

Remembering The Traditional Meaning And Role Of Kinship In American Indian Societies, To Overcome Problems Of Favoritism In Contemporary Tribal Government

Stephen M. Sachs,

Political Science, IUPUI

ssachs@earthlink.net

Western Social Science Association Meeting

April, 2011

(3/30/10)

Traditional American Indian societies were inclusive and participatory. Kinship was broadly defined so that everyone in band, clan and tribe was considered a relative to whom one owed obligations, and everyone was owed obligations by everyone else. Everyone effected by a decision had a say in it, and leaders, who were primarily facilitators, were responsible to all the people, who were their family, and for seeing that everyone's basic needs were provided for, though generally the web of mutual obligations among family were sufficient to insure a descent living for everyone. Today, as a result of colonialism bringing cultural intrusion and the imposition of culturally inappropriate forms of tribal government, many Native American communities experience having many people being left out of decision making, and of the receiving of benefits, as a combination of narrowed definition of family, and unrepresentative and non-participatory public processes has resulted in considerable favoritism, and often nepotism, by those in power. To overcome the current inequities and related disharmony, it may be helpful to review how traditional kinship and the underlying relational values functioned, in order to see how those values may be applied appropriately in the Twenty-First Century, as part of the process of overcoming the lack of inclusiveness and harmony in many Native communities.

I. Traditional Native Kinship

Traditionally, kinship was at the heart of American Indian ways of being and seeing, because all of life, all that is, was understood as being relational, a great extended family. The Lakota, for example, when completing a prayer or passing a sacred object say, *Mitakue Oyasun*: "all my relations - amen!" - a word, which like the Hindu Om (representing the prime sound in the universe, in which everything is vibration), when fully stated, contains all the vowels.¹ The Muscogee, like numerous other indigenous nations, have a very similar approach to interrelatedness, and when they dance the first friendship dance, recognizing and honoring the creator that is in and surrounds all things and beings, they chant "iyabileyuppe," which also contains all the vowel sounds.²

¹ See Gerald Mohatt and Joseph eagle Elk, *The Price of a Gift: A Lakota Healer's Story* (Lincoln: the University of Nebraska Press, 2000), pp. 3, 35, 145-146, 298-199; and Joseph M. Marshall III, *The Lakota Way: Stories and Lessons of Living* (New York: Viking Compass, 2001), pp. 211, 227.

² Jean and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path: The Way of the Muscogee Creeks* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 2001),.p. 26.

The unity of all beings (and for Native people, everything is alive, even the rocks, who are eldest, and share their wisdom in such ceremonies as the Sweat Lodge³) combined with their diversity, the difference in their qualities and ways of seeing, has social implications in indigenous understanding. Each person, family, group of people, human nation, tradition, as well as each nation of animals, plants, etc., has a place – with its unique perspective, qualities and talents to offer – in the circle of the world (or of being). Thus each must be respected, and everyone affected by a decision, must have a say in its making, in an inclusive participatory process (though the method for building consensus varies in traditional Native societies).⁴

Furthermore, the web of interrelationships based upon the inherent value of each being, requires a striving for balance, harmony, or as the Dine (Navajo) say, beauty (*hozo*).⁵ With the Muscogee (Creek), for instance, as seen in their creation story, and in all their related stories telling how everything is interrelated and must be kept in balance, as set forth by in Jean and Joyotpaul Chaudhuri, for example, “The beautiful astronomical legends give us a picture of the balance of male and female energies, thereby showing the patch of darkness in light and light in darkness, all circling in the search for harmony in motion. The legends provide a humanities parallel of the science of the Creeks which also sees the search for balance between the four elements and the synergy linking the cycles of dynamic energies of the earth, the water, the sun (fire), and the sky (air). This is no romantic pipe dream, but the vision of an earth-centered culture with sacred trust responsibilities. The Earth centered physics

³ Raymond A. Bucko, *The Lakota Ritual of the Sweat Lodge: History and contemporary Practice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), pp. 38-39, 77, 82, 136, and 236, note 32. Bucko provides a large number of references to other sources.

⁴ For a discussion of this in general terms, with examples from several tribes, see LaDonna Harris, Stephen M. Sachs, Barbara Morris, Deborah Esquibel Hunt, Gregory A. Cajete, Benjamin Broome, Phyllis M. Gagnier and Jonodev Chaudhuri, *Recreating the Circle: Returning American Indian Nations to Sovereignty, Self-Sufficiency and Harmony* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, Forthcoming, Ch. 1, and Ch. 4, Part I. This general pattern is also discussed briefly in Sharon O’Brien, *American Indian Tribal Governments* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), Ch. 2. For discussion of how some particular traditional native nations were participatory see: Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Iroquois* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, Carol Publishing Group 1996); Bruce G. Trigger, *The Huron: Farmers of the North* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1990), especially Ch. 6, “Government and Law”; Morris Edward Opler, *An Apache Way of Life: The Economic Social, and Religious Institutions of the Chiricahua Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), on politics, particularly pp. 460-471; Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorethea Leighton, *The Navaho* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 111-123;. Young, *A Political History of the Navajo Tribe*, pp. 15-16, 25-27; Alfred W. Bowers, *Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), particularly pp. 26-64; Catherine Price, *The Oglala People, 1841-1879: A Political History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) [which drew on many sources including the Walker papers], particularly pp. 7-21, 33-34, 60-62, 98-99, 156, 168 and 172-173; the second of the three edited volumes of the James R. Walker papers published by the University of Nebraska Press: Raymond DeMallie, Ed., *Lakota Society* (1982), Part I, particularly documents 6-16; Ruth Landes, “The Ojibwa of Canada,” in Margaret Mead, Ed., *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937), Ch. 3; Jannette Mirsky, “The Dakota” in Mead, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*; and Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, particularly Ch 9, but throughout the rest of the work, including in the creation Myth discussed in Ch. 3.

⁵ See Kluckhohn and Leighton, *The Navaho*; James F. Downes, *The Navajo* (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, Inc., 1972), particularly chapters 2, 3 and 8; Robert W. Young, *A Political History of the Navajo Tribe* (Tsaile, Navajo Nation, AZ: Navajo Community College Press, 1978); and Alice Reichard, *Navaho Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, Bollingen Series, 1950).

involves exchanges between and transformations of various forms of energy and the cycles of energy among soil, water, nutrients, animals, sunlight, air and rain in an environmentally balanced manner.”⁶ This dynamic balancing, that is necessary in the physical sphere, is also necessary in society, in which all the elements: men, women, the different clans and the two moieties - indeed all individuals - each have their unique and essential functions that must be kept in, and returned to, balance.⁷ The same is true of the individual, who if internally out of balance cannot act socially in a balanced way. “In the Muscogee Creek cosmos, all things consist of particular combinations of body, mind and spirit. When these are not in harmony, one is truly lost and healing becomes necessary for the entity to continue.”⁸ While for traditional American Indians, the ideal for individual and social life is harmony, and balance, attaining and maintaining those ends is not automatic. One has to work continually to build and keep good relations. As the Chaudhuri say of the Muskogee, "Given the unpredictable elements of nature and the quirks of human nature, the search for harmony takes sustained effort in all social institutions."⁹ Hence, in personal inner work and in all relationships, including with the natural environment and all its nations of plants, animals, etc., one continually participates in processes for returning to harmony. Each Native culture did this in a different manner, but almost all followed the same general principles (at least until they become too large or events put them sufficiently out of balance).¹⁰ A major component of the natural and human order, and a key to good relations in the family, at every level, to preserving peace and harmony (seen slightly differently by different indigenous cultures), is what some would call the principle of the circle, itself based on a fundamental value of respect, which in an important sense involves an equality between the whole and the part, at every level (i.e. the whole at one level being is the part at the next, e.g.: the individual in the family or group, the family or group in the tribe, the tribe in the world). As some Lakotas might understand it, the places in the circle have no meaning without the whole of the circle, but there is no circle without each of the individual places, which have their own qualities and ways of seeing. Hence if anything is to be decided, everyone must

⁶ Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, p. 19. On the point of balance of male and female, Indigenous societies of North America generally functioned with a balanced reciprocity between the genders. Each had their own relatively autonomous sphere of operations, and both men and women had a say in community affairs, though the details of this varied from society to society, and in particularly societies over time. Thus, unlike in past western societies, the division of labor between men and women did not create a superiority of one gender over the other, for where in the west, the division of labor between genders was part of a patriarchal, hierarchical system, in American Indian (and generally in Indigenous societies, including in the very ancient west) the division of labor between genders was part of an inclusive equalitarian system. To the extent that in Western societies it could be said that a man's home is his castle, among traditional Native Americans one might say that a man's home was her castle. Laura E. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, “Introduction,” and Daniel Maltz and JoAllyn Archambault, “Concluding Remarks,” in Laura E. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman, Ed., *Women and Power in Native North America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), pp. 3-16 and 230-249, found, in a study of 13 North American societies and multiple society culture areas north of what is now Mexico, that traditionally, in all but one case, there was a balanced reciprocity between men and women. The one partial exception in the study was the Muscogee, which Joyotpaul Chaudhuri told this author is incorrect information acquired from cultural "mixed bloods" who did not understand the traditional male-female balance of Muscogee Society, as set forth in Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*. Thus in all 13 cases it is known that balanced reciprocity existed.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Ch. 5-10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23, the theme pervading chapter 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Ch. 9, especially where quoted at p. 68

¹⁰ See for example how this worked very well in Muscogee terms in Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*.

be heard from in an inclusive participatory process, in which everyone affected is a participant, and so far as possible, everyone's concerns are worked into the decision.¹¹ This means, also, that leaders, chosen for their fine qualities, are primarily facilitators and announcers of collective decisions, though as persons respected for their wisdom and integrity¹² (something like "virtue" - but that is a Roman, now Western, concept, that is not quite the same as the American Indian sense of "good qualities"), they do have influence and exercise what in an Eastern sense might be called "guidance." Thus, every decision needs to include the input and interests of the whole community, with the goal of maintaining balance for the long term. And for native people, the community includes all beings (i.e. the plants, animals, etc.), so that the concept of peace includes keeping the natural environment in balance.

Indeed, traditional Indian societies functioned as families, with all tribal members treated as if they were relatives, regardless of whether they were biologically related. As Ella DeLoria said of the Dakota, this was a system that worked.¹³

Kinship was the all-important matter. Its demands and dictates for all phases of social life were relentless and exact; but on the other hand, its privileges and honorings and rewarding prestige were not only tolerable but downright pleasant for all who conformed. By kinship all Dakota people were held

¹¹ For a discussion of this in general terms, with examples from several tribes, see Harris, et al., *Recreating the Circle*, Chs. 1 and 4, Part I. This general pattern is also discussed briefly in Sharon O'Brien, *American Indian Tribal Governments* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989), Ch. 2. For discussion of how some particular traditional native nations were participatory see: Lewis Henry Morgan, *League of the Iroquois* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, Carol Publishing Group 1996); Bruce G. Trigger, *The Huron: Farmers of the North* (Fort Worth, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1990), especially Ch. 6, "Government and Law"; Morris Edward Opler, *An Apache Way of Life: The Economic Social, and Religious Institutions of the Chiricahua Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), on politics, particularly pp. 460-471; Clyde Kluckhohn and Dorethea Leighton, *The Navaho* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 111-123; Young, *A Political History of the Navajo Tribe*, pp. 15-16, 25-27; Alfred W. Bowers, *Hidatsa Social and Ceremonial Organization* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), particularly pp. 26-64; Catherine Price, *The Oglala People, 1841-1879: A Political History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) [which drew on many sources including the Walker papers], particularly pp. 7-21, 33-34, 60-62, 98-99, 156, 168 and 172-173; the second of the three edited volumes of the James R. Walker papers published by the University of Nebraska Press: Raymond DeMallie, Ed., *Lakota Society* (1982), Part I, particularly documents 6-16; Ruth Landes, "The Ojibwa of Canada," in Margaret Mead, Ed., *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937), Ch. 3; Jannette Mirsky, "The Dakota" in Mead, *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples*; and Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri, *A Sacred Path*, particularly Ch 9, but throughout the rest of the work, including in the creation Myth discussed in Ch. 3.

¹² Among the Navajo, for example. Young, *A Political History of the Navajo*, pp. 15-16, 25-27, reports that, according to Dine legend, the people lived in independent, self-sufficient camps, in which, like other band societies, decisions were made by the community by consensus. Headman (Hozhooli Naat'aah) only acted as advisors. He usually was proficient in leading at least one ceremony, governed by persuasion, "expounded on moral and ethical subjects, admonishing the people to live in peace and harmony. With his assistants he planned and organized the workday life of his community, gave instruction in the arts of farming and stock raising and supervised the planting, cultivating and harvesting of the crops. As an aspect of his community relations function, it was his responsibility to arbitrate disputes, resolve family difficulties, try to reform wrong doers and represent his group in its relations with other communities, tribes and governments. He had no functions whatsoever relating to war because the conduct of hostilities was the province of War Chiefs. "A headman was a man of high prestige, chosen for his good qualities and only remained a leader "so long as his leadership enlisted public confidence or resulted in public benefit." The same is shown in all of the references in footnote 7. See also E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), n, Ch. 5 & 7.

¹³ Ella DeLoria, *Speaking of Indians* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1998), Part II, "A scheme of Life That Worked," pp. 24-25.

together in a great relationship that was theoretically all-inclusive and co-extensive with the Dakota Domain. Everyone who was born a Dakota belonged in it; nobody need be left outside. [And since being Dakota, as with Indian societies generally, was more a matter of participation in the community than blood, kinship included all who effectively joined the community, whether they married in or were adopted, a common practice throughout traditional Native America].

In the traditional way, the prevalence of cooperation and sharing in the spirit of community is essential for harmony and balance.¹⁴ This requires a set of values that flow out of each other that numerous indigenous peoples summarize with the word ‘respect’, whose full meaning is not always appreciated today. The Comanche state this as relationships, responsibility, reciprocity, redistribution.¹⁵ Thus out of the nature of relationship, and the relationships everyone is in, flows a set of mutual responsibilities, which involve a reciprocity – not just of things, but of actions and concerns – which brings the redistribution necessary to continually recreate balance and harmony, or as the Dine say, beauty. Other indigenous peoples state this slightly differently, but the underlying basic values are virtually universal.¹⁶ The responsibilities and the reciprocities that the members of the community have with one another are not uniform (though the underlying principles are). They vary with the nature of the relationship, or set of relationships, involved. Thus immediate family will have more responsibilities to each other, than do distantly related persons, and, beyond that, each relationship and the specific duties involved are unique and constantly changing in detail, even though the fundamental principles remain relatively constant. These variations and changes in the details of relationships, responsibilities, reciprocity, and redistribution function as part of a broader system that constantly needs to be kept in balance and harmony even as circumstances, and hence relationships, change, keeping the relationship of relationships in the community in balance. It is a traditional principle that the basic values continually need to be applied in updated ways to maintain the balanced reciprocity of the whole community, with an appropriate distribution of all that is valued (economic distribution, influence in community affairs, position, opportunity to gain honor, possibilities for spiritual advancement, etc.),¹⁷ that the relationships themselves remain in dynamic balance. In their different ways, the institutions of the variety of Native American communities provided for the keeping of the dynamic balances and reciprocities necessary to keep their ever changing societies whole, as they adopted to new circumstance, finding ways to apply the basic values appropriately for the present, with an eye for the future. This was particularly the function of the inclusive ways of participatory decision making, in what ever ways a particular society carried them out, at a given time.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵ Michael Garrett, “To Walk in Beauty: The Way of Right Relationship,” in J.T. Garrett and Michael Garrett, *Medicine of the Cherokee: The Way of Right Relationship* (Santa Fe: Bear and Company Publishing, 1996), p. 165.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁸ Discussed with the Author by LaDonna Harris, Comanche, President of Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) for which these “four R’s” are living traditional principles applied to guide contemporary life, particularly in AIO’s Ambassadors Program. This is discussed in Stephen M. Sachs, “The AIO Ambassadors Program: Nurturing Leadership, Building a Network for Indian Country and the Indigenous World,” *Proceedings of the 2009 American Indian Studies Section of Western Social Science Association Meeting in Indigenous Policy*, Vol. XXII, No. 2, Summer 2009. For more information on its Ambassadors program, contact AIO, 1001 Marquette, NW, Albuquerque NM 87102 (505)842-8677, aio@aio.org, www.aio.org.

II. Overcoming the Impact of Colonialism: Kinship and Contemporary Indian Governance

Traditionally, American Indian communities generally functioned inclusively as families providing mutual support to their members, that usually provided a high quality of life for almost everyone, who by varying processes had a say in decisions that impacted them directly. The colonial experience of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century Changed that.¹⁹ The U.S. government attempted to assimilate American Indians into mainstream culture, by various means, including replacing communal ownership with isolated individual allotments, removing young Indian children to distant boarding schools where only English was allowed and traditional ways were denigrated, and for a long period denying Native Nations the right to have their own governments, and undermining traditional leaders. One of the results of the colonial physical and cultural genocide was some fracturing of the unity and inclusiveness of many Native communities. When finally, in the 1930's, the U.S. government allowed many Indian nations to have their own "tribal governments," under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936 or the Alaska Reorganization Act of 1936, the Western form of government generally imposed upon the tribes, most often, so clashed with traditional values that it created significant additional problems for the communities involved.²⁰ Instead of involving the citizens of the nation in participating in the community's decision, in some kind of inclusive process, councils were elected to make decisions. Those who lose an election often feel that they have been rejected by the community, and feel that their honor has been impugned. Often, tribal officials, defeated

¹⁹ See, for example, A. Timas and R. Reedy, "Implementation of cultural-specific intervention for a Native American Community," *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 1998, pp. 382-393.

²⁰ Among the numerous ways that various tribes achieved reciprocity, that united the principles of individuality and wholeness, and harmonized of competitiveness (among individuals and groups), supporting cooperation, here are a few examples. Among the plains tribes, such as the Lakota, for instance, there were numerous opportunities to compete for honor in undertaking socially desirable actions and exhibiting the four virtues: bravery, fortitude, generosity and wisdom (Royal B. Hassrick, *The Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1964), Ch. 2 and 13. Note, some Lakotas consider a longer list of positive qualities essential virtues. The word "virtue" is only an approximation of the Lakota concept. A number of Lakota have told me that they do not think of good qualities exactly in the classical sense of virtue). This might take place in warfare where a man would be recognized for being among the first in a battle to touch an enemy or for leading a raid to steal horses from an enemy camp. When a young Lakota man went on his first buffalo hunt or undertook some honorable action, his father would often have the camp crier go round the village announcing that he was giving away a horse to a poor family in honor of his son's deed (Luther Standing Bear, *My People the Sioux* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975) Oh. V.) Giving to those less fortunate was honorable and increased the community opinion of the benefactor. A woman would be honored for making beautiful articles of clothing and sharing them with others. Conversely, hoarding of goods for oneself was dishonorable, and indeed any improper act reduced one's standing. Examples of the channeling of competitiveness into promoting helpfulness in the economic sphere include Inuit ways of honoring people for how much they could provide to others, which encouraged individuals to be productive (E. Adamson Hoebel, *The Law of Primitive Man: A Study of Comparative Legal Dynamics* (New York Atheneum, 1976), Ch. 5). As with the Lakota, a person was not permitted to hoard the bounty of their hunting, while being honored for sharing it, and those who participated in a hunt, were entitled to a share of the kill. Similarly, in an environment with limited raw materials, a person was encouraged to make or obtain major useful objects, such as a kayak, which they had the right to use whenever they wished. But when they were not using it, the community expected that it be available to others to use. For reciprocity through the interaction of collaboration and competition in other Native North American societies, see the discussions of the Ojibwa, Kwakiutl, Iroquois and Zuni (as well as the Dakota) in Margaret Mead, Ed., *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937).

in a reelection bid, will spend the rest of their lives attacking the tribal government. In addition, people who are not included in the making of a decision, even if they are invited to a meeting to state their opinion to the decision makers, tend to feel left out.

Indeed today many people are, in fact, left out, as their interests are not effectively represented in the tribal electoral systems. Communication about public issues has become fragmented, with a considerable number tribal members, in many instances, unaware of, or holding distorted perceptions of, what tribal government is considering and doing.²¹ On many reservations there is now a generally low level of participation in elections and public meetings, accompanied by a great deal of disrespectful, and at times vicious, gossip and a considerable amount of, often, tenacious infighting. This situation has often made it difficult for tribal governments to get business done,²² while in some cases it has led to one faction coming to power, often temporarily, followed by extremely acrimonious conflict over their legitimacy. In a number of cases the conflicts have escalated to physical violence.²³ These difficulties are a result of the nature of the system itself, and, in general, not because of who the particular leaders happen to be at the moment. Paradoxically, these problems, in part, have been growing worse as one of their initial causes is being removed. The federal government since the 1970s began implementing a policy of self-determination for Indian people. As self-determination develops there is an accompanying growth of government-to-government relations between tribal governments and federal state and local governments in the U.S.²⁴ Therefore, what tribal governments do has

²¹ For a discussion of the variety of ways of inclusive participative decision making in traditional North American Society, see Stephen M. Sachs, "A Transformational Native American Gift: Reconceptualizing the Idea of Politics for the 21st Century," *Proceedings of the 1993 American Political Science Association Meeting* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 1993), updated as "Remembering the Circle: The Relevance of Traditional American Indian Governance for the 21st Century," Western Social Science Association 2001 Annual Meeting; and "Acknowledging the Circle: The Impact of American Indian Tradition Upon Western Political Thought and its Contemporary Relevance," *Proceedings of the 2002 American Political Science Association Meeting* (Washington, DC: American Political Science Association, 2002).

²² For a brief discussion of the impact of colonialism, Harris, *et al*, "Recreating the Circle, Ch. 2 and Ch. 3. For a more extensive history of the physical and cultural genocide of American Indians, see: Jake Page, *In the Hands of the Great Spirit: The 20,000 Year History of American Indians* (New York: Free Press, 2003), Parts Two – Four; Robert W. Venables, *American Indian History: Five Centuries of Conflict and Coexistence, Volume II: Confrontation, Adaptation & Assimilation* (Santa Fe, NM: Clear Light Publishers, 2004), Ch. I-VII; Roger L. Nichols, *American Indians in U.S. History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), Ch. 2-6; Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), Ch. 2 – 19; O'Brien, *American Indian Tribal Governments*, Part II, and the histories of several specific tribes in Part III, and Laurence Armand French, *Legislating Indian Country: Significant Milestones in Transforming Tribalism* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc, 2007), Ch. 1-5.

²³ See, Stephen M. Sachs, "Returning Tribal Government to the Traditional Wisdom of the People: Applying Traditional Principles Appropriately for the Twenty-First Century," *Proceedings of the 2010 Western Social Science Association Meeting, American Indian Studies Section, Indigenous Policy*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, Summer 2010.

²⁴ A good example of how communications has tended to break down, so that even key people who are directly concerned may not know what tribal government is doing, was observed by author Stephen Sachs on a relatively small reservation in the late 1990s. The tribe had long held a single Sun Dance, which was the most important spiritual ceremony for traditional tribal members. One year, a spiritual leader and long time helper at Sun Dances, who was a member of a tribal faction that felt left out of certain aspects of community affairs, went to the Elder's Committee to request permission to start a second Sun Dance. According to tradition, everyone concerned, most particularly the Chief of the existing Sun Dance, should have been invited to a meeting to share their views on the proposal and have a say in deciding whether, and how, to accept or reject the proposal. In the contemporary setting, however, that did not happen. Indeed, it was not until several weeks after the decision had been made by the Elder's

become more important, furthering a growing focus for contention in what is now often a fractious politics.²⁵

One impact of the combination of the fracturing of communities in the pre 1930's cultural genocide, and the further divisive effects of imposed inappropriate government, has been a narrowing of the concept of family among many Indian people, so that it is no longer inclusive. Although a great many Native people retain a considerable portion of tribal values, they have become used to functioning in social and political institutions that contradict those values. This creates a damaging cognitive dissonance, both for the person and the society. Many community members underlying values remain to varying degrees traditionally inclusive and participatory, but the ways in which they are used to functioning, to a large extent, are not. This includes the phenomena that, for many, helping family remains important, but that now means assisting one's more immediate family (though this may be more extended than "family" is for most of main stream American culture), rather than the community as a whole. One of the results of this is that today numerous tribal leaders with the responsibility to the entire tribe become involved in acts of favoritism, including nepotism, that expand the imbalances in their communities, and which sometimes are illegal. Perhaps the most famous case of this is former Navajo Nation Chairman, Peter MacDonald, who, with his first election in 1970, did a great deal to increase Navajo Nation tribal sovereignty and economic wellbeing, quite aggressively moving to extend tribal control over education and other programs, and over mineral leases, but who also engaged in considerable favoritism, nepotism and misappropriation of moneys, which led to his suspension as chair, in 1988, and his conviction on federal charges of bribery, fraud and misuse of federal funds in 1990.²⁶

This has brought about situations in which "family" is today a problem in many tribal governments, but which people too often do not discuss, as doing so seems to dishonor a traditional value that is still important. Indeed, most Native Americans continue to think and act relationally, often connecting well with someone as soon as that person is understood to be connected positively to their universe of relationships, or kinship in the traditional inclusive sense. Perhaps what needs to be done, as I have attempted here, is to consider how well "family" functioned for the community traditionally, and then to see that the problem is that the good traditional way of dealing with kinship has been lost.

I suggest that to overcome the current problems of the narrowed approach to kinship, and the divisiveness of many communities of which the reduced notion of family is a part, requires a number actions, some of which go beyond the scope of this paper to develop, but which must be mentioned (with references for more information) to put the consideration of reindigenizing the idea of "family" into perspective. The overarching need is to return Native communities to interacting inclusively, with

Committee and acknowledged by the Tribal Chair with the knowledge of the Tribal Council, that the Chief of the existing Sun Dance found out about the proposal and decision from someone who was not a tribal member and did not even live in the area.

²⁵ This was a consistent problem amongst the Comanche in Oklahoma in the early 1990s, as discussed in Harris, Sachs and Broome, "Recreating Harmony Through Wisdom of The People" and "Returning to Harmony Through Reactivating The Wisdom of the People."

²⁶ For example, see a discussion of conflict at Pine Ridge, SD in the 1970s in George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1998), pp. 129-133.

members listening to and supporting each other again, so that life can return to being lived consistently with the basic values that most Indigenous Americans still have, in varying, but considerable degrees. This needs to be undertaken in ways that meet the current needs and conditions of each community, as it is in the current moment, and to help it develop well in the future.

One of the needs is to move to returning community Institutions, especially tribal governments, to including every one concerned in building consensus through some kind of participatory process. One model is the application of a participatory strategic planning process by Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) for discussing all its major issues and decisions as a family, in the traditional sense, following the principles of Relationship, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Redistribution.²⁷ In addition to operating internally with the inclusive dialoging process, the Indigenous Leaders Interactive System (ILIS),²⁸ AIO uses ILIS to make meetings with other organizations inclusive, and applies it as a major component of its two year Indian leadership nurturing process, the Ambassadors Program. An important aspect of the Ambassadors Program is that its alumni remain in the communication network of its extended family, discussing major issues for AIO and Native people. With Ambassadors now working at decision making levels of every major U.S. Indian Organization, and in every federal agency that deals significantly with tribes, the network has become an important resource for Indian Country.

AIO has also used the ILIS to help return tribal governance to being inclusive and participatory. This was undertaken briefly with several nations, and more extensively with the Comanche Nation of Oklahoma.²⁹ For approximately two years, beginning in February 1992, the Comanche tribe in Oklahoma used ILIS with the goal of recreating traditional ways of building consensus in order to reinstall harmony in the nation. So long as the Comanche worked with the process on the tribal level, and in the four local communities, harmony was significantly increased. The strategic planning process was initiated at the invitation of the Comanche Business Committee (the tribal council) to provide discussions of important issues and to make proposals to the Business Committee, which had been having difficulty in getting business done because of lack of community consensus on proposals, regardless of their merits, in a climate of considerable division and infighting among the tribal membership. As a result of the community participation that included all the significant groups in the nation, proposals that were developed through ILIS were quickly and easily passed by the Business Committee, as they were supported by broad consensus, while proposals not widely discussed by the community continued to be difficult to enact. During this period, community relations improved

²⁷ See, Harris, *et al*, *Recreating the Circle*, Ch. 3.

²⁸ Castile, *To Show Heart*, pp. 34-35, 132.

²⁹ For example of some relevant work on American Indian Education, see, Gregory A. Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An ecology of Indigenous education* (Kivaki Press, Skyland, North Carolina, 1994); Estelle Fuchs and Robert J. Havighurst, *To Live on This Earth: American Indian Education* (Albuquerque, NM, University of New Mexico Press, 1983, reprinting the original volume, with a new introduction by Margaret Cornell Sasz, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); Margaret Connel Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928*, Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged (Albuquerque, University of New Mexico Press, 1999) T.L. McCarty, Regina Hadley Lynch, Stephen Wallace and AnCita Benally, "Classroom Inquiry and Navajo Learning Styles: A Call for Reassessment," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, Volume 22, 1991, pp. 42-59; and J. Cedric Woods, "Diverse Learning Styles Among Native Students," *Red Ink*, Volume 4, No. 2, Fall 1995, pp. 26-30.

markedly, with infighting dropping off, while participation at the tribe's annual general meeting increased markedly, and for the first time in a decade, a tribal chair was reelected. However, when a new tribal chair, who did not understand the importance of ILIS, ceased building consensus through the participatory process, infighting returned to the tribe, perhaps more vehemently than before, as people who were now used to participating, were angry at being excluded. Thus, the Comanche experience offers strong evidence that the reestablishment of culturally appropriate means of involving all tribal members in the affairs of the tribe can overcome divisiveness in Indian nations. It also demonstrates, that new institutions, however compatible with community values, must be sufficiently nurtured for a considerable period if they are to become an established part of community life.

Numerous other Native Nations have been working with other means of moving to recreate consensus decision making.³⁰ Some Native nations in Alaska and Western British Columbia have adopted the Baha'i "consultation" method of decision making, which is essentially a consensus decision making process. This consultation method involves an elected council which is trained to listen respectfully to all sides and views on an issue as expressed by community members, either in open community forums, or by representatives of different ways of approaching an issue. Only after carefully hearing the full range of concerns on a question, will the council move to crafting a policy, attempting to do so as inclusively as possible, balancing the full range of concerns in any decision. The Yurok Tribe of California, in 2005, undertook a comprehensive, long range Tribal Transportation Plan, "Taking Back a Traditional Trail," through an inclusive discussion process, involving tribal members, community residents and other relevant stakeholders identifying community priorities, unmet needs, and the unique circumstances relating to tribal transportation. A number of nations have instituted representative focus groups to gain community input into tribal decisions, including Navajo Nation, which is also working to increase public participation by decentralizing aspects of governance from its national government to its 110 chapters, and the Southern Ute Tribe of Colorado. The Utes, at various times, have also enhanced citizen participation by increasing the number of general meetings of the tribal council from quarterly to monthly, having monthly meetings for tribal members with concerns or complaints to meet individually with the council, having participants in a tribal activity decide how it would be carried out and under who's leadership, and undertaking a collaborative process to enhance cooperation among tribal and neighboring government services, with tribal member input.

To return Indian communities to being families also requires the continued expansion of Indigenizing Indian education, as many tribes and neighboring communities with large Native student populations have been engaged in doing.³¹ Since traditional Indian education was both participatory, and experiential, its reinstatement would help teach the traditional values related to inclusiveness as well as experience with it. In addition, as Native young people are more and more taught the beauty of their own traditions, in appropriate ways in which they are comfortable, the better they will feel about themselves and their nations. People who feel good about themselves and their cultures are more likely to participate and act inclusively. Thus appropriate education can play an important role in overcoming cultural and physical genocide, including unresolved historical grief. Other methods for doing this need

30

31

to be expanded, as fits the particular case, such as expanding appropriate social services and increasing participation in traditional, or new, culturally relevant ceremonies.³² However a major method for overcoming unresolved historical grief and other inner injuries from colonialism is participation in good quality, mutually supportive, inclusive participation in community affairs.

As to overcoming the problems of the narrowing of the idea of kinship contributing to favoritism by tribal leaders, sufficient development of all of the above methods over time will return Indigenous American communities to functioning as families, educating and pressuring their leaders to act inclusively.³³ But as was demonstrated in the Comanche case, this takes time, and an unreformed tribal leader can unwittingly (or intentionally) undermine or delay the revitalization of inclusiveness, if steps are not taken to educate them about the value of embracing it. There are a number of traditional tribal practices that may be suggestive of what contemporary communities might do to impart a sense of responsibility to act inclusively and participatively in tribal leaders, and to remind the members of the community to hold their leaders responsible for doing so.

Amongst the peoples of the Trobriand Islands in the Pacific, as in many other Indigenous cultures, a chief on assuming office would marry at least one woman from each village in the tribe's territory, except his own, to solidify the mutual obligations which he facilitated as a leader. In a different way, among the Ashanti, in Africa, the tribe was unified in the office of its principle leader through family

³² It should be noted that the experiential and participatory aspects of American Indian education, as did other aspects of Native American thinking and worldview, had a direct impact on the rise of pragmatism, an American school of philosophy, which included the work of John Dewey, and his developing "progressive education," which is participatory an experiential, as set forth in Scott L. Pratt, *Native Pragmatism: Rethinking the Roots of American Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). See also Stephen M. Sachs, "The Putney School: John Dewey is Alive and Well in Southern Vermont," *Democracy and Education*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Spring 1992. It was precisely because progressive education was closer to traditional Indian education than most Euro-American approaches to teaching and learning that it was employed in Indian education reform during John Collier's administration of the BIA during the New Deal (See Szasz, *Education and the American Indian*, Ch. 4-6). Thus through application of Dewey some of the early reindigenification of Indian education was begun.

³³ Some recent developments in the expansion of Indigenized Indian education include: The Washington, D.C.-based Center for Education Reform, reported on December 21, 2004, that the number of Indian tribes using charter schools is increasing, and there were at least 30 Indian charter schools in the country. Arizona has the most, with 12, followed by California with six. Indian charters have also opened in Minnesota and Michigan. Some have achieved positive results, quickly. The San Diego-area Barona Indian Charter School, for example, posted substantial increases in student performance on standardized test scores in the 2003-04, with the school ranking higher than the state average. Not all Native charter schools been, unqualified successes, however, with one Arizona Indian charter having to shut down after authorities had trouble with federal special education requirements and an audit. Additional Native charter schools are being planned, including one in Alaska. (*Indigenous Policy*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, Spring 2005, "Indigenous Developments: Educational and Cultural Developments", at: www.indigenouspolicy.org (as well as *Indigenous Policy*, Vol. XV, No. 3, Fall 2004, "Indigenous Developments": "Educational and Cultural Developments", at: www.indigenouspolicy.org, and *Native Americans Policy*, Vol. XIV, No. 1, Spring 2004, "Indigenous Developments": "Economic Developments", "Educational and Cultural Developments"); Teri C. Hansen, "Innovative Program results in success for Native students," *Indian Country Today Education '08-'09*, pp. 13-14; On the Southern Utes success with their own elementary school: Dave Brown, "Ribbons Cutting Marks Opening of Academy," *Southern Ute Drum*, September 8, 2000, p. 1; and Dave Brown, "Academy Students ZAP the CSAP Test," *Southern Ute Drum*, May 18, 2001, pp 1 and 3. Others include: Jeff Goelitz, "Successful Truancy Program Involves Parents and HeartMath," *A Change of Heart: A Newsletter from the Institute of HeartMath*, Winter 2003, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 3; *First Nations Development Institute/Fannie Mae Foundation*, Second Edition, "Building Native Communities: Financial Skills for Families", Instructor's Guide/Participant's Workbook; *Keys to Connectedness*, in progress, K. Phyllis M. Gagnier. The author may be contacted at phyllisgagnier@earthlink.net.

relationships, with the elected heads of all the lineages from throughout the national territory having a place on the principle leader's council, and the principle chief elected in a process that all the people, from all the lineages, had a say (although he was always a member of the *Sofoesofo* lineage). The ceremony of the chief's coming to office, similar to those of the heads of each lineage, included first a reminder by the leading elders, voiced by the Talking Chief (*Okyeame*) of the values the new leader must follow in his office in carrying out the duties to the people: his relatives in the family that composed the nation. Then, after paying the elders a token payment of acknowledgement, the new leader swore the most solemn oath to the Earth Goddess, promising in part, "If I do not listen to the advice of my elders [representing all the lineages]; if I make war on them; If I run away in battle; then I have violated the oath," which meant he was no longer worthy of continuing in office, and could be impeached – a not infrequent occurrence. Furthermore, emphasizing the separation of the office and the one who held it, on becoming principle chief, all of that man's property became owned by the office, including his wives. So that if he were impeached, he became impoverished, his property remaining with the chieftainship.

While American Indians nations today will likely not wish to go so far as did the Ashanti, most have adoption rituals that could be adapted to making, or reminding, the ascending leader that he or she is a relative of all tribal (or of an office representing a portion of the tribe's citizens, all jurisdictional) members, and oaths to serve the entire family properly could be taken. Such ceremonies as a nation might choose, when combined with the necessary steps to return the community actually to being a family, might well reindigenize the idea of kinship, assisting leaders to act inclusively as facilitators, helping their relatives to decide and to carry into effect their collective wishes.³⁴

- *Aho Mitakue Oyasun!*

³⁴ . For a discussion of inclusive participatory leadership in the contemporary Native American context, see: Stephen M. Sachs, "Working in the Circle: American Indian Leadership and Collaboration Through Applying Traditional Values in the Context of the Twenty-First Century," *Proceedings of the 2004 American Political Science Association Meetings* (Washington, DC: The American Political Science Association, 2004).