptable knowledge?"

Epilogue

Although this mother's story occurred separate from my own life, it is very much like it in many ways. In thinking through all the events, I have spent considerable time reflecting on the covert forms of racism that exist. One such concept, "color-blindness" (Carr 1997; Fair 1997; Killian 1990; Shanklin 1998; Willaims 1998), or the inability on the part of Euro-Americans to recognize that there are differences and that those "differences" are just that—differences that are neither better nor worse than the beliefs, practices, and production of all academics since the first university opened in Paris in the tenth century. And yet the differences continue to be used to exclude and denigrate the achievements of minority faculty members in many twenty-first century universities.

A second concept related to covert racism is paternalism and patronization that accompanies comments and inquiries from "color-blind" individuals. Such paternalism is detectable from the combined verbal and non-verbal behavior of the individual (Jackman 1994; Lujan 1995). Each of these concepts, color-blindness and paternalism, supports institutional racism as it exists today (Aparicio and Jose-Kampfner 1995; Goulet 1998; Huff 1997; Sacks and Thiel 1995; Taylor 1981).

In discussing these situations with my First Nations colleagues during professional meetings or on-line, we frequently recite the kinds of (un)knowing cruelties that we indigenous faculty are subjected to. Because the kinds of behaviors for which an Atlanta @*%\$(& baseball player was recently censored for are blatant racist remarks and should not need addressing, I am choosing to list a few of the subtle remarks and actions that represent those cruelties. Many of them are aimed at our souls—our sense of identity. I personally have heard the following comments uttered by both colleagues and students too many times to count, but the pain inflicted is cumulative:

"Gee, you don't look Indian!" The assumption that makes this statement racist is that people from First Nations communities are a homogenous group of people who have few differences in their genetic makeup. As we have been a people who have been forcibly removed, assimilated, acculturated, and invaded for half a millennium, we have shared our "looks" with our Euro-American captors, friends, and relatives. Our "looks" are as differentiated as are the complexities of the cultures, governmental structures, and religious beliefs of our five-hundred-plus Nations.

"How much Indian blood do you have?" The assumption that makes this a racist statement is that "blood," by which Euro-Americans appear to mean "genetic makeup," is the standard for identity. This question usually follows the first. Its Euro-centric assumption is that Indigenous Nations consider blood quantum to be

the only measure of group association. Although a few Nations have, as a consideration, the concept of blood quantum, for the most part this concept is strictly the European viewpoint about what it means to identify yourself as belonging to a group. Again it is racist because it denies the identities of those who were born from indigenous parents, learned indigenous ways of knowing as children, and have strong ties to indigenous communities.

"How come you don't do something with your hair?" The assumption that makes this a racist statement is based on the Euro-American belief that personal adornment is a representation of status. Indigenous individuals consider personal adornment to represent spirituality. Each Nation has specific cultural and spiritual proprietary beliefs about what represents the sacred in terms of the manner in which we present ourselves as members of our communities by our clothing, hair, or adornment.

"You can't be a minority, your skin is the same color as mine!" The assumption that makes this statement racist is so simplistic that I would think it would be obvious. However, since it appears not to be obvious, the assumption rests on the idea that skin color is the only criteria for membership in an underrepresented minority community in the United States. At its heart it is an attack on every minority community in which members have many different skin colors and tones. I am reminded of my teaching days in an all African American school and the great number of beautiful descriptors of the different tones of skin color among students and faculty. We all need to learn to view the differences as beautiful rather than to use the differences to stigmatize, degrade, debase, and debilitate our brothers and sisters. For those of us from indigenous communities, identity is tied to our cultural and spiritual beliefs, our ways of knowing and relating to the living world, and our great desire to know all our relations as brothers and sisters not as outsiders.

Then there are the non-verbal behaviors that are equally insulting. Some students and colleagues behave as if they believe that we indigenous scholars are somehow simpleminded children. They speak to us in patronizing tones using presumptory body language (body language in which they posture themselves as "parental"). They address us using simple sentences as if we could not understand the complexities of academic life, which they find easy to follow. In actuality, it is not academic life that is difficult, but the unwritten institutional agenda that often accompanies it. In talking amongst ourselves, we sometimes have posited that perhaps our Euro-American colleagues do not see the unwritten institutional agenda. Like the experience of culture shock that the mother expressed in her comments about attending college, perhaps it is that we who continue to live two identities, see what is simply the "lived experience" of our Euro-American colleagues? That what we call the "unwritten institutional agenda" is actually the amalgamation of their home and school experiences which were never required to remain separate?

Whatever the answers to these questions may be, if there is ever to be a time when Indigenous Peoples can achieve their due recognition, if there is ever to be a time when textbooks begin to represent the truths of all our lives and histories, if there is ever to be a time when world views that collide can be accepted as just that—different but equally valid—if there is ever to be a time when everyone can find her/his voice and feel free to express it knowing the knowledge thus expressed is accepted as valid and reliable knowledge, then there are still major changes that must occur. Changes that will require that our Euro-American colleagues begin to recognize inherent traps that an insistence on remaining color-blind sets for minority scholars. Changes that will require that we, as First Nations scholars, are willing to risk our positions by speaking out at the institutional level given the current university atmosphere as illustrated by the experiences of those who have spoken out in the past.

Such changes can be facilitated by the development of programs like an Indigenous Nations Studies Program, for they announce that we exist as lively, contemporaneous, and culturally diverse peoples within their midst. They allow us the opportunity to inform and educate those of our colleagues and students who stand unthreatened by the unknown and delighting in learning. Such a forum provides us the opportunity to explain our views until the perceived spectrum of light is widened to include the brilliance of the Creator's Rainbow.

Notes

1. Lest I be accused of being "ahalada" (a big mouth; one who brags about one's accomplishments or one who tries to make trouble), I include my GPA simply because it balances my high school GPA of 1.98. My test scores got me into college. The term "ahalada" describes someone who attempts to destabilize the balance in a communal setting. In western terms one might say that "na ahalada" is someone whose ego has taken the upper hand in decision making.

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