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‘Planting the Seeds of Educational Change’

Indigenous Voices, Multicultural Education, and the US Democratic Ideal

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Indigenous Voices, Multicultural Education, and the US Democratic Ideal

Chairperson or Co-Chairperson: Kathryn Shanley

An Exploration of the Potential Roles and Influences of Indigenous Voices in Education on Collective Perceptions of Truth and Democracy

Increasingly, statistics have shown that the state of Native American Student achievement in public schools across the United States is in dire need of reform. Recent studies, such as the National Caucus of Native American State Legislators' 2008 Report entitled *Striving To Achieve: Helping Native American Students Succeed*, expose national crisis, revealing that Native American Students are '237% more likely to drop out of school' (2008: 5) than white students. Naturally, Indigenous grassroots movements aimed toward addressing the educational processes shaping their communities and futures are simultaneously increasing in the US. Bringing alternative realities to light in the educational sphere of American society, such movements perhaps have the potential to initiate change not only with regard to Indigenous nation building, but with regard to collective societal perceptions of democracy as it stands today in the United States. The awareness of alternative realities and perceptions of history initiated through the increasing voices of Indigenous peoples and minorities in mainstream education and academia has given rise to many questions which remain unanswered. Can opposing truths and contesting histories be honored in formal education settings and if so, how? Furthermore, what do these opposing truths tell regarding the nature of democracy in the USA?

The incorporation of Indigenous voices in mainstream academic thought and discourse increasingly presents challenges to the US national narrative propagated through formal education. With increasing presence, such voices are collectively challenging the Eurocentric nature of national mythology as propagated through formal educational settings. Accordingly, an exploration of both the historical and contemporary institutional factors facilitating the perpetuation of national mythology within formal education settings may be of worth in

understanding not only the construction and deconstruction of Indigenous nationhood but also in understanding the roots of contemporary American democracy as it stands today.

The growing body of research regarding Indigenous Education, more of which is being conducted by Indigenous peoples themselves, suggests that the implications of imposed cultural norms through educational processes on Indigenous identity and nation building deserve further study. Rauna Kuokkanen, author of *Towards an Indigenous Paradigm*, argues that '[e]ducational institutions have been central to the process of colonizing Indigenous peoples' minds all over the world' (2009: 20). If this argument holds truth, research into the influence of formal education on Indigenous nation building in the US may be of value in expanding current research with regard to nationalism not only locally and nationally, but globally as well. And perhaps, such expansion may give birth to more questions regarding the legitimacy of the national mythology upon which contemporary American democracy rests. For it is this very national mythology, that the increasing presence of Indigenous and minority voices in mainstream education, academic thought, and discourse challenges.

The goal of my research, which included participant observation as well as in depth anonymous interviews with individuals from my home community on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Northern Montana in addition to extensive literary and archival research, was to consider carefully the following questions 1.) What forms and functions has the US national narrative taken with regard to education over time? 2.) What challenges do the incorporation of Indigenous and minority narratives and voices into mainstream academic discourse and education present today to national mythology? 3.) If indeed, US Democracy today is largely sustained through the perpetuation of national mythology which has traditionally excluded the voices of Indigenous peoples and minorities, what will the incorporation of contested histories in

formal education settings hold for the future of democracy and multicultural education in the US? And 4.) Finally, and perhaps too far into the abyss of speculation surrounding the topic for the purposes of this paper, if history is to be rewritten what are the potential local, national and global implications? Through years of extensive literary research in addition to fieldwork, I found that potential answers to these complex questions required and will continue to require in depth multidisciplinary approaches and analysis. A thorough understanding of the phenomenon at hand requires the merging and delicate weaving of many disciplines including but not limited to Indigenous Studies, Law, History, Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy and Political Science. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to weave together key themes and elements from each discipline, with the hope and vision that subsequent research will expand upon such themes accordingly in light of potential solutions to the challenges at hand.

The Historical Role of Formal Education among Indigenous Peoples in the US

No longer is it commonly contested that historically, formal education played a pivotal role in the attempted assimilation of Indigenous peoples not only in the United States but throughout the world. Likewise, the rise of Indigenous scholars and educational leaders is leading to an increased awareness of the philosophies underlying both the present and past treatment of Indigenous and minority peoples worldwide. Many argue that such philosophies, which originate in the historical and political mission to ‘civilize’ Indigenous children, a mission essentially masterminded by the US Federal Government and carried out by missionaries for decades, have had profound effects on the both the collective and individual identities of Indigenous peoples in the US, and thus arguably on Indigenous nation building (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 2008).

During the early colonization of the Americas, a common belief in Manifest Destiny and that the original inhabitants of the land were ‘uncivilized’ savages led to the dispossession of Indigenous lands and later gave birth to an era of US Federal Indian Policy known as the Assimilation Era, where numerous government funded assimilationist policies were enforced upon Indigenous peoples. Not only did the philosophies underlying the beliefs which supported such policies fail to recognize Indigenous ways of living and knowing, but such policies in essence, failed to recognize the basic humanity of Indigenous peoples in the US. In accordance with the US Federal Indian Policy of Assimilation that plagued the latter half of the nineteenth century as well as the beginning of the twentieth, missionaries and US Government officials engaged in an unofficial yet documentable campaign to carry out the wishes of Congress to assimilate Indigenous peoples within the US through the use of formal education.

During the Assimilation Era of Federal Indian Policy in the United States, missionary boarding schools were established throughout Indian country across the West. In my home community on the Flathead Indian Reservation, now home to the Confederated Salish, Kootenai, and Pend D’ Oreille Tribes, the first Indian boarding school was established on the reservation during the mid-1800s, nearly thirty years prior to the forced removal of the last band of Bitterroot Salish from their aboriginal homelands in the Bitterroot Valley. According to the memoirs of Father Lawrence Benedict Palladino, an Italian Jesuit Missionary who engaged in missionary work among the Bitterroot Salish approximately twenty years following the arrival of the first Jesuit missionaries beginning in the 1860s, ‘[t]he founding of a boarding school for the education of Indian youth marked a new era in the cause of the red man’s civilization’ (1922: 103).

The supposedly well-meaning civilization of Indigenous peoples in the US was in all actuality rooted in ethnocentrism, and called essentially for the eradication of Indigenous languages, worldviews, and belief systems in exchange for the forced indoctrination of European values and learned adherence to the values sustaining the developing nation at large. The following paragraph depicts the prominence of commonly held ethnocentric thought which was deeply embedded within individual and collective psyches of the time. In this case, and perhaps in many, the individual psyche was responsible for both the creation and administration of ‘civilizing’ education to Indigenous children.

Father Palladino wrote the following in his 1922 memoir, in a chapter entitled ‘Educating the Indian’,

[m]an at birth is but a blank, helpless little savage, the scion of royalty, in this wise, being not a whit better off than the rude savage of the Rocky Mountains. Take, if you please, civilization’s most favored son from civilization’s lap, let him grow up in the barbarous surroundings of the wigwam – do you think his intellectual, moral, and material condition will be one bit above that of the wild children of the forest? Whence the difference? Because of education. It is therefore evident that the Indian, as the rest of mankind, if he is to be civilized, must be educated (1922: 105).

Regardless of intent, according to recent scholarship, missionary education has had profound and lasting effects on the well-being of Indigenous peoples, both individually and collectively. The growing body of literature on historical trauma suggests that the aftermath of the atrocities and

crimes against humanity that occurred during this period in history can be seen in the manifestation of the numerous societal problems plaguing Indigenous communities today. Such problems include but are not limited to disproportionately high rates of alcoholism/drug use, suicide, and violent crime. Scholars in the field of historical trauma tie such phenomenon to the assimilationist policies and the systematic assault on Native peoples and cultures, specifically that of boarding school education (Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998). Countless generations of Indigenous children were taken from their homes based on a common belief held by Father Palladino himself, proclaimed blatantly in the following statement, ‘the parent, because of his intimate connection with his children, becomes positively an uncivilizing agent and a genuine obstacle in the way of advancement’ (1922: 107).

There are many theories regarding the intent underlying the ‘civilization’ of Indigenous peoples in the US. David Wallace-Adams, author of *Education for Extinction*, argues that the term civilization came to be a ‘legitimizing rationale for the hegemonic relationship that had come to characterize Indian-white relations’ and ‘served as a compelling justification for dispossessing Indians of their land’ (1995: 12) . Under these premises, missionary education was regarded as a vehicle through which the assimilation of Indigenous peoples could be accomplished peacefully as well as a systematic means through which Indigenous lands and resources could be exploited.

Regardless of intent and of whether or not such policies were made in ‘good-faith’ the mission to assimilate Indigenous peoples in the US spanned across several generations and resulted in the near extinction of Indigenous languages and in some cases, the termination of entire tribes. Regarding colonial policy in the United States and Mexico, Noam Chomsky, author of *A New World of Indigenous Resistance* states, ‘[o]ne difference is that the Native, Indigenous

communities in the United States were virtually decimated' (2010: 50). Some argue that the mission continues today, albeit less directly and more systematically. Efforts to assimilate Indigenous peoples through formal education and the 'civilization of the Indian' undeniably have influenced the ability of Indigenous peoples to sustain nationhood in various ways, including but not limited to the attempted eradication of Indigenous languages, worldviews, and ways of knowing. Based on the impact of such educational policies on Indigenous nations today, it may be safe to say that formal education during the latter half of the nineteenth century as well as throughout the twentieth, has perhaps been one of the most significant factors influencing the contemporary realities and fates of many US Indigenous peoples and communities today with regard to Indigenous nation building.

Historical policies with regard to the formal education of Indigenous peoples are today considered a form of ethnocide by many scholars, and the assault on Indigenous languages through formal educational processes unarguably has had profound influences on Indigenous identity and thus on Indigenous nation building. With language as the cornerstone of all nations, it can also be argued that missionary education resulting in the near extinction of Indigenous languages contributed to the near eradication of Indigenous nationhood simultaneously. According to Stephen Greymorning, author of *A Will To Survive: Indigenous Essays on the Politics of Culture, Language and Identity*, '[t]he threat that Indigenous North Americans face today is one of our most serious and most challenging, that of keeping our languages from becoming extinct, and by so doing, preserving the essence of our cultures' (2004: 15).

Colonial Education: Contemporary Reality or Thing of the Past?

Fortunately, with visions to restore those aspects of Indigenous culture that were nearly eradicated, Indigenous peoples in the US are currently engaged in language revitalization and nation building efforts that expand into the realm of formal education and beyond. According to Lomawaima and McCarty, '[t]he Education of American Indian Children has been at the very center of the battleground between federal and tribal powers; the war has been waged through and about children, and the costs of colonial education have largely been borne by Indian People' (2006: 5). Such statements provoke many scholars today to ask whether or not colonial education is truly a thing of the past. The above quotation dated in 2006, appears to suggest otherwise. Perhaps the idea that colonial education in the United States is a thing of the past is merely an illusion. The increasing demands on behalf of Indigenous and minority peoples to have a voice in the educational processes occurring within their communities has perhaps helped to bring the illusionary nature of such beliefs to the surface today.

Interestingly, the incorporation of the Indigenous voices into mainstream academia and thought initiated by grassroots Indigenous movements has also added to the growing body of literature based in post-colonial theory. While the term post-colonial is suggestive of the end of colonialism, the theory encompasses the ideology of neo-colonialism. According to Kwame Nkrumah, author of *Neo-Colonialism; the Last Stage of Imperialism*, '[t]he essence of neo-colonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus political policy is directed from outside' (1965: ix). Neo-colonialism holds that power relations continue to be influenced by ongoing colonial processes such imperialism, modernity, and globalization albeit systematically, having profound repercussions for the oppressed peoples of the world, which tend to be Indigenous and minority peoples.

In essence, such theories take into account colonial and neo-colonial realities in contrast to traditional ethnic studies, influencing one to consider potential bias in contemporary dominant thought and subsequently, educational policy regarding Indigenous and minority peoples. According to Nkrumah, '[i]n place of colonialism as the main instrument of imperialism, we have today neo-colonialism' (1965: ix). While Nkrumah's statement refers to 1960's neo-colonial Africa, similar comparisons can be drawn with regard to the 'neo-colonization' of Indigenous peoples in the US today.

Recent scholarship suggests that an in depth analysis of the various ways in which imperialism manifests may be a crucial step toward 'decolonizing' Indigenous peoples and nations. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, author of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, imperialism tends to manifest in the following ways, '(1) Imperialism as economic expansion; (2) Imperialism as the subjugation of "others" (3) Imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization and (4) Imperialism as a *discursive field of knowledge*' (1999: 22). Accordingly, the understanding of imperialism as field of knowledge which is perpetuated through formal education processes may be a crucial component in analysing the past, present, and future influences of formal education on Indigenous nation building. Researchers may benefit the field by exploring the various ways in which imperialism manifests through formal education practices and policies today and how they affect developing minds. The late and highly renowned Indigenous scholar and philosopher Vine Deloria Jr argued in his book *Custer Died For Your Sins*, that in light of combatting and potentially eliminating the oppression of Indigenous peoples, '[c]ultural and economic imperialism must be relinquished' (1969: 59). Theorizing imperialism as a *discursive field of knowledge* may allow us to explore and identify the various ways in which nation-states maintain power through educational means.

Interestingly, imperialist and neo-colonialist endeavors with regard to formal education are not limited to Indigenous peoples in the US, but span across the globe. In fact, such endeavors are creatively exposed in the music of the late Bob Marley, whose music inspired Ethnic nationalism in the 1970s. The global repercussions of imperialist education are quite eloquently expressed in the following lyrics taken from Marley's 'You Can't Blame the Youth', '[y]ou teach the youths about Christopher Columbus and you said he was a very great man. You teach the youths about Marco Polo and you said he was a very great man. So, you can't blame the youths. You can't fool the youths. You can't blame the youths of today' (Bob Marley's 'You Can't Blame the Youth', 1973).

Interestingly, similar frustrations surrounding public school education and historical inaccuracy/omission surfaced throughout the duration of my research on the Flathead Indian Reservation. According to an anonymous Indigenous educator on the Flathead Indian Reservation,

[t]he textbooks haven't changed much. You get a history textbook and there are the 13 Colonies and Danielle Boone, but not very much about Indian people and what they contributed to this country. I think that needs to be incorporated into the newer versions of text books so that Native American students will see it and say, "[m]y Ancestors have something to do with it. They contributed something to this country" (Anonymous Interview number 2 Flathead Indian Reservation, January 2011).

In addition to educator frustration with contesting histories, students also expressed concerns regarding the information propagated in reservation high schools. According to one Indigenous male student who had recently chosen to drop out of a local reservation high school,

[t]he text books said we weren't here. I had to argue with my teacher about it and say "the book says this but people around here say this and it is well known".

They didn't want us to know the truth. It was the same with the principal. He had a cop mentality, like "I believe this so you should believe this", just like back in the day when Christian people made Indian people believe something. I had a problem with that (Anonymous Interview number 1, Flathead Indian Reservation: January 2011).

Additionally, when asked about how he felt about the way Columbus Day was observed at his high school he responded with the following statement,

[t]hey worshiped him. They treated him like royalty. I just don't understand why an Indian person should believe in that you know? It's like me going up the principal and saying "I need you to learn from Chief Charlo, or I need you to learn the battle strategies of whomever" but he has his own battle strategies and his own teachings and that's what he goes by (Anonymous Interview number 1, Flathead Indian Reservation, January 2011).

Statements such as these prompt many to wonder why, both educationally and nationally, citizens of the United States continue to choose to glorify people who raped and pillaged while continuing to celebrate events which lead to calamity among the colonized. Noam Chomsky, in his book entitled *Chomsky on MisEducation* refers to this twisting of history in a chapter entitled

‘The Craft of “Historical Engineering”’, stating that the ‘[t]he vocation of “historical engineering” is as old as history and was recognized as a professional responsibility as the United States entered World War I’ (2000: 57). While the logic underlying such an agenda may be difficult for many to understand, such logic undoubtedly plays a role in sustaining the colonial *reality* or in the maintenance of societal delusion rather. When societal fabric is woven with delusions of collective proportion, it is not hard to understand how social hegemony within such a society develops.

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, examines the process of the subjugation of the oppressed by the oppressor, and how in this process both parties are essentially dehumanized. Freire illuminates the societal shadows underlying colonial oppression arguing that, ‘[a]s the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves are also dehumanized’ (1970: 56). Exploring the ways in which oppressors create myths which are then propagated through various social outlets including but not limited to education may contribute significantly not only to studies on Indigenous nation building but to peace and conflict studies as well. Furthermore, if one analyses the history of formal education among Indigenous peoples in the US it is possible to draw parallels between such experiences and the following description of colonialism offered by Freire,

[c]ultural invasion, which serves the ends of conquest and the preservation of oppression, always involves a parochial view of reality, a static perception of the world, and the imposition of one view upon the other. It implies the “superiority” of the invader and the “inferiority” of those who are invaded, as well as the imposition of values by the former, who possess the latter and are afraid of losing them (1970: 160).

Now, considering the last sentence of Freire's quote, let us return to the last lyric of Marley's 'You can't blame the Youth', as each compliments the other in regard to shedding light upon the power of national mythology in maintaining the oppression of Indigenous and minority people. What happens when the youth can no longer be fooled? What happens when the oppressed are not easily possessed? Because Indigenous people today are increasingly recognizing the importance of the education that their children are receiving in the development of Indigenous nationhood and thus are inevitably on the path to collective realization, the conscious seeking of answers to such questions may prove fruitful in the collective quest to alleviate both local and global inequality. With the education of Indigenous Education increasingly seen as having revolutionary potential to rebuild Indigenous nationhood as well as contribute to studies in democracy and education, Indigenous grassroots efforts to address educational processes occurring within their communities can be conceptualized as peaceful revolutions as well as long term investments with the potential power to secure a better future for humanity in general.

Potentially worth noting, in the concluding chapter of *Rebuilding Native Nations, Strategies for Governance and Development*, Jorgensen suggests that the lack of effective leadership within Indigenous communities presents obstacles to Native nation building (2007: 276-94). While the focus of this chapter is on the relationship between education and nation building, because education and leadership can be conceptualized as inextricably connected, it is perhaps important if not crucial to note. Highlighting the role and importance of effective leadership in the rebuilding of Indigenous nationhood, the article also exposes the obstacles to securing effective leadership today. What is not explored however is the *creation* of leaders which is directly related to education, whether that education is formal or informal. While the

quest for effective leadership goes on, researchers may contribute to the field by exploring Indigenous ways of perceiving leadership while digging deep down to the roots of the problems brought to light. In Norbert Hill's anthology entitled *Words of Power: Voices from Indian America*, Southern Ute and Indigenous Educator Eddie Box states '[t]he battle for Indian children will be won in the classroom, not on the streets or on horses. The students of today are our warriors of tomorrow' (1994: 19).

Challenges to Challenging the Status Quo: Indigenous Voices in Education and the Democratic Ideal

According to Taiaike Alfred, author of *Peace, Power, and Righteousness: an Indigenous Manifesto*, '[w]e must reorient our societies to provide leaders with a basis for conduct rooted in Indigenous culture, to restore-bring back to life-traditional political cultures by abandoning the structures imposed on us, and exorcizing the attitudes, beliefs, and values that perpetuate our colonization' (1999: 44).

While the increasing presence of Indigenous voices in mainstream thought does not constitute the abandonment of imposed educational structures, it does present challenges to the existing political structure of formal education in the US today. Many Indigenous communities are both collectively and actively striving to rebuild Native nationhood through re-evaluating educational processes occurring within their communities. The recognition of the tremendous power of education to shape political, social, and national realities is leading to both the exposure of the functions of formal education as pertaining to the national level as well as to the potential of education to influence Indigenous nation building at the grassroots level. Freire argues that, '[i]n order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must

perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limited situation which they can transform' (1970: 49).

Today, Indigenous leaders and activists in the US are increasingly recognizing not only the near extinction of Indigenous languages but the crisis of Indigenous education as this; limiting situations whose transformation can be accomplished through the vehicle of education. While such efforts have taken different forms, the vast majority of approaches to addressing the crisis have involved the organization, collaboration and dedication of both Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous at the grassroots level. According to an anonymous non-Indigenous educator on the Flathead Indian Reservation, '[w]e need to do a better job of taking a look at the background where a lot of our students are coming from. I don't think we're doing a good job of doing that. It's another culture. They have different needs. They have different wants. They have a different idea of how education should be presented to them. I think they are all legitimate wants and desires' (Anonymous Interview number 3, Flathead Indian Reservation, January 2011).

In light of recognizing the educational processes occurring within Indigenous communities as active agents of change, Indigenous grassroots efforts to address education within their communities have laid the ground for the seeds of change to grow throughout the nation. On the Flathead Indian Reservation, community members have organized collectively at the grassroots level to address the educational process occurring on the reservation today. Interestingly, despite the enactment of legislation intending to eliminate the significant achievement gap between Native and non-Native students in Montana Public Schools, the studies continue to reveal alarming statistics. Making sense of these statistics required and will continue to require in depth research regarding Native American achievement in Flathead Reservation Schools where in many cases, Native American achievement rates pale in

comparison to those of others. Thus and naturally, the organizing of community members was born through, according to an Indian Education Specialist responsible for overseeing Indian Education in an anonymous school district, '[a] strong concern for Tribal children across the reservation and a strong desire to improve the educational outcomes of Tribal children' (Anonymous Interview number 4, Flathead Indian Reservation, 2011).

Through developing various approaches, Indigenous communities throughout the US are actively implementing tactics to provide education that is more culturally aligned with the goals of their communities. In many ways, the process sparks a very heated debate. Proponents of formal educational reform suggest that culturally sensitive material be incorporated into the dominant institutions of thought while others suggest that Indigenous students attend linguistic and cultural immersion schools where they will be immersed in their Native cultures. To members of the dominant society, the proposition that Indigenous students should attend separate schools may seem segregationist in theory. However, to members of Indigenous communities who face linguistic extinction due to long histories of assimilative policies launched through government funded educational projects, the creation and maintenance of cultural immersion schools may seem a rather urgent necessity. Considering the inextricable connection between language and national unity allows for the conceptualization of the relationship between mother tongue education and the rebuilding of Native nationhood. It is this way that grassroots initiated immersion schools are participating in the process of rebuilding Indigenous nationhood today. Suggestions on behalf of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike have contributed significantly to an ongoing debate regarding what types of educational structures are most appropriate for Native students. Should culturally relevant material be incorporated into formal educational structures existing within Native communities? Or rather, should Indigenous

communities establish linguistic immersion schools, where students receive culturally appropriate education strictly in their Native tongue? While remaining specific to individual Indigenous communities, the answers to such questions may come only with time and further research, and are unfortunately beyond the scope of this chapter.

Matters of potential effectiveness of approach set aside, it can be argued that both Indigenous immersion and formal education reform approaches are simultaneously contributing to Indigenous nation building at this time in unique ways and will likely produce unique and interesting results. While immersion schools focus on the restoration of language, the cornerstone of nations, the approaches to public school reform seek to bring Indigenous voices into the public sphere, a reality which has the potential to restructure US national mythology and thus collective perceptions of democracy. The restructuring of national mythology, as it pertains to formal education, undoubtedly holds revolutionary potential with regard to the restructuring of American society in general, as does the ability of immersion education to restore Indigenous languages now and in the future. All potential outcomes of educational approaches, regardless of their specifics, can be expected to have positive implications with regard to Indigenous nation building and cultural revival. However, the approach of formal education reform may have greater potential in influencing the restructuring of contemporary American democracy and society at large.

Interestingly, the importance of language revitalization programs within Flathead Indian Reservation public schools surfaced throughout the duration of my fieldwork and research on behalf of educators and students alike. According to one seventeen year old anonymous interviewee, being able to attend Salish language class at the local high school was one of the main motivating factors influencing his attendance. However, he stated that his decision to drop

out was largely based on the fact that Salish language class was cut from the curriculum. When asked why he thought they wanted to remove Salish from the curriculum, he stated the following,

[w]hen I was in high school I had a specific person tell me I couldn't amount to anything in life. One of the main reasons that drove me to going to school every day was to learn Salish, my own language, because I wanted to be a Salish teacher. They wanted to cut Salish for some reason. There were rumors going around about our teacher. The school is a cowboy school and they wanted the Indian students to go Two Eagle (the local Tribal high school), just put them there like chess pieces. They wanted to "keep her mouth shut" because she gave good information and truthful information. But like some politicians they don't want the truth to be out there so they try to hide it. And that's what they did
(Anonymous Interview number 1, Flathead Indian Reservation, 2011).

Indigenous Voices in Education: Historical Disequilibrium and the Challenging of US Democracy

For the purposes of obtaining a deeper understanding of the relationship between formal education, Native nationalism, and democracy in the United States, one may find a journey through history beneficial, thought provoking and potentially foretelling in the unfolding of US democracy today. While historical analysis may prove a necessary path, one finds that, although potentially beneficial, we need not journey into the depths of the creation of colonial education to find a connection between formal education and the maintenance of US democracy. Interestingly, the relationship between democracy and education pertaining both to the

development of Native nationhood and contemporary democracy in the US is quite eloquently brought to light in the following passage written by Edward Hartman Reisner in his 1922 PhD dissertation entitled *Nationalism and Education Since 1789: A Social and Political History of Modern Education*, '[i]f democracy in the countries of western Europe has been the result of the efforts of factory workers to secure the ballot for the improvement of the conditions of labor, in the United States, democracy has come as a result of the abundance of *free land* (emphasis added) on the ever extending frontier and from the simplicity and naturalness of pioneer life' (1922: 2).

While Reisner's observations intricately expose the relationship between education and nationalism across two continents, they also expose the inherent foundational flaws of contemporary democracy in the United States by exposing the fallacy at the roots of a national mythology which holds and continues to hold to some extent, that that the 'New World' was unoccupied prior to European arrival. While his testimony reflects the national mythology propagated at the time it was written and is rooted in manifest destiny, such testimony may still prove fruitful to contemporary political philosophy. It was, after all, under manifest destiny, that the illegal occupation of Native American lands was not only justified, but considered a God-given right. Today, with the rise of Indigenous scholarship and the incorporation of Indigenous voices into mainstream education and academia, it has become increasingly apparent throughout the academic world and thus the public sphere that perhaps the colonization of the Americas was neither glorious nor peaceful, but quite the opposite, a truth which has been known amongst many Indigenous peoples and minorities since its birth.

The argument that the 'New World' was unoccupied prior to colonial efforts to establish settlements, an argument rooted in ethnocentrism, Darwinian Theory, and in the disregard of Indigenous human rights, is no longer justifiable, and so shakes the foundation of contemporary

American democracy. The New World was not so new, and was in fact home to countless Indigenous Tribes and Confederacies. Most importantly, if contemporary democracy in America is largely the result of the 'abundance of free land' available to early colonists in the Americas, land that in all actually was occupied by Indigenous peoples, then is it safe to say that contemporary American democracy is in fact based in fallacy? And furthermore, is it safe to speculate that the fallacy of American democracy lives on through the maintenance of a national mythology which has excluded the voices of Indigenous peoples as well as minorities for that very reason? If so, what will the rewriting of history hold for the future of democracy in the US?

Conclusion

In the US today, grassroots Indigenous efforts to address education within Indigenous communities are indeed facilitating Indigenous nation building, both through the revitalization of Indigenous languages and the through the challenging of national mythology traditionally propagated in formal education settings. While contributing to the restructuring of formal education in general, the argument that the incorporation of Indigenous voices into education and academia at all levels, while empowering Indigenous people individually and collectively, is simultaneously shaking the very foundations of contemporary of American democracy, may hold truth. If so, what will these movements hold for the future of both Indigenous nation building and democracy in the US? Many may agree that the asking of such questions is both a valid and necessary prerequisite to understanding the complexity of the situation at hand. Perhaps the asking of these questions will help plant the seeds of change regarding the elimination of oppression of Indigenous peoples not only on the Flathead Indian Reservation but across the

nation as well. And perhaps in our increasingly globalized world, the rising contribution of Indigenous and minority voices into mainstream education and academia have at this time more power than ever before, to change the historical narratives that sustain inequity not only nationally, but globally. Perhaps seeds sewn in this moment, however small, will bear the great fruits of truth for tomorrow.

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