

## *Place and Kinship*

*A Native American's Identity Before and After Words*

DONALD ANDREW GRINDE, JR.

I cannot order my early memories in any particular sequence—rather they swirl around me in an experiential place where time and space, as well as collective and individual perceptions, blur into an impressionistic totality (perhaps I will return to such a state upon my death). I do know that my parents dreamed of me before I was conceived, before such dreams I lived in a place without names and words. It was their dream that eventually enabled me to come into the world of words and then learn to be a human being. And so it was that I was brought into the world, and subsequently, through a barrage of seemingly random sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touches, that concrete reality after birth gradually took on the shape of names and words. It was my parents and the rest of my family that named me when I was a child—not the outside world. That kinship identity and meaning was informed by the human and natural environments that I encountered in my formative years. As Native and mixed-blood people from the coastal Southeastern United States (we had another name for it, "Tama," when we lived in that place in another world with only our native relatives), we understood that we did not own the earth—it owned us. We were simply "Tomathli," or the people who live on the high ground or bluffs. Thus, the place of our birth vested indelibly in us, an identity, since we have always been and will always be there with the spirits of relatives of past, present, and future.

Our relatives, elders, and friends helped us to name the world and thus enabled us to "see" it and to dream about it. Thus kinship tells us that our biological and mythological grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers are reflected in the environmental mothers and fathers (Moon, Sun, earth and sky), sisters and brothers (plants and animals) and forces of creation (earth, wind, fire and water). From the start, a sense of unity existed for me in the small federal housing project where my parents and I lived during the early years of my childhood—since we still lived in the land of our ancestors.

Before I went to school, I had lived in a world where there were no words (in the spiritual world and the womb of my mother) and after I was born I had lived in a world where you heard words.

When I went outside that world into the dominant society's schools, I learned that you could also see words, and this was called reading. As long as I can remember, I was intrigued by the idea of "seeing" words.

As a young child, my world was very personalized. Hours were spent looking at the transit of ants and praying mantis, and listening to the birds and the wind in the trees. I was raised to know that experience came first and then ideas, because we were encouraged to figure the world out for ourselves. My identity, informed by place and kinship, partially preceded notions of nationalistic ideology that I would receive in the educational environments of the dominant society. Ideological identities can be changed and reformulated in the media and education to suit the time and historical needs of a population, while traditional Native American conceptions of identity are rooted in place and kinship in a magical way that insinuates itself into your life from birth. I suppose that is why colonial societies have attacked American Indian identity from the beginning of contact. People who ritualize place and link kinship to that reality cannot be easily "moved" or "reinvented" for the sake of conquest and the marketplace.

My mother taught me that the place I inhabited nurtured me in a maternal way. When I complained about the hot Georgia sun she would tell me that since they had paved so much of the ground in the city, the earth, our mother, could not "breathe." From her I learned that the earth was a living and breathing organism and that we were a product and function of its existence. Life, as we knew it, endured because our mother endured. I realized that our spirits were all around us—not on some cloud in the sky—we just needed to understand the spiritual world around us and learn how it operated. We were guided by our personal and spiritual experiences, not faith. My personal relationship with my natural surroundings formed at an early age, was not symbolic but deeply experiential for me, and has remained with me throughout my entire life.

At the same time, I began to notice that other people had ideas about this world as a "vale of tears" and that true happiness existed in a far-off place separate from this world, called "heaven." These ideological notions of existence appeared to concentrate on human codes of behavior with little attention to learning from the physical place and historical time within which people lived. In fact, space and time are often compressed or obliterated in such ideological conceptions, since the only place that mattered was some far off "holy land" and the only time that was significant was a magical one that existed about 2,000 years ago. Coming from a humid subtropical environment, it was impossible for me to imagine such an arid place as the "holy land" where people herded sheep for a living. Thus, the message was not "grounded" in my spatial and personal experience. Such a "holy" place seemed far less vivid than my own personal and familial experiences with my surroundings.

Growing up as an only child, with a heightened sense of relatedness, did not prepare me for the bureaucratic indifference of the public schools. Although I was shy, I made friends. It was during this time that I also experienced the terror of gangs. For the poor, random and senseless violence was a hallmark of our existence, and, even in the first grade, bands of violent boys, six to twelve years old, terrorized those of us who would not join. In the first grade during recess, a student in another class knifed me in the abdomen, sending me to the emergency room. I never knew that the attack was coming. After taking a drink from the water fountain, I turned and felt the knife plunge into my stomach. I can still remember the smile on my assailant's face, the pain in my abdomen and my parents' panic and concern at the hospital. I can still remember my mother and father protesting to the school about the violence and very little being done about curtailing weapons in our elementary school.

I also remember observing group violence during my youth. As the Civil Rights Movement heated up in the mid-1950s, I saw African-American people demonstrating peacefully after a St. Patrick's Day parade and mounted police charging into them with tear gas and clubs. My mother observed that the Black man and the White man were locked in a struggle for equality and that in such struggles Euroamericans sometimes go crazy with violence—lynching peo-

ple and killing women and children. It was obvious to me even as a child that while the state had a monopoly on "legitimate" violence, police violence was often far from being legitimate in its application. ←

As a student who was "different" in the American South, I received a rather spotty education in grammar school. Since I read a lot at home and my parents and relatives talked to me a great deal, I learned about language, politics, literature, and culture through family experiences. When I received standardized testing in the upper grades, it was revealed to the school's surprise that I was "gifted" and I entered an "accelerated" academic program. My years in the "gifted" program were basically oriented towards Math and Science—disciplines that appeared to be addenda to the Cold War defense education efforts.

During my years in elementary school, I established a firm relationship with my Grandfather, who taught me hunting, trapping, native agricultural practices, and the spiritual dimension to place such things in an appropriate context. My Grandfather had seven daughters, and my mother was his oldest daughter. As my mother's first child, I was almost the same age as his two younger daughters. In retrospect, it appears to me that I was not only my Grandfather's first grandchild but also the son he never had. I think my mother sent me to visit my Grandfather during the summer so I could learn things and so my Grandfather could have a son. The result is that I really had two fathers when I was growing up. Although I did not grow up in affluence, my family life more than compensated for any monetary shortcomings.

Grandpa had herbal remedies for most ailments. He believed that Indians should eat no grains except corn and occasionally rice and that wheat bread, refined sugars, and virtually every processed food was bad for us, both for nutritional reasons and because these foods were not part of a traditional American Indian diet. He grew corn, beans, and squash in "hills," stating that they were supposed to be grown together symbiotically. In the late summer and early fall we would run the razorback pigs out of the swamp into his cornfields to fatten them up for market. He would always take the leanest and strongest and slaughter them for our consumption before he fattened the others for market. I learned about the behavior of pigs, snakes, rabbits, deer, and insects from him. Everything had a place in creation, according to Grandpa. I watched wild pigs forage for rattlesnakes in the swamp. I learned how to avoid poisonous snakes and not to kill them, since we believed that if you kill one snake many more will show up in that same place in the next day or two. My Grandfather also taught me about the weather, I still remember learning about the high wind in the pines and the sound it makes in anticipation of a storm.

When I entered high school, I took a heavy academic load, which sometimes had an adverse effect on my health. But I was determined to do my best to gain a good education in order to bring honor to my family and to become self-sufficient. At the age of twelve, I began to have epileptic seizures. Although the seizures ceased by the time I was fourteen, the experience taught me about the fragility of life and the human condition. I remember my first seizure as if it were yesterday. As I was fading into unconsciousness, I wondered if I was exiting from this world. Awakening a few minutes later, I was pleased to still be on this earth, and yet I had experienced a peacefulness that defied description. From a practical standpoint, the seizures heightened my awareness that the world of ideas was where I would work, since many jobs involving physical labor were not suitable for epileptics.

My mother and father had graduated from high school during the Great Depression and going to college was not a realistic option for them. However, they saw in the early 1960s that a state university education for their son was within their financial grasp so they encouraged me to aspire to it. For awhile I entertained the idea of going to an Ivy League school, but the tuition was more than my father made in a year. It was unrealistic for me to seek something that was so out of reach for the class that I was born into.

I wound up going to Georgia Southern College, a state university just a few miles from my Grandfather's house and far enough away from my parents to secure the experience of residen-

tial college life. I began as a business major, then switched quickly to pre-law, seriously contemplated becoming a biology major (I really enjoyed botany) but then decided to go into history since it sought to comprehend human existence in very broad terms. College life in the early sixties was still a lot of "panty raids" and beer parties, but I do recall some defining moments, even in that environment.

In the fall of 1963 I remember sitting in Freshman English Composition and hearing a student run down the hall shouting that the President had been shot! We were writing an in-class essay and the English Professor (a kindly gay man with one of the biggest hearts I have ever known in the academic community) told us to finish our assignment and then leave quietly. After class, I walked down to the student union and watched on TV the grim news of President John F. Kennedy's assassination in Dallas. When it became apparent that he was dead, I went with several Asian American students and some white students to lower the campus flag to half-mast. As we were doing this, a group of white students told us threateningly that we weren't to lower the flag since Kennedy was a "nigger lover" and deserved to be shot. The ensuing shoving match, with racial epithets hurled from both sides, ended when a larger group of white students arrived with the intent to also lower the flag to half-mast.

Once again, I had faced the darker and violent side of American society, even in a time of national mourning. The next year I would deliver a paper in my International Relations class on the futility of American involvement in Vietnam. Most students hissed at the end of my presentation, and the only other American Indian at the school, a Seminole from Florida, seemed to be the only one who considered my views seriously. Through these experiences, I learned that speaking out and taking "controversial" stands had a cost, but I generally believed that the benefits gained by being true to yourself outweighed the costs levied by the dominant society.

Completing my undergraduate degree in 1966 at the age of nineteen, I obtained a graduate fellowship in American history to attend the University of Delaware in the fall. Although I had wanted to do American Indian history, there was no such thing at the time and no graduate advisor to help me. American Indian history was not considered a "legitimate" field and my graduate advisor told me that I needed to focus on an area such as American Economic history to secure employment. When I told him that I was an American Indian and thus still wanted to do research in this area, he smiled and murmured, "I thought that we had killed all of them." Since my advisor's interests were in the development of the American West, I wrote a dissertation on the DuPont Company's price-fixing practices in its western markets. At the time, that was about as close as I could get to a study of American Indians. But I resolved that I would create my own American Indian history course when I began my teaching career.

Realizing that American Indian history was not an "approved" subject, I knew that I would have to seek internal rather than external validation for my work. I still strove to complete my classes and degrees, but I understood that my professional life would be essentially different from many "mainstream" students. My quest was to create a discourse on Native American history that reflected the Native American viewpoint on the process of conquest, domination, and the struggle for self-determination. I reasoned that this would not be an easy journey, and there would probably be little appreciation for my work except amongst American Indian people. I also understood, from the start, that by sticking to a realistic interpretation of American Indian history from the Native American viewpoint I would not gain friends and influence people in the upper echelons of the historical profession which was marked by ideology, control, and the sanitization of American history for popular consumption. For me, the conquest of America clearly had winners and losers, while the official line was that nation-state formation was a bothersome process that eventually created a society that was "fair" to all who assimilated into its ideological inventions.

From my own internal identity produced by place and kinship, such ideological rationalizations repudiated the intrinsic worth of American Indian people and the genocidal struggles that we had undergone. Often, friends and colleagues exhorted me to give up my dedication to my group

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identity and pursue my academic career as an "individual" (that is, to do work that benefited me and not necessarily my group). Also I noticed during the 1960s that people whose identities were not grounded in place and kinship tended to develop and change ideological identities quite readily. For example, once when sitting with a group of Indians and non-Indians in a social event at a park, a young non-Indian woman dressed in 1960s fringed garb confessed to the group that she was trying to "find" herself. Her search was for ideas that would define her, and in doing so she thought she would find a place and people that would be better. Since the United States is a collection of ideas and not a homogeneous people, I suppose that this process was important for many people. But I never went through a conversion process and thus I was never an ardent "Marxist" or "Capitalist" or "conservative" or "liberal." Instead, I understood that these were the thoughts of the Europeans that structured and restructured their worlds in the whirligig of "politics." My own political inclinations seemed to defy conventional classification until academic scholarship began to focus more directly on race, class, and gender.

Nevertheless, I was still perceived by many as being "political." I was once asked by a colleague, "Don, as a radical American Indian scholar, what do you think of the concept of American Indian sovereignty?" I replied to his query by asserting that "If I were a member of the dominant society then I would not be perceived as a radical but a conservative, since I stood steadfastly for the preservation of the language, culture, traditional government, and land base of Native American peoples." I am not so sure that the colleague ever fathomed the full meaning of my reply since it would have required him to look at me as something more than a "marginal" person in his society.

By the late 1960s, protests against the Vietnam War were in full swing. Feeling strongly about the futility of U.S. involvement, I became involved in student protests against the war. My advisor chided me for my views since he was a conservative, but he truly believed that you had the right to your views and your only obligation was to logically substantiate them. Throughout my graduate studies, I never felt penalized for my political views by him, although I did not feel that this was necessarily so with regards to other, more "liberal," professors who talked one way and behaved another. This professional experience demonstrated to me the moral contradictions in liberalism, as the war in Vietnam split our society asunder.

At about this time, it also became obvious to me that refocusing the status quo to arrive at a consensus for all meant severe sacrifices for those of us outside the mainstream. Worse yet, becoming a part of the mainstream seemed a form of psychological, cultural, and intellectual suicide. However, listening to the social, political, and economic critics of the time enabled me to formulate a personal course that seemed to avoid some of the ideological pitfalls of the times. Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, Tom Hayden, Jane Fonda, Herbert Aptheker, Stokely Carmichael, and many student leaders were among the people whom I gained wisdom from during this time.

A few American Indian students were in attendance at the University of Delaware and we "found" each other in the course of our stay there. I remember a Nanticoke Indian from Delaware who lived in the university apartment complex. He had been in the Navy in the early sixties and had gained a security clearance in Naval intelligence since he was assigned to guard an admiral's office door in the Pentagon. By the mid-sixties, he was using the GI Bill to attend college, but he was always complaining that if Naval intelligence wanted him they could yank him back into the service years after he was out.

One balmy autumn day in 1968, this American Indian student ran up to me and said that he wanted to go fishing that afternoon. His manner had a certain urgency to it and we drove twenty miles to a secluded lake and then rowed out into the middle of it. Before I could get my line into the water, my friend produced a letter from a governmental security organization stating that, since he had been in Naval intelligence, he could earn money by joining certain "radical" student organizations at the University of Delaware and reporting on their activities. They offered him \$6,000 per year for his reports, which in those days paid for his tuition, room, and board as an in-state student. Although he did not want to do such a thing, the letter also con-

tained a thinly disguised threat that if he did not agree to their offer they might pull him back into active military service, which would disrupt his college career.

My friend anguished over being placed in the position of "ratting" on his fellow students or being forced to interrupt his college career. We discussed his options, and I told him to ignore the letter and make no choice, at the time, since it appeared to be a form letter. Finally, he agreed that doing nothing was the best course and, as far as I know, he was never contacted again about the matter. With this experience, I understood that we were being "watched" and that it was important to convey our awareness of what the government was doing to monitor our activities.

In 1969, I was elected to a second term as President of the Graduate Student Association at the University of Delaware. As a student leader I supported antiwar protest marches, the Students for Democratic Society, the Weathermen, protests against ROTC and defense research on campus, Earth Day, as well as the beginning of women's rights and minority studies.

Essentially, I was either an undergraduate or a graduate student throughout the 1960s, and I am thankful for that experience since it was such an exciting time to be involved in politics and university life. However, I was always aware that a significant number of the people involved in the antiwar movement were not interested in the other issues that I considered related or pivotal to changing American society. My role as a student leader became more focused as I gained a fuller realization of such mainstream political realities.

My decision to become a university professor sprang from an awareness that the ferment of the 1960s was driven more by people's personal concerns about the effect of the military draft on themselves than by a larger critique of American politics and society (race, class, and gender issues). With the intellectual baptism of the 1960s fresh in my mind, I began my teaching career in 1971 at a small Catholic college (Mercyhurst) in Erie, Pennsylvania. I was twenty-five at the time. Paradoxically, the first course I taught was not American Economic history (which my advisor had thought marketable), but American Indian history—a task I had been training myself for throughout my graduate career. I regarded the training to get a Ph.D. as the "union card" that allowed me to legitimately function within the historical profession while pursuing my own goals to create a usable past for American Indian people, and maybe for the dominant society. Teaching the course was a scramble initially, since I had to invent the course and create the lectures from scratch. I knew that conquest history, wars, treaties, and government policies were important, but I also included discussions on Native languages, culture, philosophy, and spirituality. Fortunately, the students responded favorably to this approach. I was virtually the only professor who gave them insight into the world of "marginalized" people from a personal perspective. People at that small Catholic college understood white ethnic differences and extrapolated their reality to reason that understanding American Indians' experiences was a similar process. While they were not right in their assumptions, their intentions were good and they were open to discussing ethnicity in America in a variety of contexts.

I worked in Native American community organizations wherever my career moves took me. My community work provided a fuller understanding of the practical sides of American Indian education and policies as well as the problems of developing an American Indian history that we could call our own—not one that rationalized and justified the behavior of the conqueror. Whether it was working at SUNY in Buffalo, UCLA, UC Riverside, or Cal Poly, this networking with other American Indian and minority scholars helped me to lessen the social and intellectual isolation from the institution that was the norm. It is through this interaction that I have been able to refine and hone my ideas, since talking to mainstream scholars usually involved shrugs and discourses on "standards" and "real history," as opposed to any meaningful interaction about content and interpretation.

This isolation, however, made me a better family man because my life as a social human became centered more and more on kinship, childrearing, and marriage. As a result, I have happy, well adjusted children and grandchildren. Since both my wife's tribe as well as mine are matrilineal and

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matrifocal, we have built a house on her reservation (Navajo) for summer use and retirement purposes. Our children have become educated and returned to the reservation to raise their children. As a consequence, when my wife and I go back to the reservation, life is a swirl of kinship and place-oriented activities. This process has greater and greater value for me as I get older. My writing and rewriting of American Indian history are more important for my children and grandchildren than they are to me personally these days.

It was in this environment that I had a series of personal crises that profoundly affected my life. The first of these was the murder of my sixteen-year-old son by a drug dealer. One Sunday afternoon, my second-oldest son went to play a game of pick-up basketball at the local neighborhood playground in the small, rural California town where we were living. He was playing with a group of boys when a car drove up and motioned to two of the boys to come over to the car. With the game interrupted, my son stood by waiting as the two boys talked to the men some thirty feet away. After some shouting, the men pulled out a gun and motioned for the two boys to get into the car. Seeing what was happening, my son tried to ease away, but the men yelled for him to get into the car since he had seen what was happening. The two boys in the car said that he had nothing to do with them, but my son was forced into the car. Taken to a deserted road, the marijuana growers placed the three boys face down and began to intimidate them by cocking and uncocking a pistol to the back of their heads—accusing the boys of stealing their plants. The other two boys as well as my son said he had nothing to do with such activities. Finally, the men shot my son in the back of the head at point-blank range and then got into the car and sped off—leaving the other two boys there with my dying son.

The resulting entanglement with the legal system showed me that justice, up close, is neither pretty nor blind—it reflects instead the values of the community, racism and all. Upon being informed of the crime and the capture of the perpetrator that evening, we were told that the murderer was a local businessman and that he was trying to plead "diminished" capacity (he claimed the shooting was accidental since he was on drugs at the time), and plea-bargain to involuntary manslaughter (about three years hard time). Initially, the District Attorney seemed inclined to agree with his reasoning—thinking initially, as he stated to me later, that my son was just an illegal "Mexican." When he found out that my son was the son of a local American Indian college professor, he decided to change his mind on the plea bargain and prosecute for second-degree murder.

I pressured the DA's office to fully prosecute the murderer while arranging for my son's burial and grieving with my family. I do not now understand how I did all those things and still kept my sanity. I remember being angry and disappointed in the way the justice system worked. My wife told me that she felt violated—like someone had opened up her womb and had begun to kill her from the inside out. The other children were in shock.

The trial was even worse. The local business community that we traded with presented a signed petition to the judge that my son's murderer was a local businessman and thus deserved special consideration. The defense tried repeatedly to prove that my son was, indeed, involved in stealing the murderer's marijuana plants, in spite of the testimony to the contrary by the two other boys who survived the incident. Towards the end of the trial, victim's assistance services called us and asked why we were not in court to see justice served. When I replied that I was afraid I would kill the murderer if I saw him on a regular basis in court, the court counselor suggested that I visit the murderer in jail and "forgive" him. When I told the victim's assistance counselor that we did not do things that way, there was a long pause and then a "good bye." Eventually, the man was convicted and served eleven years and he is out on parole now.

A few years after my son's death, I was stricken suddenly with diabetes. I lost a pound a day for twenty-five days before I was able to diagnose my condition. The health maintenance organization that I was enrolled in kept insisting I had the flu and that they did not need to run a series

of tests on me. I thought I had cancer and might die soon and finally persuaded the HMO to run tests on me and to specifically run the diabetes tests over the protests of my doctor. Within hours, the doctor called me up and sheepishly informed me that I had diagnosed myself and had additional health problems from going so long without treatment. The experience was another lesson in death and dying and what's important in life—and it was especially helpful a few years later as I talked to my father in his last days as he lay dying of cancer.

These personal crises had coincided with my getting tenure, so I decided that speaking my mind and working to change an awful system were more important than climbing the ladder of success. The experiences redoubled my resolve to write American Indian history from an American Indian perspective for the record, and less for personal advancement. As a newly-tenured faculty member, my personal identity as a Native American was increasingly in conflict with my professional identity. An affirmative action officer at a university where I worked once told me, "Don, you have to think of yourself and your personal advancement and think less of the needs of American Indian people." As a person with strong group orientations, such conflicts between doing what was advantageous for me and not right for American Indian people became untenable. I reasoned that having tenure and job security now compelled me to use my freedom to free others.

As a result, I continued my research on the Iroquois influences on American government. In the early 1970s, as a young American Indian professor at SUNY-Buffalo, I was visited by several Iroquois elders. They told me that their tribal and oral histories testified to the fact that their ideas of democracy had a profound influence on the founders of America. They then asked me as one of the first Native Americans to receive a Ph.D. in American history to research the white man's documents and write about this historical fact in a way that non-Indians could comprehend. I told them that I was surprised at this thesis and request, since I had always thought that the U.S. Constitution was one of the primary instruments of oppression used against American Indian people. In a deliberate manner, the Iroquois elders replied that they were aware of the way the Constitution had been used against them but they wanted me to pursue such a line of research, "Because it is the truth." I began a preliminary survey of the historical and documentary literature and found some interesting leads for further research. However, grant money for the project was not forthcoming. Non-Indian foundations and professors discounted the idea out of hand in spite of an intriguing scholarly evolution of the idea (a former President of the American Historical Association had hinted at the use of Iroquois ideas in the quest for American union as early as 1754).

In 1977, having no research funds and using only the evidence I could garner in the libraries in Buffalo, I published a book, *The Iroquois and the Founding of the American Nation* which advanced the notion that the Great Law of Peace of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) was an intellectual factor in the development of American governmental ideas of freedom and democracy. Initially, the book fell stillborn from the press. Only interested American Indians and a few others read it—scholars and "friends" of the American Indians scoffed at the thesis of the book. Five years later, interest in the idea resurfaced as the Bicentennial of the Constitution approached. I then gained some research money from private foundations to further my work on the subject and published *Exemplar of Liberty: Native America and the Evolution of American Democracy* in 1991 (coauthored with Bruce E. Johansen). This book is now acknowledged as the definitive work on the Iroquois influence on American government. Without my internal validation and the personal crises I experienced, I doubt that I would have had the persistence to publish my second book given the derision that I received from the anthropological establishment after my first publication.

Fortunately, this research enjoyed and still enjoys a wide readership for those who want to survey the evidence and decide for themselves. The argument that there is no scholarly and documentary evidence relating to the Iroquois influence on American government is no longer tenable. Critics and neoconservative pundits claimed that such assertions were a product of an "invented" tradition that served the needs of "multiculturalism." They reasoned that, of course,

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American Indian people (appealing to latent racism and implying that we were savages) could not have had anything to do with the development of American government. I was impressed with the absolute avoidance of historical and documentary fact and the *ad hominem* and racially biased critiques about my scholarship. They said that it was better that a good non-Indian historian examine the evidence, rather than I.

In the process of my research, I discovered important and heretofore unpublished notes relating to the first draft of the Constitution. As a scholar of the American Constitution, I approached the Constitutional Bicentennial Commission (chaired by former Chief Justice Warren Burger) and asked that they publish what was essentially the first notations and draft of the Constitution. They flatly refused such a request without even examining the draft that exists in a historical society in Philadelphia. It became clear that they were not interested in furthering scholarship on the Constitution, but rather their role was to make sure that the right "spin" on the Constitution was achieved in the Bicentennial celebrations. It was clear that the federal government and the "court historians" were more interested in rationalizing American history to support the present dominant ideologies than in broadening our historical awareness. ←

By the early 1990s, my arguments and scholarship could no longer be ignored as they had been in the 1970s. The result was both a media and scholarly argument that fueled the wars over "political correctness." I have concluded that the making of American history like the making of sausage is a messy and untidy business and if you have an uncritical appetite for either of them then you had better not examine their production very closely. Historical facts, interpretations, as well as historical inventions that we choose to examine, are functions of our present existence. Objectivity is a myth: we are "participants" in the creation of American history, and to pretend that we are not active in the construction of our "realities" is to deny our humanity, our place, and our time. Throughout this whole process, it has been American Indian scholars, my family, as well as many non-Indians like my co-author, Professor Bruce E. Johansen, who have been supportive of my ideas.

In the late 1980s, I spent a year in Washington D.C. pursuing my research and testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs. During that time, Russian-American relations were thawing and Russian scholars were coming to Washington D.C. I became a part of the program that brought American and Russian scholars together in various people's homes and hotels to discuss common issues to speed the ending of the Cold War. As we met the Russian scholars, we were aware of the beige government vans that were always outside the hotel with men in trench coats standing around, watching our activities. These surveillance tactics clearly indicated that the Cold War was not completely over. Our discussions with the scholars, on the other hand, were very positive, and we realized that we shared very similar experiences, even though we lived under different ideological configurations. This was a significant experience in my life, as it reinforced my feeling that governments often stand in the way of meaningful interactions, even at such critical times as the thawing of the Cold War.

No discussion of my life could be complete without some mention of my activities in the American Indian Movement (AIM). For over twenty years, I have been a member of AIM. From the time that it was declared one of the ten most dangerous organizations by the FBI in the 1970s until today, I have believed that American Indian liberation is basically a conservative process (preserving the culture, language, and spirituality of American Indian people), but I also believe that political action and human liberation movements are crucial if indigenous peoples are to regain their lands, sovereignty, and autonomy. In most other colonized areas of the world, native peoples (India, China, Africa) have regained their lands and their freedom, but this has not happened in the Americas. Instead, American Indian sovereignty is obfuscated by governmental discourses on "jurisdiction," resource management, and assimilation. American Indian people have largely remained colonized entities within the neocolonial governments that have been created after independence movements in the Americas. Until this is rectified, American Indians will

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remain imprisoned in an ideological rationalization that denies them basic human rights. For example, site-based Native American spiritualities are given short shrift by the U.S. judicial system. When an American Indian spiritual leader states that a certain mountain is sacred, a non-Indian must corroborate that assertion. We do not go to Muslim scholars who study Christianity for outside verification when the Pope asserts that abortion is immoral in his eyes—people accept the Pope's word, although they may disagree. Only American Indians need "outsiders" to validate their religious claims about sacred sites and their spirituality. As long as American Indian people remain unfree and imprisoned within alien ideologies, there will always be a need for Native American liberation movements like AIM in the Americas.

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At the beginning of the 1980s, when my wife and I decided to build a house on her reservation (Navajo) we reasoned that our children needed to understand the place of their birth even though we lived in the non-Indian world as professionals. We plan to retire to this house because it is our place with our kin. Having built the house with my own hands and the help of my family, there is no other place quite like it for us. When my wife and I die, we expect to return to the place (mother earth) that is important to us and our kin. Since I have not talked to anyone who has come back from the dead, I do not know much about that world after death. Perhaps it is a world without words where everything and everyone is related. I suspect it will be very different in every way from this world, including the spiritual environment. At any rate, I will have lived my life here, and I will be content to leave the world and my place to my kin to make of it what they will. I hope that my words will inform them of what I know so they can better understand what they know. In looking back, I have been blessed by the creator through my family and my work. My life has been interesting and full, and there is still much to do.