

Renaming Ourselves On Our Own Terms: Race, Tribal Nations, and Representation in Education

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The main islands were thickly populated with a peaceful folk when Christ-over found them. But the orgy of blood which followed, no man has written. We are the slaughterers. It is the tortured soul of our world.

—William Carlos Williams¹

As human beings, we can always look on the past, examine the present, and prepare for the future of humanity by sharing our cultural stories. In public school I was taught that Christopher Columbus discovered America. Later, I found out that the man was totally lost on his voyage and named the Indigenous Peoples he “discovered” *Indios* because he was looking for the country of India. Throughout my entire public school education, I was led to believe by my teachers that this was a true story. The year 1492 seems to have triggered the “Western world” mythology that has come to dominate the entire globe’s economics, politics, and academics, imposing itself as the natural, unquestionable norm of human existence. “This illusion of Western world superiority has functioned implicitly, and at times brutally explicitly, to facilitate the conquest and enslavement of native peoples, the exploitation of their labor and the natural resources, and the genocidal destruction of whole cultures and peoples” (Tinker 1993, p. vii). It is not simply that Columbus is identified as the one who started it all, but rather that he has come to represent a huge legacy of suffering and destruction (Smith 1999). He sets this modern framework of 500 years of colonization of the Indigenous

Peoples of North America and defines the outer limits of that legacy, which is the total destruction of Indigenous culture.

Lasting awareness—that in-depth understanding which penetrates the superficial differences or similarities between fact, theory, and practice, that level of consciousness which allows you to see the truth no matter how bitter, horrible, or controversial—often comes about gradually. Given my introduction to the 1492 Columbus story, I look back on elementary school, junior high, high school, and university classes that were designed to help me become a knowledgeable student, teacher, counselor, and principal. I see now that the American educational system promotes a system-maintaining curriculum. By that, I mean it virtually designs hegemonic class structures, which just about guarantees that the oppressed remain oppressed and the oppressors remain oppressors (Freire 1993). Some colleagues will say to me that school is what you make of it—that students have choices. I say that the American system of education is charged to make something distinct of us. Therefore, the title of this paper “Renaming Ourselves on Our Own Terms” is like *counting coup*² on the text.

The intent of this article is to discuss the themes around linguistic imperialism, race, tribal nations, and representation in education as a strategic intervention in debates over racial difference and inequity in an educational arena. The language for this article is a composite of my analysis of race and representation in the United States. It is a gesture of defiance representing my sociopolitical struggle to push against the boundaries of manufactured ethnocentric, ethnic images and to create words in the English language that best express my multi-tribal voice. As an Indigenous scholar, I have often felt the need to create language—finding the English language inadequate to express my cultural worldview. Through various terms used in this article, I suggest that our highest hopes for literacy at this point rest upon a vision that Lyons (2000) names *rhetorical sovereignty*.³ This article is also about tribal identity. Since decolonization as a political process is always a struggle to define ourselves in and beyond the act of resistance to domination, we are always in the process of remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future (hooks 1992).

What Is The Precise Term? The Race Card Conspiracy

Since that first institutional, cultural encounter story about Columbus, I have witnessed several transitions in the ethnic group name used by the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. Like millions of children growing up in this country, I was taught in school that “I” was for Indian. I was born during a time when the popular macroculture used the term “Indian” when referring to Indigenous Peoples of North America. During my undergraduate years in the seventies, many people in this country felt that a major new paradigm shift had been made when “native” in Native American became popular, with the predictable addition that

the “n” in native would be capitalized, just as the Spanish version of the word for black (negro), had gradually evolved to the status of capitalization. We even became a part of the civil rights struggle of the late 1960s and early 1970s with the American Indian Movement on the front lines trying to liberate Indigenous Peoples from U.S. government domination of all definitions.

Obviously these changes represented fresh yet old, struggles within the Indigenous community’s need to take control of our precise naming and self definition process to imbue our collective ethnic and tribal name with positive meaning. We wrestled with the ascribed terms— Indian, American Indian, Amerindian, Native American—as if we had no power to define other choices. We fought for the capitalization in the first letter of the word as a sign of cultural respect. Now many of us embrace the terms Indigenous Peoples and First Nations People and use these two terms interchangeably in our discourse as they originate new positive meanings and tribal identity rather than to elaborate and articulate terms that are externally imposed conceptualizations. Certainly, these terms have come a long way from the original misnomer and frequently used term of Indian.

Hirschfelder contends that a debate persists over the proper designation for hundreds of nations of peoples who were (and are) the original inhabitants of the North American continent. The following excerpts suggest that Indigenous and non-Indigenous People hold differing opinions about the use of the general terms American Indians and Native Americans. Over the last few decades, we can see that tribal nations have started to take back their original names for themselves: Diné (formerly Navajo); Ho-Chunk (formerly Winnebago); Anishinaabe (formerly Chippewa); and Tohono O’odham Nation of Arizona (formerly known as the Papago Tribe of the Sells, Gila Bend, and San Xavier Reservations in Arizona). Therefore, it is generally agreed that, whenever possible, individual tribal names should be the precise terms used.

Sample Opinions

“The word *Indian* is a colonial enactment, not a loan word, and the dominance is sustained by the simulation that has superseded the real tribal names.”

—Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe), *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1994)

“*Indian* is a European-derived word and concept. Prior to contact, Native American people were not Indians but were members of their own socio-political and cultural groups. ...the concept of *Indian* as used by the Bureau of the Census does not denote a scientific or biological definition but, rather, is an indication of the race with which a person identifies.”

—Jack Utter, *American Indians: Answers to Today’s Questions* (Lake Ann, MI: National Woodlands Publishing Company, 1993)

“But the proper term which ought to be applied to our nation, to distinguish it from the rest of the human family, is that of ‘Natives’—and I humbly conceive that the natives of this country are the only people under heaven who have a just title to the name.”

—William Apes (Pequot), *A Son of the Forest: The Experience of William Apes, a Native of the Forest* (New York: self-published, 1831)

“For too long now, the native peoples of this hemisphere have remained passive while the European invader does away with all of the ancient place-names, and then comes up with new names for the native people and their land . . . This land is not Indian and we are not Indians. Let’s face it—the people of India have a right to keep their own name . . . I would propose that we drop the use of Amerigo’s name, and adopt a name in a native language meaning ‘native land,’ ‘Indian land,’ or ‘Indian country.’ Therefore, I propose that we call this land *Anishinabe-weki*, which means ‘Indian country’ in the languages of the Algonquian speaking peoples (especially in the Chippewa, Algonkin, Ottawa, and Potawantomi languages). Of course, some people might object to using an Algonquian name for our continent; however, we have to choose a name from *one* of our many languages.”

—Jack D. Forbes (Powhatan), “It’s Time to Throw Off the White Man’s Names” (*Akwesasne Notes*, March 1972)

“A growing number of American Indians and Alaska Natives are not comfortable with the term ‘Native American’ because it creates ever greater confusion than the term it was once proposed to replace—namely, American Indian.”

—C. Matthew Snipp for the National Committee for Research on the 1980 Census, *American Indians: The First of This Land* (1989)

“How I loathe the term ‘Indian’ . . . Indian is a term used to sell things—souvenirs, cigars, cigarettes, gasoline, cars . . . ‘Indian’ is a figment of the white man’s imagination.”

—Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Ojibway), in *Stolen Continents: The Americas Through Indian Eyes Since 1492*, by Ronald Wright 1990)

“The term ‘First Nations’ has been increasing in usage throughout North America to describe its indigenous people . . . Why the term ‘First Nations’? This term more accurately describes the Americas’ indigenous people.”

—Yvonne Murry-Ramos, March 17, 1993, editorial in *News From Indian Country*

“A greater priority now is on Indian national and personal names, and on substituting traditional tribal names for those imposed through the missionizing and colonizing processes.”

—Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Muscogee), Foreword to *North Ameri-*

can Indian Landmarks, by George Cantor (1993)

“The terms indigenous and First Nations Peoples still generalize the identity of the more than 500 indigenous groups in the lower 48 and Alaska. However, I believe they are empowering ‘generalized’ descriptors because they accurately describe the political, cultural, and geographical identities, and struggles of all aboriginal peoples in the United States. I no longer use Indian, American Indian, or Native American because I consider them to be oppressive, counterfeit identities.”

—Michael Yellow Bird (Sahnish, Arikara), *Winds of Change* (Winter 1999)

Yes, we had forgotten what we had called ourselves before Columbus, other more ancient, even divine, ethnic and tribal names. These “lost” names were based upon our natal and cultural bonds and thousands of years of tribal heritage. The names were based upon our collective history and creativity. Worse, many tribes forgot the origin of their names and also how, as Indigenous Peoples, we came to be given alien English names by people outside our tribes.

Given the sacred nature of “naming” Indigenous Peoples, and given the association of a name with our tribal identity as extended families, this was a double tragedy of enormous proportions. Our focus on names became a barren one, a focus without the nourishment of cultural awareness of our rich tribal customs. Afflicted as such, we were unprepared for the earlier post-civil rights conversations about “race” naming and identity.

We had come to a point where we, as Indigenous Peoples, were named by non-indigenous people. Many Indigenous Peoples had lost control of this most fundamental of human processes, the self-determining fundamental of naming ourselves, of saying, not asking, the world who we were. Lyons (2000) asserts that not only in boarding schools but also at the signings of hundreds of treaties, most of which were dishonored by whites, would be set into motion a persistent distrust of the written word in English, a distrust that still resonates in our homes and schools and courts of law today. Moreover, in the recent debates about precise names, many scholars do not understand how and why we were coerced by Europeans to change our ethnic names to names that caused us to become preoccupied with aspects of our phenotype, mainly our skin color, hair texture, and facial features. The Europeans were looking for names in a lexicon that dehumanized and subordinated us, that contained us in our physical being, separating us from control of our minds, souls, and spirits.

Forbes contends that many non-indigenous scholars and government officials continue the practice of giving names to First Nations locations, towns, languages, cultures, and new bio-linguistic groupings without giving the least thought to asking Indigenous Peoples what they would like or what name they are already using. “This would seem to be the height of arrogance wherein outsiders see Native People as objects or like dogs, cats and horses which can be named at

will by their owners” (Forbes 1996, p. 6).

We did not understand how they, the authors of this specious classification system, were using their “race” construction in culturally irrational and pseudoscientific and calculated political ways. Above all, we have been unfamiliar with the thoughtful and scholarly homework that was accomplished by some scholars that could reveal to us what was happening in this academic naming and why, work that should have punctured the “race” balloon.

The confusion among the terms *race*, *culture*, and *ethnicity* is highly problematic. Cameron and Wycoff (1998) contend that these terms are frequently used interchangeably but that they are very different concepts. Race is an arbitrary classification system used to categorize people with a specified group of physical characteristics such as skin color, facial form, or eye shape (Zuckerman 1990). The term race is meant to imply a common descent or heredity. On the other hand, culture represents the behaviors and beliefs that characterize a particular group. Ethnicity is embedded within the culture. It consists of characteristics that make up the smaller groups within the larger cultural group or society. Ethnicity and culture are integrally related, but they are separate.

The term “indigenous” is also problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different. Smith (1999) suggests that other collective terms also in use refer to “First People” or “Native People,” “First Nations” or “People of the Land,” “Aboriginals” or “Fourth World Peoples.” Some groups prefer the labels that connect us to Mother Earth and to deeply significant spiritual relationships.

For reasons that will become clearer, my preference for the term Indigenous Peoples fits our actual historical, cultural framework and even political circumstances. The names “Indian,” “American Indian,” “Amerindian,” and “Native American” are terms that have been more or less accepted within the Indigenous family. They do not exhaust all of the possibilities, as there are many tribal groups that refer to themselves as Pueblos, communities or locations representing their tribal lands. However, one has to ask the question, from what ethnic language does it originate?

For many Indigenous Peoples in this country, we communicate with one another using the English language. And whose language does that represent? It certainly is not an indigenous language of North America. I’m trying to emphasize here the importance of precise terms—the equality of “linguistic imperialism” and “linguistic inequality.”

Language of Inequality

Like other forms of social inequality, linguistic inequality is a problem of major dimensions in the modern world. Linguistic inequality is particularly pernicious because discrimination on the basis of language ability is often not seen as truly prejudicial in the general culture. Anyone can learn to speak the “correct” language, whatever that may be, and if they do not do so, it is clearly

their own weaknesses. However, one's indigenous language is so much a part of one's tribal identity that to denigrate it is to effectively oppress one's human ability to communicate naturally. Tribal language has a vital relationship to the philosophical thought process—cognizance of one's worldview—it is our tribal identity in action and self-defining.

These terms emphasize numerical status, social class, and political status, e.g., how many we are, how wealthy we are, how powerful we are, but not ethnic or tribal identity, not *who* we are by virtue of birth. In fact, these names apply easily, potentially, to any ethnic group. Almost without exception, the group names ascribed by Europeans to Africans to First Nations People are adjectives, never proper nouns as names. Significantly, they are adjectives that suggest no respect for *who we are* or for our uniqueness as an ethnic and tribal family. In fact, they only suggest something of minimal or even negative classification. Again, these terms are embedded in the structure of the communication and service system of the sociopolitical culture.

It would be foolish of me to think that all Indigenous People ascribe to this way of identifying with their tribal identities. I am too familiar with the story of how American policymakers sought to use the schoolhouse—specifically the boarding schools—as an instrument for assimilating Indigenous youth to “American” ways of thinking and living (Adams 1995). Howard Adams (1995) asserts that after five hundred years of colonial oppression, First Nations People have internalized a colonized consciousness. 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.

Tinker (1993) asserts that many Indigenous Peoples have internalized this illusion as deeply as white Americans have and, as a result, discover from time to time just how fully they participate today in their own oppression. Some have come to recognize and accept the world created through the colonization of Indigenous America. But those who find sincerity and comfort in the oppressor, who bind themselves to recent promises, also find they must ultimately yield to the assimilationist demands of mainstream forces and abandon any meaningful attachment to an indigenous cultural and political reality. And in so doing, they are lost to the rest of us by becoming part of our forgetfulness. Thankfully, those who forget the colonization of their nations are a small minority. Most people continue to participate in, or at least support, the struggle to gain recognition and respect for their right to exist as peoples, unencumbered by demands, controls, and false identities imposed on them by others (Alfred 1999).

At the ideological level, massive financial resources toward the deconstruction of the European colonial mind-set need to be devoted to change. Conflicting ideological components, such as a defense of racial exploitation on one hand is important. An assertion of racial equality on the other hand, must depend in part

for their effectiveness upon a degree of correspondence with ongoing construction of new ideology (Saxton 1990).

Novick (1995) contends that the roots of U.S. English and English First were highly Eurocentric. For Indigenous Peoples, the demeaning language was unconscious political action for some and intentional domination for others. At the conscious level, naming was a strategy to commit “cultural genocide,” a dispersed strategy to destroy ethnic family solidarity, an isolation emphasis on individual rather than family behavior, and a disformative strategy to confuse Indigenous Peoples about their ethnic identity. Why? As Dr. John Henrik Clarke has so often said, “It is impossible to continue to oppress a consciously historical people.” The naming domination has the effect of destroying historical consciousness. Even when the use of the terms by mainstream people was not conscious, the terms had the effects intended by the strategists. 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.

I grew up in a time when Indians became American Indians. I have witnessed the popular saying “I is for Indian.” Then American Indian was transformed to Amerindian. The word “native” was important, thus, the capitalizing of Native American. Today in a new millennium, I have heard discussions in Canada, which uses the term First Nations People, and to the southern borders of the United States, where the more commonly used term is Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. So I have seen the cultural and social transformation of the way we structure and reconstruct the English language. It is ever changing to meet our needs.

For other ethnic groups I see a similar pattern emerging. Negroes became black, later changing to a capital “b” in Blacks. Then Afro-American transformed to African American with no hyphen, as has Mexican American. In the post-civil rights era, Mexican Americans became Chicanos and Chicanas, but the colonial term “Hispanics” still permeates the American consciousness with the historical dominance of Spanish hegemony. Young Americans of Asian descent rejected the term “Orientals” with its British origins and showed us a new collected identity as the Asian American.

Addressing the Real Problem

Too many jokes exist and continue to be made about our ethnic name, which perpetuates societal discussions today in describing who we are. The name matter is still unsettled for many, and friends and foes alike tread nervously when trying to follow our changing names. It is interesting to deal with the issue, among others, of the “racial” identity of Indigenous Peoples and its relationship to education.

I certainly recognize that most Indigenous People share in a phenotype. It may even have some meaning for us that we do. It is certainly included in who we are as tribal people. However, consider the major things that this leaves out.

Most of mainstream dialogue about cultural identity uses euphemistic terminology. That is why it is good for us to gain clarity, first about the meaning of the topic "race and education," and then about the nature of the problem in education that is related to it.

We must understand how the idea of "race" emerged and how it came to be associated with and embedded in education. Any close look at this question shows that much of society's thinking about race is confused and invalid but is now also accepted globally or universally, consciously and unconsciously. Then we must also admit that the poison of "race" and hegemony or white supremacy is now a part of global ideology and structure. The global environment now seems polluted with these political ideas, even to the extent that they are increasingly internalized among the victims of the system. Most of us are in denial about "race" and "hegemony" and do little committed thinking about race matters. Our response to the problem ultimately must target ideology and the recursive structure with everyday individual behavior.

Sleeter (1993) asserts that a structural analysis of racism assumes that how white people view race rests on their vested interest in justifying their power and privileges. White people's common sense understandings of race "are ideological defenses of the interests and privileges that stem from white people's position in a structure based in part on racial inequality" (Wellman 1997, p. 37). A structural analysis of racism suggests that education will not produce less racist institutions as long as white people control them. As Beverly Gordon has argued, expecting white educators to reconstruct racist institutions ignores the fact that they face

the sticky dilemma of attempting to educate the masses in a way that allows them accessibility to high status knowledge and places them on an equal footing to compete. Most assuredly in time, they will compete with our children and ostensibly with us for a share of the power and the reallocation of resources. And while most people do have good intentions, when our social status is threatened, we tend to become even more conservative in order to protect our material gains (Gordon 1985, p. 37).

We can look at the system, at the rules for establishing identity and at how they have been changed by seekers of hegemony. Using anthropological and genetic research, Cameron and Wycoff (1998) discuss the increasing scientific evidence against the existence of race and racial differences. Simply stated, the term "race" evolved out of false beliefs concerning physiological differences and has never been completely extricated from its historical roots. As a result, these matters of "race," identity, and hegemony are very difficult to discuss because they are so difficult to acknowledge and because of the guilt and fear that are still associated with them. Yet the ideology of "race" drives much of what happens

in the world and in education. It is like a computer software program that “runs in the background,” invisible and inaudible. However, our silent and invisible “racial” software is not benign. It is linked to issues of power or hegemony, the domination of a given group by another. This is what the construction of race has all been about. “Race” thinking has no reason for being except for the political use and establishment of hegemony.

In the final analysis, “race” is pivotal in matters of domination by one group of people over another. Any consideration of “race” without a consideration of racism, white supremacy, or any other form of racial supremacy as a hegemonic system is useless. In essence, the real problem is hegemony, not “race.”

If race is not a thing, but what critical cultural commentators have called a performance, neither is it an innocent word. It has played a considerable role in the attempted building of a new hegemonic alliance based upon rightist social, economic, and cultural principles (Apple 1993). The conservative restoration in many Western capitalist nations has played the “race card” with distressing regularity. Economically and culturally dominant groups have been able to “export the blame” from the disastrous effects of their own policies and practices to others with much less power in the public arena (Apple 1985). The word *OTHER* here is pregnant with meaning since it is through this very process of creating “the other” that racial logics have some of their most telling effects.

As long as there are hegemonic rules running in the background, there is no possibility that there can be clarity in the foreground. It is useful to ask, What is the origin of the idea of “racial identity”? Second, Was it common for groups in ancient times to have a “racial” identity? Why should we pursue it now?

The one thing that we can say about “race” and education is that for professional purposes, not political, “race” is irrelevant to education. It is relevant only in a political sense. Professionally, matters of interest to educators such as learning, motivation, perception, identity, etc., are not racial matters at all (Backler and Eakin 1993; Hilliard 1995). Our forecast for student achievement outcomes, under ideal professional conditions, should be virtually the same for all of the families. It is a real pity that even at this moment the majority view in virtually many surveys of education indicates the belief that some “races” are simply more intelligent than others. We will never get out of this cultural paradox until we change both our language and our ideologies.

A meaningful reexamination of who we are, on our own terms, can only be built on the recognition that cultural genocide (apartheid) was a terrible evil that treated the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas—and by implication, the world—as inferior beings. It produced the world’s most unequal democratic society. Its implementation bred lawlessness and brought a culture of felony into the driver’s seat of an already occupied continent. Non-indigenous people need to be brought to the realization that their notion of power and its extension over Indigenous Peoples is wrong by any moral standard. This approach holds the greatest promise for the freedom of Indigenous People.

Today, our tribal nations need healing. Victims and survivors who bore the

brunt of a genocidal system need healing. Perpetrators are, in their own way, victims of the genocidal system and they, too, need healing. Spirituality is central to this process of healing. We need to reach deep into the spiritual wells of our different religious traditions practiced in the United States in order to draw strength and grace with which to address the challenges of healing and nation building. These are calls for justice, forgiveness, putting the past behind us—and for reconciliation. Therefore, I affirm the decolonization approach of Taiaiake Alfred (1999) that focuses on the reform of indigenous communities as a first stage in a general reform of society's understanding and use of power. The strategic and tactical choices to be made will vary with each tribal community over time. Internally, indigenous communities must recover the notions of power that led to the formation of respectful regimes of mutual coexistence. Along with fresh leaders, a new leadership ethos grounded in tradition must be put in place, one that promotes accountability to the people through the revival of traditional decision-making procedures. We must become educated both in the ways of our ancestors and in the western knowledge and skills required to carry our communities forward. And, most urgently, we must begin to re-create a place of honor and respect within our societies for young people.

Finally, Smith (1999) comments on non-indigenous researchers still researching with Indigenous Peoples or about indigenous issues.

Clearly, there have been some shifts in the way non-indigenous researchers and academics have positioned themselves and their work in relation to the people for whom the research still counts. It is also clear, however, that there are powerful groups of researchers who resent indigenous people asking questions about their research and whose research paradigms constantly permit them to exploit indigenous peoples and their knowledges (Smith, 1999 p. 17).

Ideology as the Legacy of Hegemony

Hodge, Struckmann, and Trost (1975) give an interesting and provocative analysis of the domination problem, including "racial" domination. Some scholars argue that greed and fear are the elemental sources of the drive to dominate others. Hodge, Struckmann, and Trost argue persuasively that there is more to it than that. They argue that greedy and fearful actions lead to the creation of definitions, assumptions, and paradigms, which are embedded in the belief system, which then dictates domination or hegemonic behavior! This is a critical matter, especially if we are to seek remedies. Where do we start if the problem is to be defined as these scholars define it, as ideology?

A common Western notion occasionally expressed, usually implied, is that Western culture is superior to other cultures. In the Western worldview, Western culture is generally considered to be identical to civilization, and the non-Western

world is considered to be in varying states of development, moving toward civilization, primitive and uncivilized. These are terms that are frequently used by Westerners to refer to people in cultures that are unlike the West.

That the people of a sensible culture should view themselves as culturally superior is certainly common. But not too common is the feature contained in Western cultural thinking, that the superior should control the inferior for everybody's good. This kind of thinking emphasizes the value placed on control that produces the missionary imperialism. The notion of "white man's burden" is also derived from this type of thinking. Western control over non-Western people is thereby often considered morally defensible, even a moral imperative to create a state. If non-Western people believed in and accepted Western control, there might not be serious problems requiring urgent solutions, but this is not the case. The benefits of Western culture have often been the curse of the non-Western people who have been subjected to Western domination.

One of the key components is the belief that human reason should dominate and control nature. Westerners identify themselves with reason; they identify non-Western people as being one-with-nature. They therefore conclude that they are justified in dominating and controlling non-Western people (Hodge, Struckmann and Trost 1975, p. 3). How do schools play into this picture? Which ideas do they manifest and reinforce? To what extent are our schools' messages culturally democratic?

Indigenous Peoples do not need and should not have an oppositional ethnic identity. Indigenous People are not a "civil right" people, even though we, too, fought heroic struggles for our human rights. Indigenous Peoples do not exist merely because we are oppressed. Indigenous Peoples existed long before our oppressors. Indigenous Peoples experience oppression; however, our identity is not "the oppressed." The essence of our identity does not depend upon our oppressors. Who would we be if they did not exist? Our condition may find us, in disproportionate numbers, poverty stricken; however, our identity is not "the poor."

Many white educators acknowledge their whiteness and speak to ways in which they have benefited from their own locations in a racial and social class hierarchy and patriarchal hierarchy. Sleeter and McLaren (1995) contend that when confronting racism, whites tend to bog down, wallowing in guilt. To go beyond white guilt, Sleeter and McLaren believe whites should critically ask themselves what to do with the privileged positions they currently occupy: "We cannot escape participating in a racialized order, nor in a materialistic and highly individualistic society, nor in a patriarchal one. Like it or not, we are part of this society" (Sleeter and McLaren 1995, p. 22). Inquiry is directed to the long-term effects of internal colonization. Therefore, are the victims of extended periods and deep pressure of white supremacy now ethnic neuters? Is it too late? Have we lost forever all sense of our ethnic and tribal being? These are important questions, of course.

Indigenous Peoples 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. Many tribal members have left their tribal identities altogether following the assimilation policies of American education. Yet the core chooses to remain, to wear their tribal identities with pride and work with and for their own tribal communities and nations. In various places around the world there are small initiatives that are providing Indigenous People with space to create and be indigenous. Research seems such a small and technical aspect of the wider politics of Indigenous Peoples. It is often thought of as an activity that only anthropologists do. As Indigenous Peoples, we have our own research needs and priorities (Smith 1999).

The Current Agenda in Education

Given this discussion on race and hegemony, how does this affect the education of Indigenous Peoples today? I believe that it is important that we equip ourselves with the tools of analysis. We must know the history, purposes, consequences, and structure of the racial paradigm. And I believe that we should all be engaged in dismantling that evil paradigm brick-by-brick. Then I believe that it is our obligation to go about the process of healing ourselves.

We cannot make ourselves entirely whole by studying problems of “human relations,” “stereotypes,” “prejudice,” “bigotry,” etc. That vocabulary tends to trivialize the hegemony problem, to misdirect attention from the root problem, and to falsify its nature. The real problem, which is colonial hegemony, will never be remedied by capitalizing the word “black,” making Africans the only group in the world’s list of ethnic groups which is an adjective instead of a proper noun (Moore 1992; Wynter 1992).

Cultural sensitivity, to be acquired and practiced by dominant groups, replaces, for example, any concrete attempt to diversify the teacher population. If white teachers can learn the appropriate cultural rules, we wrongly assume that we need not hire teachers of color, and we need not address racism. More important, pluralistic models of inclusion assume that we have long ago banished the stereotypes from our heads. These models suggest that with a little practice and the right information, we can all be innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchical social relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present. It is not our ability, racism, sexism, or heterosexism that gets in the way of communicating across differences, but *their* disability, *their* culture, *their* biology, or *their* lifestyle. In sum, the cultural differences approach reinforces an important epistemological cornerstone of imperialism: the colonized possess a series of characteristics and can be studied, known, and managed accordingly by the colonizers whose own complicity remains masked (Razack 1998). Smith (1999) advocates from the vantage point of the colonized: “The term *research* is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, *research*, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous

world's vocabulary" (Smith 1999, p. 1).

Healing the distortions will require an understanding of the history of hegemony, of 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 the 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.

Ethnicity implies history, culture, location, creativity (Obinga 1998). Color does not. The trick of oppressors of causing victims to become pathologically preoccupied with phenotype, to the exclusion of an understanding of an individual's place in the cosmos, to the exclusion of an understanding of the evolution of the ethnic family, to missed opportunities for creating stronger bonds among ethnic family members, will lead people down the wrong pathway. This is where curriculum issues of race and racism are concerned. Drawing upon the work of Klugel and Smith (1986), Hurwitz and Peffley (1992) note that public policies and programs designed to provide equal opportunity in public education, like affirmative action, busing, African-centered education, and multicultural and bilingual education, are increasingly opposed by large majorities of whites. As they point out:

"The dominant ideology" in the U.S. endorsing inequality as both equitable and fair is based on the twin beliefs that: (1) opportunity for economic advancement is widespread in America today and (2) individuals are personally responsible for their positions in society. Thus, while whites support the principle of equality (i.e., equal opportunity), they often do not support policies designed to achieve equality of outcomes when they seem to offend a sense of fairness (p. 396).

Kinder and Sears (1981) have put forth the theory of "symbolic racism" to explain this seeming contradiction between principle and implementation. Seltzer, Frazier, and Ricks (1995) contend that their opposition to policies are seen as primarily benefiting African Americans, while couched in the rhetoric of discussions about standards of self-reliance, in actuality from deep-seated racial prejudices.

Many of the values, assertions, and issues surrounding the representation and diversity debate are intrinsic to the tensions inherent in race relationships in the United States. Although hegemony and representation is the primary focus of this article, assessment of the differences in majority and minority attitudes toward

interracial contact, curricular issues, racial and ethnic stereotypes, quotas in student admissions and faculty positions, and discrimination provide a good yardstick for measuring how well diversity (multiculturalism) "fits" into the development and evolution of American public education.

Nothing in what I have said will or should prevent any indigenous person or other person from making a choice with respect to their family membership. What if Indigenous People choose not to be Indigenous Peoples? That is a choice that they can certainly make. To be an individual, with no recognition of membership in any ethnic family or to attempt to be a member of someone else's ethnic family are options that anyone is free to explore and attempt. Such choices are as old as the human family. They will continue to be made. Similarly, the choice to commit to an ethnic family, to find one's destiny with that family, is also a choice.

Ethnicity in Global Perspective and the Structure of Domination

There are certain global realities that few of us are called upon to consider. An ethnic imperative is at the heart of how the world is organized. Kotkin (1993) and Huntington (1996) provide analyses that are quite compelling about the way the global world actually functions. While large portions of the world's population are becoming more diffused, Kotkin and Huntington argue that a few ethnic groups rule the world, as "global tribes or civilizations." According to Kotkin and Huntington, they do so because they preserve a strong sense of ethnic identity. This is the basis of the trust within that permits collaboration in economic and political arenas.

I have gone into some detail in this discussion about "race" and "racial identity." The topic "race and education" cannot be addressed in the absence of such an analysis. In fact, to continue with a focus on biology rather than hegemony in the traditional analyses of the problems of "race" and education is, in my opinion, to actually contribute to the negative consequences of the existing structures of domination.

Elsewhere I have dealt with the question of the structure of hegemony in the case of Indigenous Peoples being under white supremacy, especially during the past 500 years. In my speaking and writings, I have identified from my own experience and research and from the general literature on race, education, and domination common elements in structures of domination. Specifically, dominating populations crush or suppress the history of its victims, destroy the practices of the culture of its victims, prevent the victims from coming to understand themselves as a part of a cultural family, teach systematically the ideology of its white supremacy, control the socialization process, control the accumulation of wealth, and promote segregation and apartheid.

It is very important to keep in our consciousness the fact that these things are a matter of structure, matters of systematic practices founded upon ideology. No attempt to remedy problems in education can occur apart from an understanding of these things; in fact, as I have indicated in other places, one of the reasons that

we have been so unsuccessful in producing educational equity is that our understanding of the structure of hegemony was focused on a single element, that of segregation of the “races.” This left the other elements largely untouched since they were not prominent in our understanding of segregation. Otherwise, remedies would have jumped out at us immediately. For example, if the suppression of history is an element of hegemony, then the restoration of history is the antidote. Similarly, the same thing holds true with the other elements.

Conclusion

My aim in this article is to revitalize our public conversation about race, tribal nations, and representation in education, in light of our paralyzing pessimism and stultifying cynicism as tribal people. I believe it is not too late to confront and overcome the poverty and paranoia, and despair and distrust that haunt Indigenous Peoples. Williams (2000) asserts that “the legacy of European colonization and racism in federal Indian law and policy discourses can be located most definitively, therefore, in those Indian policy discourses that seek to justify white society’s privileges or aggression in the Indian’s Country on the basis of tribalism’s asserted deficiency and unassimilability” (p. 104). Subsequently, our strategy and our ethnic struggle against colonialization should be to deconstruct it (decolonization process) and replace it with the struggle for tribal community. Many Eurocentric systems are set up to detach us from our communities—from our sense of tribal community. Part of humanization is to build community. Building community opposes domination and injustice. In this effort, we can find allies and build coalitions of friends of all colors who will join us in the struggle against the continuing imperialism of Western, European-American culture. In essence, coalitions become critical for our cultural survival. It also makes it politically based because it makes a natural enemy of those in power.

It is my hope that this article has added to the discussion of renaming ourselves on our own terms with the intent of moving to a greater clarity in one of the greatest challenges that human communities face at the closure of yet another violent century. I offer you the suggestion that we need to reevaluate our tribal thinking. We need to look at the ancient philosophies and ask ourselves whether that is where we want to put our energies. Or should we look at other oppressed peoples’ ways of thinking about the world and its societies and decide anew how human priorities and human societies ought to be constructed? Or do we have the option of education of the natural person to figure things out? We need to give ourselves permission to trust our own tribal thinking, research, and teaching and not allow bureaucrats and crazed ideas at the bully pulpit to do our thinking, research, and teaching for us. And we need to take this kind of ideology and make it work for us on this earthly land.

So as we begin this new millennium, we must acknowledge our responsibility to educate for citizenship and leadership all members of a vast pluralistic democracy and in a world that is also becoming ever more interdependent.

Finally, and for me the most important of all, is that transformational leaders are heeding the call of an intellectual imperative: to correct the omission and distortions of the work and prospectus of generations of scholars and teaching.

America today is not the America of 1492 or even the 1960s and will be still more different in 2050. Education and curriculum also adapt to changing values, ideas, concerns, allegiances, position, and representation. So at the crux of this fierce debate between Indigenous Peoples and American triumphalists is the teaching of the whole story: From the truth about Columbus's historic voyages to an honest evaluation of this country's national leaders. Who really discovered whom? Who are we? Who belongs in this country? Who controls? Whose values will prevail? In whose image shall the new millennium be made?

Are we tribal people in decline because we cannot agree at this point on what term to describe ourselves or are we actually at a very exciting crossroads engaged in lively debate about a tribal future and a best way to proceed? In any case, we have an enormous task before us. We must cleanse our thinking of gross error. We must apply ourselves to correct our systems and structures. We must inform our scientific and general communities of what we are about. We must support a healing process for offended and damaged tribal families. We must focus the spotlight on hegemony and its practitioners, so that we can see it coming and take actions against it.

Notes

1. This quote came from William Carlos Williams in David E. Stannard's *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
2. *Counting coup* on the text refers to an old term of many tribes whereby warriors initiated an attempt to destroy their enemy. But at the last minute of contact in battle, the warrior instead barely touched the enemy with a stick, giving him enormous pride in this act rather than feeling the power to kill.
3. *Rhetorical sovereignty* is the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in this pursuit, to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse (Lyons 2000).

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