

Written out of History: a Critical Analysis of Political Science and Policy Studies

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One needs to look no further than to the discipline of Political Science and Policy Studies if they wish to see why American Indian Studies and Indigenous Studies has been in a continual struggle for legitimacy in academia, specifically at the university level. Besides the issue of the historical record, notions of democracy—fostered by Political Science—favor rationalism and written documentation as evidence over oral traditions and sacred knowledge; this might explain the cold shoulder that many political scientists give toward the thought of a Native American political theory or ontology having any substantive or moral value. Perhaps, the biggest reason why these disciplines suffers from resistance in higher education is that, in order to justify the dominant and prevailing worldview, there is a need to demonize difference, which serves to perpetuate the foundations of ideology behind our institutions; most notably white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy.

The book *Research Methods in Political Science*, written by Michael Le Roy and Michael Corbett, defines Political Science as a discipline that seeks to explain “aspects of political reality” (Le Roy and Corbett 2006: 67). At first glance, it is hard to notice the lack of objectivity that this statement suggests about the discipline, but the term reality advocates a metaphysical understanding of what constitutes time and space. The roots of Political Science are anchored in Western paradigms of metaphysics that originated in the Enlightenment period, favoring human rationale through the construction of a linear version of history. This view of reality is contrary to the cyclical version offered in oral traditions of many Indigenous people, which explains a lot about the enormous obstacles facing American Indian Studies (A.I.S.) and Indigenous Studies departments and programs across the country in their fight for legitimacy in academics.

Donald L. Fixico’s book *The American Indian Mind in a Linear World* compares the difference between linear and cyclical perspectives of reality. In the book, Fixico contends that the Western perspective refuses to acknowledge traditional views of cyclical time, making a presumptive statement about the supremacy of Eurocentric ideals (Fixico 2003: 15). This is a problem facing Native American students when making the decision to enter into Political Science. The foundations of social sciences are steeped in scientific methodologies that largely ignore the potential of employing methods from Indigenous cultures. In 1994, an article in the journal *Political Science and Politics* discussed the extent of neglect for Native American and Indigenous politics in academia discourse. Franke Wilmer, Michael E. Melody, and Margaret Maier Murdock wrote:

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In political science we have largely left the study of native peoples and their political systems to sociologists and anthropologists and have, therefore, denied the role that indigenous peoples have played in the development of the American political system as well as the role they continue to play in the political and economic processes of this country.
(Wilmer et al. 1994: 269)

A large part of the dilemma facing Indigenous Studies programs on the road to legitimacy, in academia, stems from the ignorance perpetuated about Indigenous and Native governance. In the minds of political scientists, there is only the linear story of democracy, emerging from Western civilization. This sort of exclusionary rationale prevents Indigenous programs from gaining the necessary consensus, among other disciplines, for legitimacy in academia.

As a result of these issues, students interested in Native Americans' political issues and systems of governance are forced to decide between classes offered by Political Science and Indigenous Studies. This forces many students to enroll in A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies as a minor, instead of pursuing the discipline as a major. The interdisciplinary approach, taken by many of these programs, relies upon instructors from many disciplines—including history, art, and anthropology (Holm, Pearson, Chavis 2003: 10). Without a stable center for Indigenous programs and courses, these instructors' different visions of academics, research methods, and legitimacy can be counter-productive to the education of students and to Indigenous Studies gaining respect among other disciplines in the university. What occurs, from these different perspectives on education, is instructing from outside the circle with little concern for finding connections that can be forged in courses for students' education. Often instructors are unable to see how an interdisciplinary approach allows for specialization in particular areas of Indigenous Studies. In essence, the various disciplines that faculty members are educated in can serve to indoctrinate them in forms of gate-keeping, as a consequence of their field's methods and epistemology.

What the Early Research and Developments in Politics has to say....

Writings on Indigenous and American Indian issues span a diverse field of academic research. For the most part, the prevailing rationale in academia during the time of research shaped the methodologies and approaches taken toward the subject matter, ignoring to a large degree input and traditional knowledge from Indigenous people. Early accounts of American Indian perspectives about the United States found little coverage in the newspapers. Tragically, the lack of attention by historians at the turn of the century prevented the recording of Native narratives for much of the nineteenth century (Edmunds 1995: 721).

Methodologies and theories that are in use, in Indigenous Studies and A.I.S, tend to borrow from other disciplines because of the character of the interdisciplinary approach. This means that it is not uncommon to find methods from economics, law, art, business and history. Regarded as an offshoot of anthropology, ethnology, political science, and sociology, there remains no consensus on the core assumptions of American Indian Studies or Indigenous Studies (Holm, Pearson, Chavis 2003). In academia, many believe that Indigenous Studies is incapable of articulating a paradigm based upon internal information. Vine Deloria Jr. considers this to be a legacy of the scientific principles from Rene

Descartes' rationalist theory, which became the theoretical foundation for many of the federal policies—during the termination and relocation era— and to a large degree, responsible for the view that A.I.S. lacks merit in academics (Holm, Pearson, Chavis 2003: 10). This prevailing rationale in academia places Indigenous Studies in the uncomfortable position of being contrary to the foundations and principals espoused by the university.

Criticisms of Eurocentric ideals are scattered throughout American Indian Studies and Indigenous Studies literature, classes, and discourse. Native American concerns deal with issues of grievances over land, religious freedoms, civil rights, treaties, and financial issues. Ethno-historians have recorded the consequences from contact to colonization from the whites' perspective. Nevertheless, there is little consideration made by scholars on the position of Natives on legislation and policies in the United States (Carson 2000: 790). Robert Berkhofer has called for historians to pay less attention to white-Indian relations and more to the Indian-Indian relationship (Bieder 1981: 324). This is an area where Native American focused Political Science can make a difference in educating people about the contemporary issues facing tribal governments. For example, factionalism is a major indication of political instability in a tribe. A tribe's ability to work through issues in an arena of contestability is a significant indication of their commitment to democratic principles; it also displays their ability to strengthen sovereignty by overcoming adversity, from factionalism.

Early academics used rationale principals to explain why some nations evolved into civilizations and why others did not; Western models for determining the importance of social and economic development for groups of people became a tool of oppression in the policy realm. The band and tribe are recognized as one of the lowest organizations of human development, according to this scale. Populations that have evolved to form central governments are the highest form of human development, according to academia. Consistent with this attitude Samuel Morton, in 1839 wrote *Crania Americana*, to demonstrate that Indigenous people are a separate species (Bieder 1981: 311).

Ironically, the Indian Removal period was in full swing as scholars facilitated these ideas into political action. It became easier for the public to buy into the idea that the American Indian stood in the way of progress and the perfect society. This ideal society was the justification to force an identity on Natives that was compatible with American democracy. Early settlers on the frontier began to believe Natives stood in the way of their ideal society, illustrating the pervasiveness of this logic. According to Berkhofer, the ideal society became the gestalt of the settlers through the fusion of American democracy, liberalism, and individualism (Berkhofer 1978).

Indeed, from the onset the United States' relationship with Native tribes was shaped by the idea of destroying tribal culture through Christianizing the Native population. Religious intolerance for Native's faith became commonplace, following King Phillip's War in 1675. This ideology was responsible for draconian laws that aimed at eradicating Native religious practices—one law passed in 1660 outlawed medicine men in the Colonies. Puritans' religious intolerance allowed for "the death penalty for blasphemy...included any Indian who refused to accept the Colonists' religion" (Talbot 2006: 9). Underlying Manifest Destiny was the hidden narrative of the master race that governed the understanding and writing of American history, which was supported through legal and papal law. Manifest Destiny transferred from one generation to another so that there was no need for ideological

propaganda (Friedberg 2000: 362). American officials created federal Indian policy to civilize Natives through the essentials: Christianity, private property, and knowledge about agricultural practices.

Tracing the roots of Western episteme reveals the Cartesian subject as the source of knowledge; free to understand the external environment through the rational principals contrived in the human mind. Under this view, the subject is the ultimate resource of judgment, who seeks to define a rational order. This constructed an episteme that placed human agency at the center of the universe. For someone growing up with the epistemological view that life is interconnected, this seems like an impossible centering of human subjectivity. In contrast to the Eurocentric view of subjectivity, traditional knowledge in many societies' places value on the external environment as more than a mere resource for the purpose of production.

Fergus M. Bordewiche's book *Killing the White Man's Indian* relates Locke's notions on property as part of the trivializing and romanticizing of American Indian culture. Myths and misconceptions on American Indian life reveal the beginning of the political stigmatization that tribal people faced in the American political arena (Bordewich 1997: 34). The reluctance of the populist to participate in political vitalizing activities is very likely a symptom of the belief that politics and policy are an activity for land holding white men. Many Natives correlate property claims to the theft of their traditional lands, making matters even more complicated.

John Locke argued in the *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) that Natives did not own the land. He wrote "wild woods and uncultivated waste of America...vacant places...the rule of propriety...that every man should have as much as he could make use of" (Engels 2005: 360). These ideas supplemented the religious perspective on Native land claims with the political doctrines of Manifest Destiny as a successful ideologue in America. Controlling American Indians' political agenda took place before the founding of the country. One approach taken, by many of the colonial governors, was dividing the tribal religious leaders (Engels 2005: 360).

Under the logic of Manifest Destiny, information predicated on a Western analysis of value, identity, and subjectivity was disguised as objective truths, which was a perfect smokescreen for hiding the assumptions behind calculative thinking in political discourse. Dialectic terms like credibility and relevance provide a basis for power in the academy to discipline resistance to dominate methodologies, in order, to maintain the status quo approach to education and information production. Joely De La Torre believes this to be problematic because political science tends to hide behind terminology "to avoid any meaningful analysis (De La Torre, 2004: 175)." This prevents any meaningful discourse in the discipline to transition away from gate-keeping and exclusion.

During the founding of the U.S., there was suspicion of political parties and of anyone who was critical of the newly emerging political structure, which became policy in the Sedition Act of 1798 (Schudson 1998: 55). The new government had to concentrate on maintaining a good balance between the federal government and the states. What this created was numerous policy decisions that had underlying motives behind their implementation. For instance, the decisions in the Marshall Trilogy were more about balancing state and federal powers than about recognizing the sovereignty of Native nations.

In America, gate-keeping in academia was a direct result of what was considered valuable for civil society. Notions of proper conduct in civil society are based upon the writings of Castiglione's *The*

Book of Courtier, a contemporary of Machiavelli. Upper class Italians during the Renaissance court period used this as a bible for the rules of civil conduct in society (Matthew & Platt 2008: 11). Many Native Americans have taken a stance against participation in the game of politics and aristocracy's civility. Considered an extension of the colonizing governments, the Americanized vision of politics asks Indigenous people to surrender their identity to a system that has traditionally disempowered their communities (Williams 1986: 269). The ethos of civility becomes a way to marginalize those who have a different perspective on social harmony.

Rousseau argued that natural liberty was a necessary sacrifice for the possibility to live in a community. It is through this sacrifice we are able to obtain a level of rationality and morality in civil society. Examining the underlying assumptions of Jean Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* and comparing it with Immanuel Wallerstein's thesis, *The World of Capitalism*, the crisis facing humankind collectively and individually becomes more apparent (Wallerstein 1999). Understanding the ideology and the normative consequences of the Social Contract theory sheds some light on the current division, in academia, on the issue of A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies legitimacy. The principal blemishes of democracy and the current capitalist system are rooted in the liberal framework of Social Contract theories. These frameworks are a major obstacle for Native students as they stand in the way of Indigenous governance gaining respect in an academic setting.

Native American politics from obscurity to National Agenda

Civil Rights movements, in the 1960s, brought greater awareness to the social ills and the marginalization faced by many minority groups. Following major political and social statements made by Native people in events like the second incident at Wound Knee and Alcatraz, Native issues were no longer under the radar for mainstream society throughout the United States. This provided the catalyst for universities to open the door for the development of A.I.S. and Indigenous programs, which brought the division between worldviews into the university setting. Previously, education was a tool in use by the state to maintain and perpetuate its power (Grande 2004: 52). For many Natives and Indigenous people, their experience with education has been a constant barrage of assimilation and indoctrination to perspectives that stand in stark contrast to the way they were raised. Now, they were being given a seat at the table, but it could be called an empty or token gesture as legitimacy of the Indigenous perspective was not part of the universities agenda at the time.

Many of the changes taking place throughout the country did not mean that Native people were ready to assimilate to the Western perspective or become involved in politics. In Political Science, the decline in American political participation is viewed as an indication of a larger problem throughout American society. Native communities have a common history of violent conflict with national governments, and a history of mistrust toward national governments and "Western" democratic traditions (Peterson 1997: 324). Political activity is dominated by elites that utilize slogans as a tool to install passivity in oppressed groups.

Paulo Freire writes, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that dialogue is required for trust in the political sphere (Freire 2000). Humans exist in a dialectical relationship that determines our limits and our freedom. Activism begins when pedagogy is used to educate and elaborate the sphere of communication to allow the participation of the oppressed (Freire 2000: 148). The fact that the majority

of humans interact in a world without violent or vulgar acts being the norm, suggests trust exists in the majority of civic interactions and discourse. However, this does not mean that Indigenous societies trust their colonizers.

The issue of civic engagement in the U.S. political arena has never been viewed as necessary for many Indigenous peoples, particularly due to their transnational status. That would all change with the shift in federal policy, from the 1950s Termination Era to the 1970s Era of Self-Determination. Usually, citizen interaction takes place in the economic and political sphere. A major shift that took place in the 1970s—with international trade and economic integration—began a change in the public sphere and what some people viewed as civil interaction. Henry Giroux argues, in *Against the New Authoritarianism*, that the lack of civil society in America is a direct result of socio-economic factors brought about under the guise of globalization (Giroux 2004). Giroux believes that civic virtue has diminished because of the free-market fundamentalism that controls politics and education (Giroux 2004). A predominate perspective held before the shift in federal Indian policy was that civic society was manifested to defend Eurocentric and Western value systems. Members of Native communities observed voting and civic interaction as a reaffirmation of the federal governments' social and economic hierarchies (Luna 2000: 108). In *Political Liberalism*, John Rawls advocates a “veil of ignorance” in politics to prevent judgments that are based upon preconceived notions (Rawls 2005: 305). However, this theory fails to consider certain aspects of Native American identity, as domestic dependents, and the historical injustice that occurred in order for U.S. democracy to flourish.

Participation of Indigenous communities in the political sphere and through civic interaction has increased as a result of Native people viewing their struggle for sovereignty in the context of a legal right that must be protected (Merry 2003: 344). The ability for individuals to see their problem in the terms of rights empowers activism and equality in the public sphere of communication. This reduces marginalization that undermines the opportunity for a pluralistic form of democracy to thrive. With the recognition of sovereignty as a legal right comes the need to preserve that status for future generations, which increased the need for Indigenous people to be educated on social and political theories that were responsible for the current laws in place.

A major challenge facing political theories is to remove the Eurocentric legacy and cultural imperialism that many of the ideals of democracy has come to represent for marginalized groups; because the only other option is starting from scratch, which would be impossible absent a large scale revolution in education and in the politic arena. Rights-bearing discourse has been part of the factors that have empowered Native American participation in their own governments and in American politics. A healthy pluralistic society requires the interaction of all cultural perspectives in the public communicative sphere. Natives have historical grievances that are connected with the past ideology on civic engagement. However, this is not a reason for Native people to avoid protecting their rights in the political arena. Native students can learn to identify these ideologies, in policies and laws, by being educated in some of the theories and methods used in Political Science.

Through combining Political Science and Policy Studies with courses in A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies programs, the ideals of decolonization can function as a critical pedagogy to challenge the Western way of privileging individualism and positivism. Critical pedagogy in the public sphere has a dual function

of educating and empowering, which provides a catalyst for understanding— by marginalized groups— necessary for the formation of coalitions. Coalitions are built by compromise, and through compromise marginalized groups can enter civic engagement on their terms. This is the best method to confront the mutual mistrust in society over the political sphere. America’s future requires an open mind and open discourse to challenge the past injustices in civil society, which can help to combat intolerance in politics.

Native American Intellectualism and the Academy

Centuries of “rhetorical imperialism” makes terms like civic virtue appear as a privilege of the political elite, which is an extension of their social hierarchy (Grande 2004: 1-2). Vine Deloria Jr. feels that the Native population has been “forced into a situation where they could not always perceive the justness of federal law” (Deloria and Lytle 1983: xiii). Currently, participation in the liberal sphere of rights discourse has elevated Indigenous peoples’ status. In 1978, the passage of the Religious Freedom Act increased the ability of tribes to pursue religious practices banned by the federal government. The contemporary legal arena has been instrumental in allowing Native Americans to speak and gain acknowledgement from their particular social location. This is providing Indigenous people with the ability to have equal footing in political discourse, which bridges historical injustices by giving Natives the capacity to frame their social and political concerns.

The new landscape in American has done a lot to challenge the ideals behind our political and economic systems. This has given Political Science the opportunity to come to terms with its’ exclusionary nature stemming from past injustices and its’ adoption of scientific principles for legitimacy in the academy. Instead of scolding the passivity among educators for foreclosing the possibility of a different notion of Political Science, the article *Why Political Scientists Aren’t Public Intellectuals* by Andrew Stark, discusses the future of the American Political Science Association. Despite asking questions concerning the idea of legitimacy in Political Science, the article is stuck in the ideology of compartmentalizing knowledge for the purpose of defining the material content. This is a major problem, in Political Science, because the majority of the critical discourse, in the field, is still premised on the foundations of rationale principles, which allows the discipline to censor any perspectives that are outside of that logic.

It is essential to understand the hold over the academy that the discipline of Political Science and Policy Studies has through its’ endorsement of scientific rationale to determine legitimacy. This system privileges knowledge, exterminates difference through suspicion, and lacks vision for long-term applicability. These barriers prevent the production of information by political scientist that has much relevance for use in the daily lives of citizens, specifically Indigenous citizens. Due to the scientific focus, Native American intellectuals, in Political Science departments, not only must focus on their studies in the university, but also have to be ready to face a battle for legitimacy in the academy. The objectivity that Political Science strives for, in research methods, can trivialize the real world concerns of Indigenous communities by reducing them down to variables for study.

Recently, the positive economic contributions that Native American nations have made to the U.S. economy, since adopting economic development policies, is a significant reason why academia should reconsider its’ view of A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies programs and departments. Many Native nations’

governments suffer from inadequacies that are part of the legacy of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 and factionalism that developed as a result of outside influences upon their traditional political systems. If Political Science is unwilling to find academic value in the traditional systems of governance of Native nations, than Indigenous Studies programs should fill the void left by their lack of interest by offering courses that present these alternative political structures for academic inquiry. These courses could be beneficial in combating the stereotypical view that Indigenous people lived without governments or had any form of social cohesion. These courses would not privilege Indigenous epistemology over other ways of gaining knowledge in academia, but they would place traditional ideals of tribal nations as equals with Western forms of governance and knowledge production. Nothing is gained through privileging traditional knowledge, especially if Native American intellectuals become the new gatekeepers of the university.

Currently, Political Science tries to reduce Indigenous issues to the site of minority or identity politics. However, this is a pure misunderstanding of Native sovereignty and the unique role it plays in the American political system. You would think that political scientist might find this unique relationship as an important part of our current political environment. Researching Native American sovereignty offers Political Science potential data that can be significant in understanding state to state relations in the era of globalization. Because of the unique situation of Native nations, research on federalism and the commerce clause would benefit from examining the relationship between tribal nations and the federal government. It is essential that Native people begin to understand the value and worth that their governments have for our entire political structure. By offering their own form of Political Science type courses, Indigenous Studies programs can provide Native and non-Native students with the ability to specialize in tribal administration and economic development.

American Indian Studies and Indigenous Studies programs will continue to face questions of legitimacy, in academia, until the discipline reaches departmental status on campuses throughout the United States. The lack of PhD programs and the inability for students to specialize will continue to force many of the top students to migrate to other disciplines. This continues the domination of the discipline from instructors outside of the circle of Indigenous Studies or A.I.S., which really prevents the formation of a circle that would represent the core of the discipline. We can no longer afford for outsiders to control the direction of research and data on Indigenous societies. For instance, the *Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development* provides the usually song and dance about how the authors observed some Indigenous people firsthand, which makes them now experts on Native affairs and culture (Harvard Report 2008: xxi). This approach allows anyone who writes about Native issues to teach courses about Indigenous Studies without concern for the community being serviced.

Since the door has been opened, in universities for N.A.S. /A.I.S. programs, there is no longer a need to force a way in, but if the discipline of Indigenous Studies wants to be taken seriously, then a core curriculum for the studies must emerge. By filling the gap left by some disciplines in the university, these programs can provide its students with the education that is neglected by Western views of academic value. For instance, history and anthropology students are able to research Native issues in their discipline. However, Political Science ignores the contribution that Native people have had on our

government, which makes it an area that A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies could offer courses in that would counter the current perspectives in academia. By filling the void left by many of the disciplines, in the academy, programs can find legitimacy through forming consensus on the value and responsibilities of their curriculum. Through forming a consensus on the values and responsibilities of Indigenous programs, A.I.S. and Indigenous Studies can move from program status to a recognized discipline on equal footing with Western perspectives in the university.

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