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COMMUNITY, POVERTY, POWER:  
THE POLITICS OF TRIBAL SELF-DETERMINATION, 1960-1968

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By

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COMMUNITY, POVERTY, POWER:  
THE POLITICS OF TRIBAL SELF-DETERMINATION, 1960-1968

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel M. Cobb, “Philosophy of an Indian War: Indian Community Action in the Johnson Administration’s War on Indian Poverty, 1964-1968,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 41-66; Daniel M. Cobb, “‘Us Indians Understand the Basics’: Oklahoma Indians and the Politics of Community Action, 1964-1970,” *Western Historical Quarterly* XXXIII, no. 1 (spring 2002): 41-66.

of Community Action, 1964-1970,” and it was through his encouragement and the incisive comments of the referees that I was able to turn it into an essay worthy of the Western History Association’s Bert M. Fireman Award.

I am fortunate to have had several role models during my time as a student, but I would like to single out two people in particular. The first is Professor Norman Stillman, the Schusterman/Josey Chair in Judaic Studies at the University of Oklahoma. As fate would have it, I was appointed to be his research assistant during a year when I would need his presence the most. A gifted teacher, accomplished author, and wise mentor, I consider him to be the consummate scholar. The second individual is my father, Dr. Stephen G. Cobb. I have always looked to him as the kind of person that I aspire to be—intellectually astute, socially conscious, and utterly selfless. At least it can now be said that I, too, have earned a Ph.D. I will have to continue to work on the others.

One does not survive the rigors of a doctoral program without a strong support network. I am thankful that I could turn to my family. My brother and sister were never more than a phone call away, and they consistently helped me to keep things in perspective—even when they did not necessarily realize they were doing it. My wife, Nicole, did the same. Over the past five years, she has sacrificed a great deal in order to give me the time I needed to study, travel, and write. She is my strength. Though not yet two years of age, our daughter, Anna, has inspired me to work harder as well. She has great expectations: if you ask her, she will tell you that her daddy is going to win the Pulitzer. Finally, I want to acknowledge the profound debt I owe to my mother and father. For their undeviating love and encouragement, I dedicate this dissertation to them.

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## Abstract

“Community, Poverty, Power” explores how tribal self-determination moved from the periphery to the center of the public sphere during the 1960s. Focusing on the Association on American Indian Affairs, National Congress of American Indians, American Indian Chicago Conference, Workshop on American Indian Affairs, and National Indian Youth Council, Part One demonstrates that the struggle against termination and assimilation cannot be understood apart from the global politics of decolonization and domestic contests over race and mass society. Having situated the study in this milieu, Part Two examines the central role the War on Poverty, and particularly the Community Action Program, played in the politics of self-determination after its inauguration in 1964.

Based on original manuscript research and interviews with Vine Deloria Jr., Forrest Gerard, Dr. Jim Wilson, and other central actors, these chapters detail the complex series of negotiations regarding the nature of poverty, the meaning of community, and the fate of tribal identities that followed. Two additional chapters focused on Oklahoma, and informed by interviews with LaDonna Harris, Senator Fred R. Harris, Iola Hayden, and others demonstrate the interconnectedness of local people’s experiences and the decisions made by national policymakers. The dissertation concludes with a Coda that carries the study forward to the spring of 1968 and the Poor People’s Campaign—a pivotal moment that evidenced the limitations of social reform and the impending fragmentation of the Indian rights movement.

“Community, Poverty, Power” underscores the need for scholars to transcend

conventional definitions of Indian history, combine micro and macro scales of analysis, and blend social and political perspectives. In addition to expanding the interpretive ground upon which the War on Poverty is assessed and suggesting a different way of thinking about the emergence of tribal self-determination, it provides a context for understanding the heightened militancy of the Red Power movement. It also re-envision the meaning of activism so that it includes people who worked within the system in order to affect change. To the extent that the idea of tribal self-determination entered national discourse between 1960 and 1968, it did so because of these continuing encounters between natives and newcomers.

Introduction  
Continuing Encounters:  
Toward an American Indian Political History

I'm always saying, "You know, we got to get involved in politics. It's politics. I don't care how you look at it, it's politics—in a community, anywhere. You got to get involved in politics."

Howard Goodbear (Cheyenne)<sup>1</sup>

Encounters are mutual, reciprocal—two-way rather than one-way streets. Encounters are generically capacious: there are encounters of people but also of ideas, institutions, habits, values, plants, animals, and micro-organisms. Encounters are temporally and spatially fluid: they can occur at any time in any place before or after 1492, around the globe.

James Axtell<sup>2</sup>

"Community, Poverty, Power" explores the politics of tribal self-determination during the 1960s. In an attempt to carve out an American Indian political history, it eschews the conventional bifurcation between community and policy studies in favor of an approach that probes the interconnectedness of politics and culture, agency and structure, local people and privileged elites.<sup>3</sup> This orientation affords new insights into the central problem of the study—how the idea of tribal self-determination moved from the periphery to the center of the public sphere through the course of a most tumultuous decade. The process cannot be understood apart from the larger global politics of modernization and decolonization or the turbulent domestic contests over race and war that animated the period. But at its center rested the War on Poverty, and particularly the contested meanings of Indian involvement in its most controversial innovation, the

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<sup>1</sup> Howard Goodbear, interview by Boyce Timmons, 3 March 1968, volume 25, Doris Duke Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>2</sup> James Axtell, "Colonial Encounters: Beyond 1992," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 49, no. 2 (April 1992): 336.

<sup>3</sup> In arguing this point, I am mindful of Robert F. Berkhofer's seminal essay, "The Political Context of a New Indian History," *Pacific Historical Review* 40, no. 3 (1971): 357-82. Berkhofer, however, encouraged historians to focus primarily on the internal dynamics of Indian politics, such as the role of factionalism within a particular tribe. The application of encounters to political topics discussed in the pages that follow resonates more with Wilcomb Washburn's durable concept of "history in the round." Wilcomb Washburn, "Ethnohistory: 'History in the Round,'" *Ethnohistory* 8, no. 1 (1961): 31-48.

Community Action Program.

Historians generally agree that termination and the denigration of Indianness begrudgingly gave way to imperfect and in many ways unsatisfactory forms of self-determination and cultural pluralism. They have proven less adept at explaining how this process developed over time. Eclipsed by the legislative accomplishments and militant activism of the 1970s, the transitional period of the sixties typically receives only cursory treatment.<sup>4</sup> Top-down policy narratives and bottom-up community studies dominate what little has been written about Community Action and the coming of tribal self-determination.<sup>5</sup> These works make vital contributions and much remains to be written

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Paul Prucha, *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indian*, vol. 2 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 1087-109; James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 202-03; E. Fletcher McClellan, "The Politics of American Indian Self-Determination, 1958-1975: The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1988); Emma Gross, *Contemporary Federal Policy Toward American Indians*, Contributions to Ethnic Studies, no. 25 (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 53-56, 79. Rebecca Robbins, "The Forgotten American: A Foundation for Contemporary Indian Self-Determination," *Wicazo Sa Review* 6, no. 1 (1990): 27-33; James J. Rawls, *Chief Red Fox is Dead: A History of Native Americans Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 54-75. Brief discussions that stand out for their perspicacity include D'Arcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* (1973; reprint with a forward by Peter Iverson, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); William T. Hagan, "Tribalism Rejuvenated: The Native American Since the Era of Termination," *Western Historical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (January 1981): 5-16; and Philip S. Deloria, "The Era of Tribal Self-Determination: An Overview," in *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan*, ed. Kenneth R. Philp (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1986; Logan: Utah State University, 1995), 191-207.

<sup>5</sup> Community and individual perspectives can be found in Human Sciences Research, Inc., *A Comprehensive Evaluation of OEO Community Action Programs on Six Selected American Indian Reservations* (September 1966); Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: Delta, 1968), 193-214; Ian Traquair Ball, "Institution Building for Development: OEO Community Action Programs on Two North Dakota Indian Reservations" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1968); Robert L. Bee, "Tribal Leadership in the War on Poverty: A Case Study," *Social Science Quarterly* 50, no. 3 (December 1969): 676-86; and Ruth Meserve Houghton, "Adaptive Strategies in an American Indian Reservation Community: The War on Poverty, 1965-1971" (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 1973); Catherine Price Straight, "The Effectiveness of the War on Poverty on the Rosebud Sioux Indian Reservation" (master's thesis, University of South Dakota, 1981); Robert L. Bee, *Crosscurrents Along the Colorado: The Impact of Government Policy on the Quechan Indians* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1981), 122-59; and especially Päivi Hoikkala's "Mothers and Community Builders: Salt River Pima and Maricopa Women in Community Action," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213-34. Brief mention is made in some contemporary studies on

from their perspectives, but the focus on a single scale of analysis does not provide a model capable of addressing the problem that guides this study.

Conceptualized as an agency/structure synthesis that spans several scales of analysis, "Community, Poverty, Power" takes part in the effort to rethink contemporary American Indian historiography. More specifically, it contributes to the search for what historians Frederick Hoxie, Peter Mancall, and James Merrell call "an intellectual framework for understanding the distinctiveness—and the interconnectedness—of Indian and non-Indian history."<sup>6</sup> The story of tribal self-determination needs to be interwoven with the larger history of which it was a part—the struggle for black equality, unraveling

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policy, including Sar A. Levitan, *The Great Society's Poor Law: A New Approach to Poverty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 263-70; Sar A. Levitan and Barbara Hetrick, *Big Brother's Indian Programs—With Reservations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971); Sar A. Levitan and William B. Johnston, *Indian Giving: Federal Programs for Native Americans* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975); George P. Castile, "Federal Indian Policy and the Sustained Enclave: An Anthropological Perspective," *Human Organization* 33, no. 3 (Fall 1974): 219-28; and Alan L. Sorkin, *American Indians and Federal Aid* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1971). Later policy studies that devote space to Community Action are Arthur Lathrop Amey, Jr., "Indian Affairs and the Great Society" (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1980); Guy B. Senese, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1991); Christopher Riggs, "Shattering the Barriers: American Indians, the Office of Economic Opportunity, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, 1964-1969" (master's thesis, University of Colorado at Denver, 1993); Christopher Riggs, "Indians, Liberalism, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, 1963-1969" (Ph.D. diss., University of Colorado, 1997); Christopher Riggs, "American Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (August 2000): 431-63; George Pierre Castile, "Indian Sign: Hegemony and Symbolism in Federal Indian Policy," in *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy*, ed. George P. Castile and Robert L. Bee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 165-86; Robert L. Bee, "Riding the Paper Tiger," in *State and Reservation*, 139-64; Donald L. Parman, *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 151-52; George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998); and Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell, "Introduction," in *American Nations: Encounters in Indian Country, 1850 to the Present*, ed. Frederick E. Hoxie, Peter C. Mancall, and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2001), xiv. My initial attempt to strike a balance between community and national scales of analysis can be found in Daniel M. Cobb, "Philosophy of an Indian War: Indian Community Action in the Johnson Administration's War on Indian Poverty," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 71-103. A second effort is Daniel M. Cobb, "'Us Indians Understand the Basics': Oklahoma Indians and the Politics of Community Action, 1964-1970," *Western Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (spring 2002): 41-66.

of liberalism and resurgence of conservatism, the Vietnam War, rising Third World nationalism, the Cold War, and social scientific thought.

As a new political history, “Community, Poverty, Power” draws on interdisciplinary methods to synthesize social and political historical perspectives. Accordingly, this study conceptualizes politics as one facet of the continuing encounters between natives and newcomers. Employed most effectively by historians of the contact, colonial, and early national periods, the notion of encounters derived from the tremendous outpouring of scholarship that accompanied the quincentennial observances of Columbus’s voyage to the Americas. Cohering to form an innovative framework called the “Columbian Encounters,” these explorations detailed the consequences of 1492 in terms of complex cultural, social, spiritual, economic, microbial, and ideational exchanges between Europeans and indigenous peoples. James Axtell captured the dynamism of encounters when he described them as “mutual, reciprocal—two-way rather than one-way streets,” “generically capacious,” and “temporally and spatially fluid.” Bounded neither by space nor time, encounters preceded 1492 and they endure.<sup>7</sup>

Just as students of twentieth-century Indian history would do well to borrow from their colleagues working in the colonial period, so too can they benefit from recent developments in social and political history. A search for synthesis between the latter two fields has inspired new studies that explore the relationships between private lives

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<sup>7</sup> Axtell, “Colonial Encounters,” 336. For a subsequent review of the literature on encounters, see James Axtell, “Columbian Encounters: 1992-1995,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 52, no. 4 (October 1995): 695. A sampling of essays on encounters is Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell, eds., *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

and the public sphere, politics and culture, individual agency and external structure.<sup>8</sup> Due in large part to social historians' insistence on rethinking the meaning of politics, the "political" has come to embrace more than the standard maneuvers of parties and national organizations, more than topics such as elections, presidencies, and policymaking. Subtle everyday forms of behavior—"hidden transcripts" to use political scientist James C. Scott's evocative phrase—have been situated in broad political contexts to great effect.<sup>9</sup>

A commensurate effort to bridge the gulf between new and old Indian histories remains to be seen. This straitened definition of the field has been one of the factors that has prevented historians from fully applying the theme of encounters to twentieth-century topics. And it is at this point that the integration of social and political history offers lessons worthy of emulation. Room for innovation exists along the entire expanse of the

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<sup>8</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, "Social History," in *The New American History*, rev. and exp., ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 240-45; Thomas Bender, "The New History—Then and Now," *Reviews in American History* 12, no. 4 (1984): 620-22; Thomas Bender, "Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 73, no. 1 (1986): 120-36. For responses to Bender's "Wholes and Parts" essay, see "A Round Table: Synthesis in American History," *Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 107-22. Bender provides a rejoinder in "Wholes and Parts: Continuing the Conversation," *ibid.*, 123-30; Louise A. Tilly, "Connections," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 1 (February 1994): 2; John Gerring, "The Perils of Particularism: Political History after Hartz," *Journal of Policy History* 11, no. 3 (1999): 313-22.

<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Ross, "New and Newer Histories," in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Anthony Mohlo and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 97. Important works include Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). On "hidden transcripts," see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). For an example of this theory in an American context, see Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Black Poor and the Politics of Opposition in a New South City, 1929-1970," in *The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 293-333. A classic work on gender and the welfare state is Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

broad continuum between political and social history. Since the purpose is not homogenization, political and social historians routinely cross subdisciplinary boundaries without feeling compelled to surrender their affiliation with one or the other.<sup>10</sup> By engaging subjects from this perspective, chroniclers of the Indian past can join in producing a rich middle ground of scholarship similar to the one being cultivated in the larger field of American history. This framework also provides a way to transcend the stultifying polemics revolving around whether a given work is “really” Indian history or just non-Indian perceptions of it.<sup>11</sup>

It has been widely acknowledged that a lacuna exists in the field of twentieth-century Indian history and especially the post-1945 period. Explorations of what Peter Iverson calls “the dynamics of self-determination and sovereignty” remain largely unwritten.<sup>12</sup> This comes in spite of how integral policies and the politics that enliven are

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<sup>10</sup> James Patterson notes, however, that many historians working in the twentieth century remain primarily identified with narrow specializations “in topical areas such as cultural, social, economic, urban, or intellectual history. . . .” James T. Patterson, “Americans and the Writing of Twentieth-Century United States History,” in *Imagined Histories*, 195-96.

<sup>11</sup> On “non-Indian perceptions of Indian history,” see Angela Cavendar Wilson, “American Indian History or Non-Indian Perceptions of American Indian History?” in *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, ed. Devon Mihesuah (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 23-26. For recent developments in the field, and particularly in the area of ethnohistory, see Frederick E. Hoxie, “Ethnohistory for a Tribal World,” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 4 (fall 1997): 595-615; Daniel Richter, “Whose Indian History?” *William and Mary Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (1993): 379-93; Frederick E. Hoxie, “What’s Your Problem? New Work in Twentieth-Century American Indian Ethnohistory,” *Ethnohistory* 47, no. 2 (spring 2000): 470-81; Donald L. Fixico, “Ethics and Responsibilities in Writing American Indian History,” in *Natives and Academics*, 84-99; Frederick E. Hoxie, “Thinking Like an Indian’: Exploring American Indian Views of American History,” *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 1 (2001): 1-14; and Melissa L. Meyer and Kerwin Lee Klein, “Native American Studies and the End of Ethnohistory” in *Studying Native America: Problems and Prospects*, ed. Russell Thornton (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998), 182-216.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Iverson, “We are Restored,” in *A New Significance: Re-envisioning the History of the American West*, ed. Clyde A. Milner (New York, 1996), 241; William T. Hagan, “The New Indian History,” in *Rethinking American Indian History* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 37; and Donald L. Fixico, “Methodologies in Reconstructing Native American History,” in *Rethinking American Indian History*, 125.

to many of the critical issues in need of further investigation—the physical and cultural persistence of Native peoples, land and water rights, economic development, political sovereignty, language preservation, community and leadership development, and repatriation represent a few.<sup>13</sup> Some years ago, James Merrell attributed the absence of Indians from colonial history to the fact that they do not “intrude on contemporary consciousness.” “We need to remember,” he advised, “that things were different two or three centuries ago.”<sup>14</sup> Since that observation, historian David Rich Lewis and others have duly noted that the resurgence of tribes during the twentieth century has made them more integral to state and national economies. Indians increasingly intrude, as it were, on the political, economic, and cultural life of states across the nation. The time is right, then, for the development of a new American Indian political history that will help to recover the manifold stories residing within these transformations.<sup>15</sup>

Few historians, of course, would argue that political history does not matter. The question is how best to write it. The options are plain enough for the policy-inclined: they can either stand firmly on the ground of tradition or innovate. The latest dissertations and books overwhelmingly adopt the former strategy. Written almost entirely from archival and government documents and centered on white policymaking elites, they follow in the very large footsteps of Francis Paul Prucha.<sup>16</sup> These studies

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<sup>13</sup> Many of these themes are discussed in David Rich Lewis, “Still Native: The Significance of Native Americans in the History of the Twentieth-Century American West,” Peter Iverson, “We are Restored,” and Barre Toelken, “New Awareness for an Old Significance,” in *A New Significance*, 213-54.

<sup>14</sup> Merrell, “Some Thoughts,” 116.

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, “Still Native,” 213-32; Hoxie, “What’s Your Problem?” 471; Hoxie, Merrell, and Mancall, *American Nations*, xii.

<sup>16</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*; Castile, *To Show Heart*; Riggs, “Indians, Liberalism, and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society”; Prucha, *The Great Father*.

delve into the inner workings of policymaking at the national level. They reveal the tensions that existed not only between the executive and legislative branches, but within the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations as well. Works framed in this way do, however, leave for others the tasks of exploring the implementation stage of the policy process, untangling the political maneuvers of Indians and others that did not take place at the national level, and talking with persons who did not commit their ideas, feelings, and memories to paper.

The second strategy, that of innovation, represents the road not yet taken. “Community, Poverty, Power” makes a turn in that direction. Drawing on developments in social and political history and merging them with the idea of encounters, it portrays the politics of federal-Indian affairs in terms of a dynamic series of complicated encounters that cut across community, class, and racial boundaries. These political engagements included Indians and non-Indians, the young and the aged, men and women, and individuals from all walks of life; they moved within the confines of, sought to defend, and at times overtly challenged the cultural, economic, and political structures that surrounded them. Local people mattered as political agents during the 1960s, and Community Action often served as their way of being heard. This study explains how that came to pass, in what ways it succeeded, and why it often failed.

An expansive definition of politics further links “Community, Poverty, Power” to a budding interest in the “other sixties.” Given their allure, women’s liberation, the New Left, Black Power, and the counterculture garnered considerably more scholarly attention than other aspects of the 1960s. Historians have just begun to appreciate the activism of

persons who carried their causes into the 1970s, worked within the liberal establishment rather than taking to the streets, and contributed to the renaissance of a potent political, cultural, and economic conservatism. These latter studies broaden activism to include people on both the left and right, from Molotov cocktail throwers to suburban housewives, and underscore the need to reconsider the political culture of the 1960s.<sup>17</sup>

The same potential resides in the field of American Indian history where the American Indian Movement's (AIM) variant of Red Power continues to symbolize "1960's activism." The organization and its members dominate the literature and our historical imagination. This comes in spite of the fact that AIM was not founded until 1968 and did not reach its apex until the 1970s. What little has been written on the 1960s centers on the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), fish-ins in the Northwest, and the occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969. But even these topics have been subordinated to bit parts; according to conventional wisdom, they anticipate the arrival of, or represent incidents on the road to, something ostensibly far more significant. As precipitating events for AIM's takeover of the BIA in 1972 and its occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, they contribute to the notion that the era's activism "began," for all intents and purposes, with Alcatraz and "ended" with the Longest Walk in 1978.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; John A. Andrew III, *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); and Jonathan M. Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Useful essays by Alan Brinkley, Susan M. Yohn, and Leo P. Ribuffo, written for a forum on American conservatism, can be found in the *American Historical Review* 99, no. 2 (April 1994): 409-52. Susan M. Hartmann, *The Other Feminists: Activists in the Liberal Establishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> A helpful introduction to the literature is Sandra K. Baringer, "Indian Activism and the American Indian Movement: A Bibliographical Essay," *American Indian and Culture Research Journal* 21, no. 4 (1997): 217-50. See also Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, eds., *American Indian*

If the definition of activism includes only transformative goals achieved through direct action—and it certainly can—this periodization suffices. A different picture, unexpected actors, and an alternative periodization materializes when its meaning incorporates reformatory goals and conventional tactics as well.<sup>19</sup> Writing grants, holding community meetings, organizing youth councils, giving testimony at congressional hearings, and authoring books and editorials all provided means of exercising power and acting in politically purposeful ways. In some contexts, the hidden transcripts of informal political behavior proved no less freighted with meaning than takeovers and occupations.

Indians, in other words, have always engaged in political activism—whether or not it captured the imagination of the dominant society or penetrated the consciousness of public policymakers. Their survival as tribes and individuals and the preservation of their homelands and communities have necessitated as much. “Community, Poverty, Power” begins with this assumption and argues that it is fundamental to understanding Indian activism in the 1960s. While it would be a mistake to discount the contributions Red Power made to ethnic revitalization and policy development, it must also be recognized that Indians who never embraced militancy made vital contributions as activists before and after AIM burst onto the scene. They are the central figures in this study.

“Community, Poverty, Power” also broadens current analyses of the War on

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*Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Troy Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination and the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). An exception to the overwhelming emphasis on the more militant dimension of Indian activism is Thomas Cowger's *The National Congress Of American Indians: The Founding Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1999).

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion of both transformative and reformatory goals, see Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 152-56.

Poverty. Studies of national politics abound and considerable research has also been conducted on Community Action in some of the nation's largest cities.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as historian Allen Matusow explained, the programs that received the most attention "had special problems and were probably not representative." "Since remarkably little is known about [Community Action Agencies] in the great majority of communities," he continued, "no final judgement on CAP will be possible until an army of local historians recovers the program's lost fragments."<sup>21</sup> Nearly twenty years since Matusow's assertion, only a handful of new works have appeared to serve this function, and even these continue to focus overwhelmingly on African American involvement in places such as Mississippi,

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<sup>20</sup> Levitan, *The Great Society's Poor Law*; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1969); James L. Sundquist, ed., *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience*, Perspectives on Poverty, vol. 2 (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Peter Marris and Martin Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform: Poverty and Community Action in the United States*, 2d ed (1967; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). See Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: The Great Society in Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1978) and Robert H. Haveman, *Poverty Policy and Poverty Research: The Great Society and the Social Sciences* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987). General overviews include John A. Andrew III, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998); Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996); Carl M. Brauer, "Kennedy, Johnson, and the War on Poverty," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (June 1982): 98-119; and Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). The standard texts on approaches to poverty remain James T. Patterson, *America's Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1994* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) and Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1984), 255. Discussions of urban Community Action include Kenneth B. Clark and Jeanette Hopkins, *A Relevant War Against Poverty: A Study of Community Action Programs and Observable Social Change* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Neil Gilbert, *Clients or Constituents: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970); Ralph M. Kramer, *Participation of the Poor: Comparative Community Case Studies in the War on Poverty* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969); J. David Greenstone and Paul E. Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973).

Newark, Milwaukee, Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles.<sup>22</sup> Community Action needs further study, particularly in non-metropolitan areas, in order to gain a comparative perspective.

Having situated this study in its historiographical context, something should also be said of the theoretical framework underpinning it. Sociologists Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's social construction of reality provides the foundation. Social constructionism affixes particular attention on how individuals define and make sense out of the world in which they live. Through externalization, objectivation, and internalization, they posit, individuals and the society around them engage in a dialectic of reciprocal construction and reconstruction. "It is through externalization that society is a human product," Berger elaborated. "It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society." This dynamic process permeates all of life and occurs simultaneously at innumerable levels of social interaction—from forming friendships and expressing spiritual belief, to accepting or rejecting the legitimacy of social, political, or economic orders. It renders the social

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<sup>22</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 363-88; Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Julie Leininger Pycior, *LBJ & Mexican Americans: The Paradox of Power* (Austin: University of Texas, 1997); Nancy A. Naples, *Grassroots Warriors: Activist Mothering, Community Work, and the War on Poverty* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Edwin L. Cobb, *No Ceasefires: The War on Poverty in Roanoke Valley* (Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press, 1984); Robert Alan Bauman, "Race, Class, and Political Power: The Implementation of the War on Poverty in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998); Mark Edward Braun, "Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor: Poverty Representation in Milwaukee's Community Action Program, 1964-1972" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin—Milwaukee, 1999); and David Milton Gerwin, "The End of Coalition: The Failure of Community Organizing in Newark in the 1960s" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University 1998).

world perpetually “unfinished.”<sup>23</sup>

Anthropological perspectives on ideology, power, and culture add to this basic theoretical structure. Jean and John Comaroff’s definition of culture as “the space of signifying practice, the semantic ground in which human beings seek to construct and represent themselves and others—and, hence, society and history,” provides an appropriate context in which to unfold it. They add an important caveat. Not all of the externalized forms present in this heterogeneous field are “empowered in the same way, or all of the time.”<sup>24</sup> The regnant social, cultural, ideological, and political order, in other words, is not simply the sum of its parts. Rather, as Eric Wolf argued, “Power is involved in deciding who can talk, in what order, through which discursive procedures, and about what topics.”<sup>25</sup> Power relations effectively stifle or silence some voices, while investing others with tremendous potency. Yet even the most deeply internalized ideas and structures—those hegemonic or reified elements that become assumed, taken for

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<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967). Berger and Luckmann synthesize the theories of George Herbert Mead, Alfred Schutz, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, W.I. Thomas, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 4. Sociologists Joane Nagel and Stephen Cornell have utilized the social construction of reality in their macro studies of American Indian ethnic renewal and revitalized political activism. See Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Cornell, *Return of the Native*.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1991), 21-2. While they, like Berger and Luckmann, draw from Marx and Weber, the Comaroffs also utilize Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. Although they do not cite Berger and Luckmann, their use of signification, objectification, and internalization parallel the concepts of externalization, objectivation, and internalization as promulgated in *The Social Construction of Reality*. Berger and Luckmann’s definition of culture is also consonant with the Comaroffs’. Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 6, 188 n. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 57.

granted, or considered natural—remain inherently unstable, the products of human manufacture. Under particular circumstances, peripheralized ideas can come to the fore with potentially transformative consequences.<sup>26</sup>

The War on Poverty served as a catalyst for this kind of breaching effect. Lyndon Johnson's declaration of "unconditional war on poverty in America" on January 8, 1964, forced Americans to confront the affluent society's ghettos, decaying rural areas, and underdeveloped reservations.<sup>27</sup> Community Action, in turn, drew local people into the politics of poverty. The mandate of maximum feasible participation of the poor focused attention not only on the impoverished, but emphasized their perspectives. As American Indians enlisted in the War on Poverty, a complex series of negotiations ensued regarding the means and meaning of their participation. Contrasting ideas regarding poverty, community, and Indianness intersected in the resulting tumult. Native people's desire for political autonomy, their refusal to be forced into the cultural and economic mainstream on terms not of their own making, and their insistence that the federal government fulfill its obligations to them gained greater salience and filtered back into tribal, state, and national politics. No *fait accompli*, heightened public consciousness of these issues grew out of a very old contest of ideas in a fundamentally redefined cultural field.

"Community, Poverty, Power" thus reinterprets a critical period in American Indian history, expands the limited ground upon which historians assess Lyndon

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<sup>26</sup> Comaroff, *Of Revelation*, 23-27, 33-34; Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction*, 88-92. Berger and Luckmann's use of reification is also compatible with the Comaroffs' treatment of hegemony.

<sup>27</sup> Lyndon Johnson, *A Time for Action: A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Lyndon B. Johnson, 1953-64* (New York: Atheneum Pocket Books, 1964), 173-74.

Johnson's antipoverty campaign, and speaks to the latest interpretive developments in the fields of political, social, and interdisciplinary history. In so doing, it argues that the time has come to abandon the dichotomy between old and new histories and particularly the value judgements ascribed to them. One way to do this is to forge a new American Indian political history that explores the intersections between local communities and high politics, Indian and non-Indian narratives, and the social and political realms.

Interdisciplinary methods and subdisciplinary syntheses have important roles to play. By moving across several disciplines and traversing multiple scales of analysis, historians can seek out the continuing encounters between natives and newcomers.

In order to carry out this endeavor, scholars must be willing to reconceptualize the past, transcend timeworn narratives, consider new actors, and revisit the old. By consulting new archival sources and, even more important, talking to the people that made these histories possible, they can fulfill at least part of their responsibility to indigenous peoples and communities. Moreover, they can begin to restore some of the emotional depth that many contemporary studies lack.<sup>28</sup> It is daunting to think that academic writing can forge collective memory, that it can effectively make some lives, ideas, and events appear to be momentous and others inconsequential. The methodology that informs "Community, Poverty, Power" undoubtedly harbors its own limitations. But, insofar as this refashioning of American Indian political history brings new people and their stories to the fore, it is a risk well worth the taking.

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<sup>28</sup> For a provocative essay on this subject, see Michael E. Harkin, "Feeling and Thinking in Memory and Forgetting: Toward an Ethnohistory of the Emotions," *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 2 (spring 2003): 261-84.

Part One  
Prelude, 1960-1963

In 1963, the editors of the left liberal journal *New University Thought* searched for words to describe the temper of the times. “From the top to the bottom of our society people seem to sense that something is amiss, that not all is well for everyone, everywhere,” they observed. “[T]he social volcano is about to erupt, bringing all manner of forces into play.” These diverse forces—ranging from African Americans’ assault on segregation to Third World struggles for liberation—conveyed a single message: “‘NO’ ‘IT’S ENOUGH’ ‘NOW.’”<sup>1</sup> American Indians moved in this charged space no less than others. The convergence of anxieties at home and abroad contributed to a dynamic milieu fraught with discussions of poverty and development, colonialism and self-determination, community and modernity. And as the pages that follow explain, this context greatly affected Indian politics.

Beginning in the 1950s and carrying the story forward to the end of 1963, Part One explores the broad cultural field from which the politics of tribal self-determination emerged. Following the late anthropologist Eric Wolf, it does not focus on “the events of history” as isolates but examines “the processes that underlie and shape such events.” Attention to the larger political, economic, and cultural contexts that surrounded the central actors of this story affords insights into the subtleties and nuances of Indian politics.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Editorial, *New University Thought*, 3, no. 4 (1963): 3, 6.

<sup>2</sup> For quote, see Eric R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8. Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, with a new preface by the author (1982; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8-9.

The civil rights movement, decolonization, cultural dissent, and the Cold War played particularly important roles. The last of these, a far-reaching and multifaceted struggle between the United States and Soviet Union, permeated the domestic scene, colored perceptions, and altered the course of events.<sup>3</sup> Some advocates of tribal self-determination saw in this fertile ground for reform, for it offered programs and concepts that could be used to destroy the last vestiges of termination. Others warned of the peril. If Cold War ideology provided a means for advancing reform, it could also serve as a bulwark against change. The same could be said of the struggle for black equality and the critiques of mass culture that came to the fore during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The editors of *New University Thought* accurately described the tumult of what sociologists would call a breaching moment, a period of profound externalization. To be sure, as sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explain, externalization represents the ubiquitous “ongoing outpouring of human being into the world.”<sup>4</sup> But during the period under study, those outpourings that ran counter to the status quo grew more salient. The cultural field was not, after all, static or homogenous. Rather it represented a temporal, mutable, heterogeneous space filled with differentially

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<sup>3</sup> There are several exemplary studies that consciously connect foreign and domestic affairs. On the family and gender relations, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988). Mary L. Dudziak considers the Cold War’s impact on the civil rights movement in *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). A persuasive look at the relationship between the Cold War, social science, and foreign policy is Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Alice O’Connor examines the social policy implications of modernization abroad in *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), especially 99-123.

<sup>4</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (1967; New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 4. See also Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966; New York: Anchor Books, 1966).

empowered ideas, beliefs, and lifeways.<sup>5</sup>

These years witnessed the unleashing of what anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff call “a process in which signifiers were set afloat, fought over, and recaptured. . .”<sup>6</sup> The safe assumptions, the truisms, the doctrines, those things reified and long taken for granted became unfixed and revealed for what they were—the products of human manufacture. Hegemony refers to “signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies” that come to be perceived as “the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it.” These were precisely the things that began to fracture.<sup>7</sup> A vast array of individuals—from veteran tribal leaders and non-Indian advocates to rebellious Indian youths and dissident social scientists—entered the fray and became active participants in a complicated process of awakenings and convergence.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean and John Comaroff eloquently note that “far from being reducible to a closed system of signs and relations, the meaningful world always presents itself as a fluid, often contested, and only partially integrated mosaic of narratives, images, and signifying practices.” Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>6</sup> Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, 23.

Chapter One  
Awakenings:  
The Mainstream and Its Discontents

The problem of the American Indian is overinstitutionalization, magnificent bureaucracy, dehumanization, and alienation of the individual. If that doesn't describe middle-class America, and if there isn't a relationship between that, then I'm the village idiot.

Clyde Warrior (Ponca)<sup>1</sup>

[I]f I could use only one adjective to describe the nature of the Indian problem, I would say it is political.

LaVerne Madigan<sup>2</sup>

On January 12, 1960, forty delegates from eleven Indian tribes congregated in the small northeastern Oklahoma town of Fort Gibson. A remote enclave of 1,400 souls, Fort Gibson had served as the terminal point of the Cherokees' harrowing Trail of Tears. But on this warm Tuesday afternoon punctuated by drizzling rain, those assembled did not come to commemorate the past. Rather, they had their eyes fixed firmly on the future. With early guidance from Allen Quetone (Kiowa), they resolved to launch a campaign to banish derogatory depictions of Indians from the new and potent medium of television. Criticism focused on Westerns, the dominant genre of the period.<sup>3</sup> Two weeks later, a larger entourage of seventy tribal leaders arrived at the state capitol. There Harry J.W. Belvin, Choctaw principal chief and state representative from southeastern Oklahoma,

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Warrior Lecture on Social Movements, tape recording, Monteith College, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich., c. 1966, personal papers of Albert L. Wahrhaftig.

<sup>2</sup> LaVerne Madigan to Sol Tax, 3 May 1961, folder 7, box 59, series II, subseries I, Association on American Indian Affairs Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>3</sup> These years marked the beginning of the end of the Western's dominance. In 1959, seven of the ten most-watched programs were Westerns. Some twenty-two different Westerns ran in 1960, and between nine and fourteen different programs aired annually between 1961 and 1969. On Westerns during this period, see Gary A. Yoggy, "Prime-time Bonanza! The Western on Television," in *Wanted Dead or Alive: The American West in Popular Culture*, ed. Richard Aquila (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 160-87; William Boddy, "'Sixty Million Viewers Can't Be Wrong': The Rise and Fall of the Television Western," in *Back in the Saddle Again: New Essays on the Western*, ed. Edward Buscombe and Roberta E. Pearson (London: British Film Institute Press, 1998), 119-40; J. Fred MacDonald, *Who Shot the Sheriff? The Rise and Fall of the Television Western* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 57-59.

championed a resolution critical of Hollywood's Indian. "They're portraying us as bloodthirsty marauders and murderers," Belvin lamented, "and it's hurting us."<sup>4</sup>

The damaging misappropriation of Indian images could also be found in print media. Organizations such as the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), and National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) directed particular attention at a widely disseminated Calvert Distillers Company advertisement. It featured a caricatured Indian, bedecked in headdress and buckskins, raising a shot of the company's "Soft Whiskey." "The Indians didn't call whiskey 'fire water' for nothing," the ad proclaimed, quipping parenthetically, "Why do you think they were yelping all the time?" "Soft Whiskey swallows easy. It's gentle going down. You could say we've gotten rid of the evil spirits. But don't fool yourself," the company reassured those who might imbibe, "Soft Whiskey isn't for old squaws."<sup>5</sup>

NCAI Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) assailed Calvert Distillers, firing a series of rhetorical questions at the company's advertising manager. "Do Indians yelp? I believe I have only heard 'yelp' referred to dogs? Is the inference that Indians are dogs?" he asked sardonically. "Pray tell me, what is an old squaw? Do Indians have 'squaws'? Do you still refer to Negro males as 'bucks'? Are the minority races still 'species' for you?" For Deloria, the issue at hand transcended negative

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<sup>4</sup> "Indian Urges Chance for TV," *Daily Oklahoman*, 14 January 1960; Earl Boyd Pierce to Helen Peterson, 11 January 1960, "Pierce, Earl Boyd (Attorney)" folder, box 67, series III, National Congress of American Indians Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland; Ralph E. Friar and Natasha A. Friar, *The Only Good Indian: The Hollywood Gospel* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1972), 260; MacDonald, *Who Shot the Sheriff?*, 114. For Belvin quotation, see "Indians Scorch TV for Shows About Savages," *Daily Oklahoman*, 31 January 1960, A5.

<sup>5</sup> For a copy of the Calvert Distillers Company ad, see folder 7, box 89, AAIA Archives.

stereotypes of Indians. "All groups," he argued, "are trying to overcome an image that THEY DID NOT CREATE."<sup>6</sup> His fight was but one facet of a larger battle over cultural meanings that Native Americans shared with other religious and ethnic minorities.<sup>7</sup>

These vignettes provide a window onto the cultural field of the late 1950s and early 1960s. They suggest how Indians were perceived from the vantage point of the "mainstream of American life." To be sure, derogatory images abounded. They could be found in textbooks, magazines, and newspapers, in films, cartoons, and television programs, on college campuses and in professional sports. Even the editorials ostensibly written in support of the anti-discrimination campaigns ran under disparaging headlines that included references to warpaths, powwows, and scalp-seeking red men.<sup>8</sup> Image and epistemology intertwined in popular culture. And each of them betrayed an epistemology that cast Indians as antitheses to what Quetone evocatively called "today's complex space age."<sup>9</sup> The message, Deloria further explained, conveyed that "Indians are a funny little group from America's past, and so it is safe to portray them as a funny little people."<sup>10</sup> According to popular consciousness, Native Americans conformed to the dominant society's sense of itself and of its history—they played bit parts in a triumphant story of

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<sup>6</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., to Walter Houghton, 29 April 1965, folder 7, box 89, AAIA Archives. Within months, Calvert Distillers withdrew the advertisement. W.H. James to William Byler, 5 May 1965, folder 7, box 89, AAIA Archives. The NIYC's interest in the campaign against Calvert Distillers is reflected in Melvin D. Thom to Walter Houghton, 13 May 1965, folder 10, box 23, AAIA Archives.

<sup>7</sup> No trifling affair, these struggles, as Shari Huhndorf has argued, pointed to even larger ones "over power in society." Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>8</sup> These editorial titles were reprinted in collage format by the AAIA. A copy is available in folder 15, box 89, AAIA Archives.

<sup>9</sup> "Indian Urges Chance for TV," *Daily Oklahoman*, 14 January 1960.

<sup>10</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., to Walter Houghton, 29 April 1965, folder 7, box 89, AAIA Archives.

civilization's progress, suffered defeat and were sometimes mistreated, then sank into obscurity.

But the status quo clearly had its critics, the mainstream its discontents. Indians did not attempt to wrest control and redefine the ideas, symbols, and signifiers that subordinated them in a vacuum. Hubris and angst pervaded American society during the 1950s and 1960s. Historian Howard Brick cogently observed of the latter decade, "Never before in modern Western intellectual history had the voices vaunting social progress and denouncing its pretensions been quite so clear and contentious, so evenly at loggerheads."<sup>11</sup> American Indians listened and contributed to these conversations as they crescendoed from the hushed tones of the 1950s to the cacophony of the late 1960s. In so doing, they adopted the language of major domestic and foreign debates and imbued it with new meanings. Non-Indian politicians, social scientists, and advocates also engaged in this complex process of translation. Consequently, the politics of Indian policy became a forum for the continuing encounters between Natives and newcomers.

Termination cast a ponderous shadow over the immediate postwar years. The policy, articulated in House Concurrent Resolution 108 in 1953, called for the abrogation of tribes' sovereign relationships with the federal government. Public Law 280, passed the same year, gave select states the authority to assume criminal and civil jurisdiction over reservations without tribal consent. Termination envisioned the eventual liquidation of land held in trust and the negation of any past special relationships, through treaties or

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<sup>11</sup> Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 44.

agreements, that tribes possessed with the United States. Established in 1946, the Indian Claims Commission quickened the process by creating a mechanism for tribes to settle legal claims against the United States. Having provided final restitution for promises made and broken, pro-terminationists argued, Congress could justifiably abolish tribes' unique legal status. Meanwhile, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) encouraged individuals and families to leave their reservation homes and begin anew in urban centers such as Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, and St. Louis through its Voluntary Relocation Program.<sup>12</sup> Support for this purported "solution" to the "Indian problem" gained momentum after World War II, reached its apex in the mid-fifties, and then underwent a series of redefinitions thereafter.<sup>13</sup>

Riding on the crest of a war fought in the name of democracy and freedom, proponents of termination evoked images of emancipation, integration, equality, and full citizenship to bolster public support. The idea of terminating tribes thus manifested the assimilationist racial egalitarian ideals that informed postwar race relations.<sup>14</sup> "In a sense, the Indian Service is an anachronism," one interested commentator wrote. "It goes back

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<sup>12</sup> On the Indian Claims Commission, see Kenneth R. Philp, *Termination Revisited: American Indians on the Trail to Self-Determination, 1933-1953* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), chapter 2. The most recent monographic treatment of relocation is Donald L. Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). But also see Kenneth R. Philp, "Stride Toward Freedom: The Relocation of Indians to Cities, 1952-1960," *Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (April 1985): 175-90; and Peter Iverson, "Building Toward Self-Determination: Plains and Southwestern Indians in the 1940s and 1950s," *Western Historical Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (April 1985): 163-73.

<sup>13</sup> On termination, see Philp, *Termination Revisited*, chapters 5-6 and 9-10; Larry W. Burt, *Tribalism in Crisis: Federal Indian Policy, 1953-1961* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982); Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation: Federal Indian Policy, 1945-1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986); and Thomas W. Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 49-53 and 99-108.

<sup>14</sup> Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 10, 76, 97.

to the days when the doctrine of white supremacy was heard in the land, and when members of minority groups were regarded as inferiors, to be exploited or protected as the case might be.”<sup>15</sup> Indians, it followed, would not only be guaranteed their full legal equality as American citizens but also fleeced of their so-called special privileges. As it proposed to do for the poor generally, the federal government would harness the power of economic growth by enticing outside industries to locate plants in depressed areas and by providing job training and remedial education. No longer isolated and culturally deprived, the thinking went, Indians would be immersed in the healing currents of the mainstream.<sup>16</sup>

The politics of Indian policy further injected facets of Cold War ideology into this amalgamation of contemporary thought on race relations, poverty, and economic growth. Termination made sense because reservations ostensibly served as hothouses for “atheistic communism.” They perpetuated attributes of primitivism such as tribal lifeways, communal land ownership, and unconventional spiritual practices. “Tradition is the Enemy of Progress,” read one sign atop a Presbyterian mission in the Navajo Nation. And with missionary zeal politicians and others labored to exorcize Indians of their primitive un-Americanism. In the minds of those who crafted the policy, termination proffered a free-market solution to poverty, cultural backwardness, and second-class citizenship. It therefore served a significant ideological function by reaffirming the

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Marriott, “Why Doesn’t the Government. . .” ca. 1950-1953, p. 3, folder 45, box 81, Alice Marriott Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. Also see James Officer’s discussion of the anti-New Deal trend in Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: Utah State University, 1995), 116.

<sup>16</sup> This was very much an extension of more general federal policies toward the poor. See O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 19-21, 77, 94-98.

superiority of capitalism as an economic system and signifying the preeminence of the dominant culture.<sup>17</sup>

In the wake of World War Two, ideas regarding evolutionary social, political, and economic change at home and abroad intertwined. Indeed, the same basic structural functionalist assumptions regarding underdevelopment and cultural deprivation resided in social scientific theories regarding decolonization in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Just as the poor at home suffered due to their isolation from the mainstream economy and culture, so too did underdeveloped nations. With technical assistance and capital from the United States, however, the poor peoples of the world would progress from traditional, pre-industrial folk societies to modern industrial urban ones, in turn becoming self-sufficient, contributing members of the global economy. The end results at home and abroad also resonated with one another. Third World nations would take on “liberal social values, capitalist economic organizations, and democratic political structures” and join a world order made in the image of the United States. Through an analogous process, Indians—and the poor, generally—would be cast in the mold of middle-class America, the epitome of the mainstream.<sup>18</sup>

Many of termination’s opponents did not challenge the philosophical

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<sup>17</sup> Burt, *Tribalism*, 121; O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 100. For reference to “Tradition is the Enemy of Progress” sign, see Helen Peterson to W.W. Keeler, 10 November 1960, “Keeler, W.W. (Consultant, BIA)” folder, box 66, series III, NCAI Papers.

<sup>18</sup> John Lewis Gaddis makes the significant point that the countries policymakers called the “Third World” had more differences than commonalities. Included were nations that had not been colonies at the end of the Second World War and others that had never been colonized. What bound them together, he argued, was their being “predominantly pre-industrial.” Given its extensive use during the period under study, I have opted to use the term “Third World,” but I do so with this caveat in mind. John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 153. The quotation is from Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 6.

underpinnings of these policies; they maintained the assumption that progress entailed the linear movement from pre-industrial traditional societies to advanced industrial modern ones. They rejected, however, precipitous termination and forced assimilation as an appropriate means for achieving that end. In so doing, both the Association on American Indian Affairs and the National Congress of American Indians crafted alternative visions. They based their prescriptions for change on Point Four, an innovative component of President Harry S. Truman's foreign policy. In January 1949, Truman enunciated four objectives for U.S. involvement overseas. In his fourth and final point, he called for "a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas." Congress gave form to this vision with the Act for International Development (AID) in June 1950.<sup>19</sup>

Point Four ultimately received modest funding and produced unremarkable results, but that did not diminish its philosophical import. If scientific training and technical assistance from the United States could be used to modernize the world's poorest nations, it could also be used to improve the lives of American Indians. In 1957, the AAIA launched a cooperative interracial community and economic development initiative entitled "We Shake Hands" that was intended to prove the wisdom of Point Four and quietly subvert termination.<sup>20</sup> Oliver La Farge, the acerbic Pulitzer Prize-

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<sup>19</sup> Latham, *Modernization*, 7, 25; Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir*, with Richard Holbrooke (New York: Random House, 1991), 252; James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 168. For quotation, see William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1973), 474.

<sup>20</sup> Forrest Gerard, interview by author, tape recording, Albuquerque, New Mex., 31 May 2002. For coverage of AAIA initiatives, see "Alaska Statehood and Native Claims," *Indian Affairs* 27 (July 1958): 6; "Indians and the Courts," *Indian Affairs* 30 (February 1959): 8; Oliver La Farge, "The Rate of

winning novelist and president of the AAIA, considered it to be an unqualified success.<sup>21</sup>

From his perspective, termination ran “contrary to basic American principles encouraging the greatest amount of self-determination of dependent peoples the world over.”<sup>22</sup> The AAIA arduously brought the concept of Point Four to the attention of national policymakers, writing letters to presidents Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower, appealing to congresspersons, twisting the arms of federal bureaucrats, and publishing incisive editorials. Their endeavor culminated in a cooperative undertaking with the National Congress of American Indians.

Founded in 1944, the NCAI had come into its own in the campaign against termination. Wielding the strength of an unprecedented pan-tribal alliance, it heightened the visibility and influence of American Indians in the national political sphere. Its founders carefully distinguished Indian peoples’ interests from those of other minority groups. Full civil and political rights of American citizenship along with the recognition of tribal sovereignty and treaties provided the foundation for its activism. In 1954, guided by Executive Director Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Lakota), the NCAI dealt

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Indian Land Loss,” *Indian Affairs* 19 (January 1957): 2; “We Shake Hands,” *Indian Affairs* Nebraska Supplement, 24 (December 1957); “Northern Cheyennes Protest Sale of their Lands,” *Indian Affairs* 24 (December 1957); “Northern Cheyenne Goal—All Land in Tribal Ownership,” *Indian Affairs* 34 (November 1959): 1; “Mississippi Discrimination Against First-Grade Pupil,” *Indian Affairs* 35 (February 1960): 4; “U.S. and Florida Act on Miccosukee Lands,” *Indian Affairs* 38 (October 1960): 1-2; “We Shake Hands Notes,” “Miccosukees Achieve Tribal Status,” and “Legislative Round-Up,” *Indian Affairs* 45 (March 1962): 3, 5-6; “Northern Cheyenne Land Victory” and Arthur Lazarus, Jr., “Defense of Indian Rights,” *Indian Affairs* 49 (December 1962): 1-2. See also Robert Hecht, *Oliver La Farge and the American Indian: A Biography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 259-325.

<sup>21</sup> Confidential Report to the Board of Directors by Oliver La Farge, 15 April 1960, p. 6, folder 9, box 394, AAIA Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Hecht, *Oliver La Farge*, 196. Hecht rightly notes that La Farge “did not find it incongruous that as of 1949 no Indian had as yet sat on the AAIA board of directors. *Ibid.*, 197.

termination a decisive blow.<sup>23</sup> In their search for an alternative, leaders of the NCAI also looked abroad. And like Oliver La Farge and the AAIA, they found it in the approach taken by the United States toward nations emerging from colonial rule.<sup>24</sup>

No one within the NCAI argued more forcefully from this perspective than one of its founding members, D'Arcy McNickle. Born of Canadian Cree, French, and Irish ancestry, he was an enrolled member of the Flathead tribe. He attended mission schools as a child and later studied at Columbia and Oxford. A writer, poet, and activist, McNickle joined the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930s and strongly endorsed the Indian New Deal. In 1940 he accompanied the United States delegation to the organizational meeting of the Inter-American Indian Institute (IAII). McNickle later directed the National Indian Institute, the United States' arm of that organization, and both he and Helen Peterson returned to Latin America several times for IAII conferences.<sup>25</sup> Through experiences such as these, McNickle and others came to see "their history extending beyond tribal limits," he later reflected, "sharing the world

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<sup>23</sup> Cowger, *National Congress of American Indians*, 25-26, 30-31, 38, 44, 58-69, 76-125. On the significance of the NCAI as a pan-tribal organization that fostered a "supratribal consciousness," see Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 119 and 191-92.

<sup>24</sup> Dorothy R. Parker, *Singing an Indian Song: A Biography of D'Arcy McNickle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 174; Guy B. Sense, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 23-24; Cowger, *National Congress of American Indians*, 109, 117, 122; Office Manager for Helen Peterson to W.W. Keeler, 5 January 1966, "Keeler, W.W. (Consultant, BIA)" folder, box 66, series III, NCAI Papers. Barbara Moffett, "American Indians: Their Role in Society," p. 33 in "American Indians: Their Role in Society," folder, box 3, Records of the American Indian Chicago Conference, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

<sup>25</sup> Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, viii, 84-85

experience of other native peoples subjected to colonial domination.”<sup>26</sup> Just as Indians shared these negative experiences with other indigenous peoples, according to McNickle, they too would benefit from a Point Four program geared toward modernization.

Thoroughly disillusioned by the aggressive termination policy of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Dillon S. Myer, McNickle took a leave of absence from the Indian Bureau in 1951 and resigned three years later. During this transitional period, he founded American Indian Development, an organization that shared the same acronym—AID—as the enabling legislation for Truman’s Point Four program. McNickle promptly set about, as historian Frederick Hoxie aptly stated, “to extend the process of decolonization to the United States.”<sup>27</sup> AID convened workshops for tribal leaders, launched an ambitious community development program in the Navajo Nation, and sponsored the Workshop on American Indian Affairs for Indian college students. If termination could not be defeated in Congress, McNickle would lay the foundation for an indigenous Point Four program that would function independent of federal policy.<sup>28</sup>

An opportunity to rout arbitrary termination came in 1957 with the introduction of Senate Concurrent Resolution 3. Entitled “An American Indian Point Four Program,” SCR 3 proposed the repeal of House Concurrent Resolution 108.<sup>29</sup> The Point Four

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Frederick E. Hoxie, “‘Thinking Like an Indian’: Exploring American Indian Views of American History,” *Reviews in American History* 29, no. 1 (2001): 9. The quotation is from D’Arcy McNickle, *They Came Here First* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1949).

<sup>27</sup> Hoxie, “Thinking Like an Indian,” 9.

<sup>28</sup> Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 84-85, 123, 132-36. On the Crownpoint Project in the Navajo Nation, see especially pages 137-67.

<sup>29</sup> Whether or not a concurrent resolution retained staying power beyond the congressional session in which it was proposed was debated. The point was moot, however, since members of Congress actively pursued termination throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. Tribes would not yield until it had been symbolically laid to rest.

resolution denounced assimilation, reduced the BIA's role to one of providing only technical and financial assistance, recommended tribal control over the timing and nature of outside involvement in their affairs, and pledged support for the maximization of natural and human resources. "Indian communities cannot be considered to have reached the American level of well-being until the principles of consent of the governed, self-determination, and local self-government are operative," it read, "nor until Indian opportunities in economy, education, and health are measurably equal to those of their fellow citizens."<sup>30</sup> The resolution stopped short of renouncing termination, though it relegated it to an indeterminate time in the future. According to this vision, tribal governments and socially distinct Indian communities would persist interminably but without their separate legal identities.

Decolonization provided a critical backdrop to the debate over the American Indian Point Four resolution. In the fifteen years following the close of World War Two, some forty nations with a total population of 800 million people gained their independence. By the late 1950s, the Soviet Union matched American pledges of support for developing nations by sending officials through Egypt, Indonesia, India, and Latin America. Like their American counterparts, these emissaries promised economic development, trade, and technical assistance. For both superpowers, such assistance demonstrated goodwill. To be anything less than beneficent would be a stain on the national honor and risk humiliation. "Reputation emerged as a vital interest," noted

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<sup>30</sup> "A Legislative Program for American Indians, An American Indian Point IV Program, Senate Concurrent Resolution 3," *Indian Affairs* 19 (January 1957): 4.

historian John Lewis Gaddis, “with credibility the standard against which to measure it.” Superimposed over the base issues of economic power, military might, and ideological superiority, this moral dimension of the Cold War gave the United States and the Soviet Union yet another means of competing with one another and, consequently, proffered a tool Third World countries could use to their advantage.<sup>31</sup> “You are powerful,” they could say to either global hegemon, playing one against the other, “but are you just?”

Proponents of Senate Concurrent Resolution 3 wove elements of this moral contest into their own arguments, thus fashioning a Cold War imperative out of Indian affairs. Seeking to marshal the full weight of this new weapon, they contended that the treatment of Indians was of vital interest to the world’s indigenous peoples, and therefore the United States as well. “Looked at squarely, the Indian problem is a problem of conquest and colonialism, deeply involving us and our ideal of ourselves as a nation,” the AAIA editorialized.<sup>32</sup> Like many Third World nations, AAIA Executive Director La Verne Madigan continued, Indians were “colonially ruled,” had “their self-government restricted,” and took directives from a distant governmental agency over which they had little control.<sup>33</sup> Yet termination, the proposed solution to this deplorable situation, only exacerbated reservation poverty, opened wide the doors of exploitation, led to the plunder of Native resources, and undermined tribal self-governance.

No small matter, this state of affairs had grave implications for American efforts

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<sup>31</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 27-28; for quote, see Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 154.

<sup>32</sup> Editorial, *Indian Affairs* 19 (January 1957): 1.

<sup>33</sup> La Verne Madigan, “Indian Survival on the Great Plains,” *Indian Affairs* 22 (September 1957):

to forestall the spread of communism overseas. How could the world's developing nations take American claims of improving their lives seriously in light of the deplorable condition of Indians? What country would allow the fate of Native Americans to befall them? Employing an argument found also in the struggle for black equality, anti-terminationists pointed to a fundamental contradiction in the democratic principles espoused by the United States. A Point Four program at home that improved Indians' material well-being and demonstrated respect for self-governance, by contrast, would lend credibility to the United States in its ideological contest with the Soviet Union. To do anything less would be to lose face in Latin America, Asia, and Africa and provide grist for the Soviet propaganda mill.<sup>34</sup> Here was a subtle variation on the theme of Cold War civil rights.<sup>35</sup>

Despite remarkable cooperation between the AAIA, NCAI, and other organizations, they won only a partial victory. Representatives from the Interior Department and the BIA paralyzed their efforts when they declined to participate in the Senate hearings on SCR 3, deemed the resolution unnecessary, and recommended that no action be taken. When Congress recessed in January, the resolution died. This surge of activism did, however, influence the Eisenhower administration's decision to retreat from immediate termination. In September 1958, Interior Secretary Fred Seaton announced that the severance of federal trust statuses would occur only after tribes had become self-

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<sup>34</sup> Guy B. Senese, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1991), n. 32, ff. 42. See also U.S. Congress, Senate, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs*, 85<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1957).

<sup>35</sup> On the relationship between the Cold War and the civil rights movement, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

sufficient and given their consent. The BIA also began to adopt the rhetoric of Point Four.<sup>36</sup> Critics, however, considered these moves disingenuous. “The Commissioner’s assumption,” La Verne Madigan wrote of Indian Commissioner Glenn Emmons in 1957, “seems to be that the Indian communities are no more than asyla [*sic*] for the social and physical misfits of the present Indian generation.”<sup>37</sup>

Anxieties regarding the American economy and culture enlivened Indian politics no less than decolonization and development. Many of these rumblings of discontent occurred within the academy, and particularly in the social sciences, then slowly penetrated popular culture. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, a spate of widely read books critiqued dominant ideas regarding affluence, economic growth, democracy, and mainstream culture. John Kenneth Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (1958), Gunnar Myrdal’s *Challenge to Affluence* (1962) and Michael Harrington’s *The Other America* (1962) revealed the costs of the postwar economic boom and the negative impact of automation on the lives of unskilled workers. Industrialization marred the environment, mechanization wreaked havoc on rural America, and cybernation appeared to make traditional definitions of work obsolete. And then there was poverty. Myrdal warned of a permanent “substratum of hopeless and miserable people, detached from the nation at large” and Harrington likened America’s forty to fifty million poor to an “underdeveloped nation.” Meanwhile, some economists warned that economic growth alone would not

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<sup>36</sup> Oliver La Farge, “Editorial,” *Indian Affairs* 28 (November 1958): 1.

<sup>37</sup> La Verne Madigan, “Indian Survival on the Great Plains,” *Indian Affairs* 22 (September 1957):

alleviate their suffering.<sup>38</sup>

And yet the unprecedented affluence of the 1950s bestowed upon American popular consciousness a cool, comfortable sense of complacency. In *The Affluent Society*, Galbraith called this the “Conventional Wisdom,” a convenient, self-affirming pattern of thinking. An economic system premised on the inherent good of growth and oriented toward private gain rather than the commonweal, he argued, enriched a minority while obscuring the existence of structural inequalities that production alone could not mitigate. Despite all of this, Galbraith brooded, the Conventional Wisdom held fast to the idea that “[it] is far, far better and much safer to have a firm anchor in nonsense, than to put out on the troubled seas of thought.”<sup>39</sup>

The minority of intellectuals that cast out on that troubled sea also confronted the question of what fate community and individuality had in light of mass culture, suburbanization, and racism. Political pundits, college students, beats, journalists, academics, and civil rights activists populated this group of skeptics. In his influential *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), sociologist David Reisman excoriated the other-directedness fostered by suburbia and mass culture. Americans, he argued, increasingly estimated self-worth and social standing according to conformity and consumption. Other observers pointed to potentially explosive feelings of anomie, alienation, and powerlessness running

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, with a new introduction (New York: Macmillan, Co., 1962; New York: Penguin Books, 1971), 1, 167. Gunnar Myrdal, *Challenge to Affluence*, rev. and exp. (1962; New York: Vintage, 1965), 17; Robert Theobald, “Needed: A New Definition of Work,” *New University Thought* 3, no. 4 (1963): 10-12. See also, Henry Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: The Great Society in Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977), 18-19; O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 18-19, 101-02, 114, 122; and Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 2-6.

<sup>39</sup> Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, 2-5, 8-9, 129, quotes at 131 and x.

from the decaying inner cities to the carefully groomed lawns of middle class America. Elsewhere, young adults, those who organized the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960 among them, searched for authenticity, meaning, and purpose in a nation they defined as increasingly banal, impersonal, and undemocratic. And in retaliation for African American efforts to build a “beloved community,” the ugly contradictions to American principles of justice, democracy, and equality came to the fore.<sup>40</sup>

If the mainstream of American life brimmed with confidence, these misgivings coursed just beneath the surface. American Indians drew from and contributed to this groundswell of dissent. The Workshop on American Indian Affairs, a six-week program for Indian graduate and undergraduate students begun in 1956, provides one of the clearest examples of this phenomenon. The University of Chicago provided the organizational support during its first four years and continued to influence its curriculum after D’Arcy McNickle’s American Indian Development assumed sponsorship in 1960. The Workshop provided an opportunity for Indian young adults to sharpen their intellects, encouraged them to take pride in their Native identities, and helped them to cultivate an intimate knowledge of the non-Indian world so that they could serve as negotiators of change for their people. In its inaugural year, the students gathered at Colorado College in Colorado Springs and in succeeding years the Workshop convened at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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<sup>40</sup> Howard Brick provides a cogent review of the contradictions between community and mass society in *Age of Contradiction*, 13-18 and 98-123. For discussions of popular culture and critics of the status quo, see Patterson, *Grand Expectations*, 311-74; and John Patrick Diggins, *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace, 1941-1960* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1989), 177-272.

The class of 1956, directed by Chicago anthropology graduate student Fred Gearing, engaged in a detailed study of termination. As it evolved, the Workshop's curriculum focused more intensively on social scientific theories of cultural change and applied them to Indian-white interaction from before contact to the present. Many of the Workshop instructors and guest lecturers, including Gearing, Rosalie and Murray Wax, Robert Reitz, Sol Tax, and Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), shared a common connection with the University of Chicago, an institution that had gained a reputation for innovative studies of social and cultural change. Chicago anthropologist Robert Redfield's pioneering work on what he termed the folk-urban continuum proved especially significant. Redfield articulated ideal type folk and urban societies, but rather than focusing only on the sharp disjunctions between them as structural functionalists were prone to do, he explored the process whereby the former negotiated change via acculturation.<sup>41</sup>

The instructors integrated variations of Redfield's theories into an American Indian context. A typical six-week course began with an introduction to anthropological theories on race, culture, and society. Students next examined what Robert K. Thomas called "the flavor" of folk and urban societies, then discussed the dynamics of imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism. At the same time, Thomas distinguished the concept of a minority group from that of a colonized people and explained to the students how American Indians combined attributes of both. Guest speakers followed this with analyses that compared different indigenous peoples contact experiences with Europeans.

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<sup>41</sup> Brick, *Age of Contradiction*, 46.

With a firm theoretical foundation established, the course moved to a week's consideration of American Indian history and policy, before concluding with an exploration of contemporary issues. Throughout the six weeks, students interacted with leading Indian and non-Indian intellectuals and political figures, as well as federal administrators.<sup>42</sup>

The Workshop thus conceptualized American Indians as a folk people adjusting to contact with and colonization by an urban industrial society. In this regard, it bore the distinct mark of Cherokee anthropologist Robert K. Thomas. Born in rural Kentucky and raised in northeastern Oklahoma, Thomas earned a master's degree at the University of Arizona under the direction of Edward Spicer before pursuing a Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Chicago. His Western sartorial style, affinity for local people, and folksy cadence made him a most unlikely resident of the ivory tower. But he possessed a rare intellect and his incisive analytical elocutions convinced even the most skeptical listeners.<sup>43</sup> Thomas exuded a passion for social justice, harbored an abiding distaste for what he considered to be the anonymity and vapidness of urban-industrial life, and perceived federal-Indian relations as an instance of internal colonialism. He brought all

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<sup>42</sup> Students read works by Ruth Benedict, Karl Mannheim, Dorothy Lee, Everett and Helen Hughes, George Simmel, David Riesman, Robert Redfield, Bob Thomas, D'Arcy McNickle, Felix Cohen, and others. Workshop on American Indian Affairs 1963 Report, pp. 6-9, "AID Subject File Reports" folder, box 25, Helen L. Peterson Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland. For a later version of the course outline and reading list, see College Workshop on American Indian Affairs, Reading List and Course Outline 1965, "Workshops 1965" folder, box 30, Peterson Papers. See also *The Indian Progress: Newsletter of the Workshop on American Indian Affairs* 5 (30 March 1962): 1; Rosalie Wax, "A Brief History and Analysis of the Workshop on American Indian Affairs Conducted for American Indian College Students, 1956-1960 together with a Study of Current Attitudes of Those Students," October 1961, pp. 1, and Workshop on American Indian Affairs 1963 Report, "AID Subject File Reports" folder, box 25, Peterson Papers. See also Rolland Harry Wright, "The American Indian College Student: A Study in Marginality" (Ph.D., diss., Brandeis University, 1972).

<sup>43</sup> Murray L. Wax, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 8 June 2002.

of this to bear on the Workshop on American Indian Affairs.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas's brand of social science was theoretical yet practical in application, scientifically empirical yet unabashedly political. His ideas synthesized American Indian expressions of discontent with those of others at home and abroad. Bemoaning what he called the "'creeping uniformity' that is spreading over America," Thomas rejected the prevailing notion that Indians had only a "choice of remaining a proud but poverty-stricken people or becoming imitation white men."<sup>45</sup> "Industrial civilization individuates and attacks the solidarity of the social group," he explained. "Even when tribal peoples desire to be incorporated into an industrial civilization, they are unwilling to break up as social groups. . . ." This reality bound the experiences of American Indians to those of other folk peoples. "Perhaps the struggle we see in the world today," he speculated, "is, in some sense, a struggle about how communities with a strong sense of social solidarity, particularly tribal groups, will enter the mainstream of industrial civilization."<sup>46</sup>

Under his direction, the Workshop on American Indian Affairs became a vehicle for demonstrating to an emerging generation of Indian leaders that there existed alternatives to termination and assimilation.<sup>47</sup> He sought to exploit the feelings of disaffection he detected among Indian youths. "[T]hey are very angry young people. . . .

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<sup>44</sup> For a retrospective look at Robert K. Thomas, see Steve Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee, A Good Anthropologist: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Thomas* (Los Angeles: UCLA American Indian Studies Center, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> "COPY of a letter to editor of Sun-Times by Robert K. Thomas, May 29, 1957," folder 10, box 146, Sol Tax Papers, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

<sup>46</sup> Robert K. Thomas, "Pan Indianism," in *The American Indian Today*, ed. Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 139, 140. For more on his understanding of Redfield, see Robert K. Thomas, "The Role of the Church in Indian Adjustment," *Kansas Journal of Sociology* III, no. 1 (winter 1967): 20-28.

<sup>47</sup> Wax, "A Brief History," 8.

[T]hey are angry at the general society for threatening their home communities with social oblivion,” Thomas averred. “Talk of Indian identity is very much in the forefront of their conversations about Indian affairs. . . . Indian students, like other American college students, read *Playboy* magazine, Vance Packard, David Reisman and Jules Pfeiffer’s cartoons. They are well aware of the loss of community and the loss of identity in American urban life. Their concern with Indian identity is not only a wish to preserve themselves and their home communities, but also a rejection of this frightening aspect of American society.”<sup>48</sup> If, as Thomas predicted, these youths served as “the growing tip of the Pan-Indian social movement,” it was due in no small part to what many of them learned under his tutelage at the Workshop on American Indian Affairs.

D’Arcy McNickle later recalled that the Workshop contributed to “an awakening” for those who attended.<sup>49</sup> Although responses were undoubtedly as diverse as the students themselves, the essays many of them wrote lend credence to McNickle’s assessment.<sup>50</sup> Reacting to Robert K. Thomas’s theory of internal colonialism, Frank Dukepoo (Hopi/Laguna Pueblo) wrote, “I had never before thought of the Indians as compared to colonialism. I thought colonialism existed only in the older countries like

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<sup>48</sup> Robert K. Thomas, “Pan Indianism,” in *The American Indian Today*, ed. Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 136-37.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 196.

<sup>50</sup> Many of the participants probably found in the Workshop clear articulations for visceral feelings they had long harbored. Others may have experienced epiphanies. And of course, still another cohort either rejected the ideas, never understood them, or failed to crack the books. This is to say that all of the Workshop students certainly did not have the same experience. Also, the Workshops were not all work. While the faculty challenged them during the day, they allowed the students to set many of their own rules. At night and on weekends, many of them held “49’s,” informal gatherings where they would drink and sing social songs together. Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 40. See also Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 181-99.

southern Europe or in places such as Africa. It was really quite a shock to find that. . .we were under a form of colonialism.”<sup>51</sup> Clyde Warrior (Ponca) expressed similar sentiments: “Another thing I learned is that all over the world tribal peoples are coming in contact with the outside world and basically they all have the same reactions.” “So, after all,” he concluded, “we American Indians are not the only ones hitting it tough and not being understood.”<sup>52</sup>

Many of the students found the instructors’ emphasis on self-determination and community survival persuasive. “[A]s long as there is a colonial agency set up to administer to Indian affairs, there will always be an Indian social problem,” Bruce Wilkie (Makah) wrote as he reflected on the assigned readings. “In order to be responsible and to contribute worthiness in any situation identity must be retained. Loss of identity fosters irresponsibility and a general lack of worthiness.”<sup>53</sup> Responding to a question on how best to affect change in a community, Wilkie asserted, “The task lies in getting the community to work at correcting the causes of social problems. Moreover the community must do the work themselves. The community must know a problem exists and how to go about correcting the problem. The decision and responsibility must lie with the community.”<sup>54</sup>

The Workshops challenged students to consider what meanings these decisions

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<sup>51</sup> Frank Dukepoo Essay, 7/16/62, “Workshops 1962 Student Papers 1,” folder, box 29, series 19, Peterson Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Clyde Warrior, Essay on *Where Peoples Meet*, “Workshops 1962 Student Papers 4” folder, box 29, series 19, Peterson Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Bruce Wilkie (Makah) Essay, “Workshops 1962 Student Papers 4” folder, box 29, series 18, Peterson Papers.

<sup>54</sup> Bruce Wilkie (Makah) Essay (2), “Workshops 1962 Student Papers 4” folder, box 29, series 18, Peterson Papers.

had for their people's relationship to the dominant society. Writing on the question "Should Indians in your local community 'shape up' into the mainstream of American life?" Clyde Warrior contended, "The people in my local community should 'shape up' to a certain [extent] for the reasons that they are poverty-stricken, hungry, discriminated against and as a whole the slobs of the area." But he placed responsibility on non-Indians for creating and perpetuating this situation. "The younger generations go to town school, or anywhere in town and get doors slammed in their faces and get the general idea that all Indians are slobs. . . ." In response, Indians, and especially youths, felt compelled to assimilate. "They are ashamed of Indians, they're ashamed of themselves, they're [ashamed of their] parents and hence they become sour on Indian identity, they laugh, jeer at their own ways. Now all this is very sickening to me," Warrior explained, "it's very threatening to me. It's all very threatening to my tribe. . . ."<sup>55</sup>

Clyde Warrior suggested that Indians needed to be able to relate to the dominant society on terms of their own making and as equals despite their distinctiveness. Other students echoed similar sentiments regarding the assertion of modern tribal identities. "It is not that Indians reject white culture, per se. It is that they reject white culture when they are forced to adapt to it by losing [sic] what they are and they value," Sandra Johnson (Makah) asserted. "One does not painlessly reject oneself." Searching for an appropriate analogy, she asked how non-Indians might respond to the prospect of being forced to live under Soviet domination. "Many would cry, 'Better dead than Red,'"

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<sup>55</sup> Clyde Warrior Essay, "Workshop 1962 Student Papers 4" folder, box 29, series 18, Peterson Papers.

Johnson stated. "And yet, another battle between the Reds and the Whites is being fought within our own borders. Given this different context it may be easier for white citizens to understnad [*sic*] our cry which would sound more like, 'Better Red than dead.'"<sup>56</sup>

The contest between the United States and the Soviet Union informed students' rejection of termination as well as assimilation. Just as the National Congress of American Indians and the Association on American Indian Affairs had done before them, students invoked the Cold War imperative. An editorial published in *The Indian Progress*, a newsletter written and edited by these youths, read, "With the stirring of the masses in certain countries abroad, it would be beneficial for our country to uphold and continue to respect federal obligations to and treaty rights of the American Indian." Termination, the arbitrary assumption by states of criminal and civil jurisdiction on reservations, and such tactics as the invocation of eminent domain to expropriate Indian lands, the author noted, were "sure to be read with wide interest to indigenous peoples throughout the world."<sup>57</sup>

The awakenings of discontent at home and abroad provided fertile ground for those who dissented from the prevailing policies of termination and assimilation. But the debates that ensued addressed issues more far-reaching than policy alone. As the dynamics of the cultural field changed, it afforded the opportunity for peripheralized forms of consciousness to come to the fore. Here was a chance, as Vine Deloria Jr., argued, to overcome images Indians did not create. Accordingly, the Association on

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<sup>56</sup> Sandy Johnson, "Final Conclusions," "Workshops, 1964 Miscellaneous Student Papers and Exams 2" folder, box, Peterson Papers.

<sup>57</sup> Editorial, *The Indian Progress* 7 (23 July 1962): 2.

American Indian Affairs, National Congress of American Indians, and Workshop on American Indian Affairs urged the federal government to conceptualize tribes as nations emerging from colonialism rather than minorities that desired integration. The Point Four analogy thus carried connotations of self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, cultural survival, and for some, but not all, respect for tribal sovereignty—Indians, in other words, could modernize without sacrificing their tribal identities. As the 1960s dawned, the United States had an opportunity to keep the promises it made to assist in the realization of colonized people's aspirations wherever they resided. It remained to be seen whether it would be up to the challenge.

Chapter Two  
Convergence:  
From Denver to Dallas, 1960-1963

Everybody seems to want more local self-determination for Indians, whether they live on reservations or in non-reservation communities, whether they belong to “organized” tribes or “unorganized” tribes.

Sol Tax<sup>1</sup>

In his annual presidential address to the Association on American Indian Affairs (AAIA), Oliver La Farge made it clear that he looked to 1960 as a year of decision. In no small part due to the political activism of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the AAIA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Interior Department begrudgingly adopted the trappings of Point Four. But terminationist policies and assimilationist pressures continued, making official pronouncements to the contrary illusory. Any hope that Point Four would take hold under the watch of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, he argued, had fallen victim to a bureaucratic culture that proved “callously indifferent to Indians, contemptuous of them, hostile towards them.” Meanwhile, New York, Montana, and Washington flouted tribal land, water, and fishing rights, and other states made known their intentions of assuming criminal and civil jurisdiction over reservations. Contradiction, collusion, and corruption made for a confused and damnable state of affairs. “Scandal piles on scandal,” inveighed La Farge.<sup>2</sup> Indians could wait no longer for reform.

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<sup>1</sup> “Report of the Coordinator of AICC,” 16 March 1961, folder 6, box 59, series II, subseries I, Association on American Indian Affairs Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>2</sup> Oliver La Farge, “Confusion Worse Confounded,” *Indian Affairs* 37 (June 1960): 1-2, 7-8; “The Iroquois Story,” *Indian Affairs* 36 (April 1960): 1, 3. For additional details, see Confidential Report to the Board of Directors by Oliver La Farge, 15 April 1960, folder 9, box 394, AAIA Archives.

Before a full house at New York City's Riverside Church, this hard-drinking, heavy-smoking, and irascible man demanded "a firm declaration of a positive policy" that took into account American Indians' prescriptions for change. Paternalistic plans imposed from above and without their consent made a mockery of the nation's democratic principles. Neither the well-intentioned strategies for solving the so-called "Indian problem," nor the centuries-long attempt to destroy them militarily had succeeded. Since the end of the Indian New Deal, the means changed but the ends remained the same—the federal government insisted on the dissolution of tribal governments, the liquidation of tribal lands, the expropriation of tribal resources, the assimilation of tribal peoples. And still, to the chagrin of those who would rather they vanish, Indians survived. As he looked out across his audience, the resolute AAIA president intoned, "They are still here."<sup>3</sup>

Oliver La Farge's polemical, emotion-packed rendering of the past and then-present evidenced little concern for subtlety. Instead, he proffered a one-dimensional narrative of conniving whites and victimized Indians, of dispossession and survival. Of course his was a politically charged appeal for action, not academic discourse. Moreover, the milieu in which he spoke did not lend itself to careful qualification or reasoned objectivity. As the new decade dawned, termination remained well entrenched and the future of federal Indian policy was unclear. La Farge knew this well enough, but he also realized that it would be determined soon, for 1960 was an election year.

The early sixties witnessed a convergence of the diffuse awakenings of anxiety,

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<sup>3</sup> La Farge, "Confusion," 8.

hope, and indignation that punctuated the cultural field in the twilight of the preceding decade. It brought new leadership to the White House, an expansion of the struggle for black equality, and a stirring of activism among college students, women, and other minority groups. Cultural criticism accelerated, poverty in the Deep South and Appalachia penetrated the public sphere, and the Cold War intensified. Pivotal moments in American Indian politics, from the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) and founding of the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) to John F. Kennedy's attempt to redirect federal-Indian relations, were shaped by and gave further texture to this period of ferment. These events unfolded within the broad sweep of American politics, thought, and culture, and the people involved found that their efforts intersected with a larger externalizing process as it coursed through American life.<sup>4</sup>

In the fall of 1960, it appeared unlikely that the Republican Party would serve as an agent of change in Indian affairs. Congressional elections in the late fifties brought less zealous backers of House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 280 onto key House and Senate subcommittees—most of whom were Democrats. In their national platform, the Republicans promised only to oppose “precipitous termination.”<sup>5</sup> To make matters more dubious, presidential nominee Richard M. Nixon had served as Eisenhower's vice president during the latter's eight years in office—a nadir in federal-

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<sup>4</sup> There are many ways to tell each of these stories. I am, therefore, offering only one of several possible interpretations. I am not interested in telling an endogenous or a policy history. Rather, I am seeking out the ways in which Indian history was simultaneously a part of and distinct from the larger context of American history. I do not believe, however, that this necessitates incorporating Indians into a homogenous “metanarrative.” While attending to the particular trajectory of Indian history, I seek to explore the complex syntheses that result when it intertwines with other narratives.

<sup>5</sup> “*Building a Better America: Republican Platform 1960*,” Republican National Committee, folder 16, box 151, AAIA Archives.

Indian relations. Nixon would later wax eloquent about the impact his American Indian football coach had on him during his college years, but this seemed to be primarily affective in nature and did not translate into a detailed understanding of Indian policy.<sup>6</sup> The Republican contender therefore symbolized a continuation of the status quo—hardly the kind of person advocates of reform had in mind.

His opponent, Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy, also lacked thorough knowledge of things Indian, but he advanced a bold and imaginative agenda that included Native peoples. The Democratic National Platform pledged to “assist Indian tribes in the full development of their human and natural resources and to advance the health, education, and economic well-being of Indian citizens while preserving their cultural heritage.”<sup>7</sup> Echoes of Point Four came as no coincidence. AAIA General Counsel Richard Schifter not only coauthored the Democrats’ Indian plank but also drafted a longer policy statement that ultimately carried John Kennedy’s signature.<sup>8</sup> To further underscore the party’s commitment to seeking Indian consultation and consent, Kennedy invited NCAI officer Frank George (Nez Perce) to Hyannis Port in the late summer of 1960 to discuss the platform. In yet another gesture, his brother, Robert F. Kennedy,

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<sup>6</sup> On this point, see George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 74-77.

<sup>7</sup> “The Rights of Man,” Democratic National Platform 1960,” folder 16, box 151, AAIA Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Schifter to Oliver La Farge, 29 June 1960, folder 16, box 151, AAIA Archives; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 3; Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 14. Schifter collaborated on the party plank with former BIA administrator and AAIA field representative William Zimmerman. Zimmerman’s story would be an interesting one to explore in more detail. He was the BIA representative brought before the Senate, under subpoena, in 1947 to provide a list of tribes and their preparedness for the severance of the trust status. Although it was not his intent, Congress used the list to construct HCR 108 and PL-280. One wonders whether Zimmerman saw this as an opportunity for vindication. He later served, as will be discussed below, on Stewart Udall’s Interior task force on Indian affairs.

twice solicited the NCAI's views on the future of Indian policy.<sup>9</sup>

As the election approached, attention turned to the Third World. The Korean War, Nikita Khrushchev's coming to power, and the successful completion of Fidel Castro's Cuban Revolution had exacerbated tensions in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America over the course of the preceding decade. Then, at the United Nations General Assembly in New York just two months before the presidential election, Castro heightened anxieties further by moving his delegation to a hotel in Harlem. Khrushchev and other world leaders followed suit in this demonstration of solidarity with America's poor and oppressed. While Eisenhower typically considered such actions bluster, John F. Kennedy took the threats posed by Castro and Khrushchev to heart. He promised that if elected the deterrence of communist infiltration in the Third World would be given a central place in his foreign policy. Kennedy proposed to modernize emerging nations with free market capitalism, thereby bringing them into the global economy as equals.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, he positioned the Democratic Party to be a catalytic force in what the United Nations had declared the "Development Decade."

Kennedy's hairbreadth victory on November 8 encouraged opponents of coercive termination. Here was a man who identified himself with the civil rights movement, demonstrated concern for the poor, and talked of aggressive development strategies at

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 127-30. One might find in this, too, the seeds of future frustrations. While Kennedy symbolically entreated Indians to provide their thoughts, he directly adopted those of non-Indians.

<sup>10</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 154-88.

home and abroad throughout his campaign.<sup>11</sup> Together with the party platform, these indices suggested that the New Frontier had much in store for Indians. "I feel as if fresh air was about to be let into the government of the United States for the first time in eight years," AAIA President Oliver La Farge enthused that month.<sup>12</sup> A similar exuberance pervaded the annual meeting of the National Congress of American Indians in Denver, Colorado. Convened the week after Kennedy's election, the NCAI made plain its aspirations by adopting the theme "Self-Determination—Not Termination." If Kennedy were to follow through with his campaign promises, this goal stood a reasonable chance of being realized—the sixties might be the development decade for American Indians as well.

Amidst this swirl of anticipation, keynote speaker Francis McKinley (Ute) urged the NCAI to seize this opportunity.<sup>13</sup> Whatever differences separated the various tribes, all could agree that self-determination included the recognition of treaties and agreements, economic and human resource development, federal accountability for the protection of tribal lands, and settlement of outstanding legal claims. But McKinley

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<sup>11</sup> Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1960: A Narrative of American Politics in Action* (New York: Atheneum, 1961), 106, 321-23; James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 17; Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1986), 3-29.

<sup>12</sup> Oliver La Farge to Philleo Nash, 11 November 1960, folder 1, box 140, AAIA Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Holder of a political science degree from George Washington University and director of his tribe's Community Services Division, McKinley well understood the painful consequences of coercive termination. Between 1954 and 1956, he labored to save his own people from it. In order to avoid the termination of the entire Ute tribe, McKinley engineered a compromise with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Senator Arthur Watkins (R-Utah) that ultimately stripped the mixed-bloods of their membership. Helen Peterson to W.W. Keeler, 10 November 1960, "Keeler, W.W. (Consultant, BIA)" folder, box 66, series III, National Congress of American Indians Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland. On McKinley and the termination of the mixed-blood Utes, see R. Warren Metcalf, "Lambs of Sacrifice: Termination, the Mixed-Blood Utes, and the Problem of Indian Identity," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (fall 1996): 328-37.

asked his audience to ponder an additional question regarding “[h]ow we perceive ourselves as American Indians; and how the American public perceives us.” To realize self-determination, Native Americans could neither accept the denigrating images prevalent in popular culture nor the state of dependency fostered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>14</sup> Indians would have to wrest control of the power to define themselves and use it to reconceptualize public perception. Francis McKinley had in mind the articulation of a pan-Indian political identity of unprecedented strength.

The process of decolonization and the implications of the civil rights movement captured the attention of those who attended the NCAI meeting. Beginning in Greensboro, North Carolina, in February 1960, then swiftly spreading across southern and border states, a massive wave of sit-ins reinvigorated the struggle for black equality. Demonstrations in Atlanta that fall, including the imprisonment of Martin Luther King Jr., played a decisive role in the national elections.<sup>15</sup> Francis McKinley argued that much could be learned from the unity blacks exhibited. But he warned that it would be critical for Indians to distinguish their particular interests from those of other minority groups. As the battle against termination had already demonstrated, Native Americans generally did not seek full integration into the mainstream and refused to sacrifice their distinct legal identities in order to attain equality.<sup>16</sup>

If the civil rights movement brought minority issues into the public sphere, it

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<sup>14</sup> Francis McKinley, Keynote Address, 17<sup>th</sup> Annual National Congress of American Indians Convention, 14-18 November 1960, pp. 2-5, “Speeches 1960” folder, box 12, NCAI Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1992*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 61-87.

<sup>16</sup> McKinley, Keynote Address, 5.

carried with it the danger of obfuscating this critical distinction. The media possessed the power to define the terms of political debate and to shape public consciousness. In the past several years, the NCAI arduously charted a course toward an American Indian Point Four program, a proposal steeped in the context of the emerging Third World. The concept of developing nationhood, so embedded within that analogy, could easily be lost in the wake of the civil rights movement. But, as McKinley reminded his listeners, even Point Four had its limitations. The peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America learned that development exacted costs. Accepting financial and technical assistance from the United States could mean surrendering control over how that aid would be used and to what end—the antithesis of self-determination. In recognition of this fact, he added, some nations had begun to reject American succor.<sup>17</sup> The potential pitfalls outlined by Francis McKinley, however, were just that in November 1960—possibilities and little more. Having endured eight years of constant threats to their legal and cultural identities, whatever benefits might redound to Indians via the increased visibility of minority concerns offered by the civil rights movement and Kennedy's commitment to economic development appeared to be well worth the risk.

Another person who had traveled to Denver that month shared Francis McKinley's conviction that Indians needed to forge a consensus on basic policy principles and forcefully assert them into the public sphere. Sol Tax, a professor of anthropology at the University of Chicago, therefore proposed to the National Congress of American Indians a highly publicized general meeting of Indian peoples that would be

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<sup>17</sup> McKinley, Keynote Address, 5.

held in Chicago and culminate in the drafting of a new policy statement. He planned for the document to be presented in person to President Kennedy by a delegation of American Indians. Though supported by foundation and university money, Tax promised that the convention would belong to Native Americans—they would direct the preliminary meetings, orchestrate the conference, chair the committees, and draft the final document.<sup>18</sup> In short, he proffered a vehicle for American Indians to define for the public who they were, how they conceptualized their relationship to the mainstream of American life, and what they expected of the federal government—minus the usual distortions of non-Indian policymakers, philanthropists, or spokespersons.

An influential presence in postwar anthropology, Sol Tax possessed an innovative mind, a penchant for activism, and a rigorous work ethic. Born in Chicago and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he came from a German Jewish immigrant family. He received informal political tutelage from his socialist father at the dinner table and his formal academic training under anthropologists Ralph Linton as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown as a doctoral student at the University of Chicago. By the time Tax joined Chicago's faculty in 1944, he had conducted fieldwork in American Indian communities in New Mexico, Iowa, and the Great Lakes region and spent some ten years on a research project in Guatemala and Mexico under the direction of Robert Redfield. As a teacher, researcher, founding editor of *Current*

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<sup>18</sup> Diary Entries for April to November 21, "Diary Record, Sol Tax, April-December 1960" folder, box 1, series I, American Indian Chicago Conference Records, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland; Sol Tax to Russel Carter, Lawrence Lindley, and LaVerne Madigan, 29 November 1960 and Sol Tax to LaVerne Madigan, 8 December 1960, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives; Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty," *Human Organization* 58, no. 1 (1999): 109.

*Anthropology*, and ultimately director of the Smithsonian Institution's Center for the Study of Man, Tax crossed international boundaries and encouraged comparative studies of indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup>

The American Indian Charter Convention, as it was tentatively dubbed, was founded on the principles of action anthropology. One of his most significant contributions to the field, action anthropology proposed "a participative ethnography in which the informants were coinvestigators and the investigators were students of the informants."<sup>20</sup> Practitioners of this methodology immersed themselves in the communities they studied but limited their intervention to providing alternatives their hosts could use to confront the problems and challenges they faced. Through participant observation, action anthropologists then drew theories about how different peoples negotiated cultural, political, social, and economic change. They would not, however, dictate the direction of that change.

The late fifties and early sixties were high times for the study of community development, as well as the belief that social scientific knowledge could be used to

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<sup>19</sup> Sam Stanley, "Community, Action, and Continuity: A Narrative Vita of Sol Tax," *Current Anthropology* 37, Supplement (February 1996): S131-S133, S135, S137; John W. Bennett, "Applied and Action Anthropology: Ideological and Conceptual Aspects," *Current Anthropology* 37, no. 1, Supplement (February 1996): S23-S53; Sol Tax, "Last on the Warpath: A Personalized Account of How an Anthropologist Learned from American Indians," 1968, folder 2, box 273, series VIII, Sol Tax Papers, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. Reflecting his comparative internationalist perspective, the portion of his professional library that was donated to Native American Educational Services (NAES) College in Chicago was entitled the Sol Tax Studies in Comparative Tribal and Third World Development. Stanley, "Community, Action, and Continuity," S136.

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, "Applied and Action Anthropology," S35.

develop more efficacious public policies.<sup>21</sup> Sol Tax at once embodied these trends and declared his independence from them. Despite his active involvement in the Society for Applied Anthropology (SfAA), he voiced particular displeasure with the direction it had taken. Funding agencies too often compromised the integrity and independence of applied anthropological research by shaping the agenda in advance. The close association between social science and the United States government during and after World War Two, as well as the British tradition of using anthropology as an arm of colonial administration, particularly concerned Tax. In response, he proposed that action anthropologists would be beholden to two things and two things only—their conscience and the will of the people with whom they worked.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, Tax contributed to growing criticisms of the field in which he was trained. Social anthropology concentrated on how social systems functioned to maintain homeostasis or equilibrium. Although this did not prevent theorists from dealing with power, conflict, or change over time, they typically did not address these problems. But more than that, and of particular interest to Tax, they had little to say about the future. Social and cultural anthropologists generally failed to examine critically the assumption that small-scale, folk societies would be absorbed by urban-industrial social systems. In contradistinction, Tax belonged to an increasingly vocal group of scholars who argued

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<sup>21</sup> For an overview of this phenomenon, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 74-136.

<sup>22</sup> Sol Tax to Robert K. Thomas, 28 September 1963, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers; draft, written Jan. 16; revised Jan. 17, "Historical: Beginnings of AICC" folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records; Nancy Oestrich Lurie, "The Voice of the American Indian: Report on the American Indian Chicago Conference," *Current Anthropology* 2, no. 5 (December 1961): 478.

that interactions between cultures, and specifically transformations within them, needed to be understood in terms of dynamic adaptations that were not synonymous with incremental steps toward assimilation.<sup>23</sup>

This perspective ran counter to regnant constructions of cultural change within and outside academe. Sol Tax's experience at the Institute on American Indian Assimilation, sponsored by the AAIA in May 1952, provided an apt example. Although he later altered his views, Oliver La Farge encapsulated the received wisdom of the time when he likened being "for or against assimilation" to being "for or against gravity."<sup>24</sup> Tax and his students presented contrary evidence based on extended fieldwork in the Mesquaki community of Tama, Iowa. If Indians controlled the terms of cultural, political, and economic change, they had found, there need be no expectation that Indians would vanish. External accouterments notwithstanding, Indians would never cease being Indian. Of the reactions, Tax wrote, "I realized that nobody else in the room understood that we were saying 'never,' rather than 'more slowly than you think.'"

Pressing their argument further, he and his students contended that the inevitability-of-assimilation construct—and the extent to which Indians either internalized or dared not publically refute it—actually rested at the heart of the so-called Indian problem. "I recall that there was an effect that could only be called 'electric,'" he later told D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead). "[AAIA Executive Secretary Alexander] Lesser

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<sup>23</sup> Sol Tax, "Last on the Warpath," pp. 11-12, 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Oliver La Farge, "Considerations on Assimilation of the American Indian," Advance Draft, Institute on American Indian Assimilation, 20 April 1952, p. 2, folder 17, box 20, Angie Debo Papers, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

rose to deny that he or the others had said that assimilation is inevitable; La Farge said nonsense, they had indeed been saying that, and it was wrong. Then there was a parade of recantations by Indians, who seemed relieved of a great burden. The meeting then declared against the term 'assimilation' and to look for a substitute." The University of Chicago thereafter became a leading institution in reconfiguring traditional categories for understanding cultural change.<sup>25</sup>

Just as the National Congress of American Indians, Association on American Indian Affairs, and others had done, Tax and his students connected Indian issues to those of developing nations. In a letter courting financial assistance from the Schwartzhaupt Foundation, Tax suggested that its support for the Chicago conference would contribute to a final resolution of "domestic 'colonial' problems," and thereby "provide patterns for constructive democratic action in similar situations all over the world."<sup>26</sup> Joan Ablon, an anthropology graduate student who helped to organize the conference, likewise suggested that it sought to discern "patterns of planning, cooperation, and decision making that occur when a colonial people have the opportunity to face and decide issues for themselves." Invoking words similar to those used by Indian activists and their advocates, Tax described the Chicago conference as an exercise in democratic self-

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<sup>25</sup> Sol Tax to D'Arcy McNickle, 22 June 1970, folder 5, box 133, series IV, Tax Papers. It should be noted that the AAIA was indeed divided internally over the issue of assimilation. AAIA Executive Director Alexander Lesser did not accept La Farge's ideas in this regard, nor did Felix Cohen. It appears that this meeting proved to be a turning point for Oliver La Farge's thinking. Robert A. Hecht, *Oliver La Farge and the American Indian: A Biography* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1991), 197-200. For Alexander Lesser's views, see "Preliminary Draft Questions on Assimilation," 17 April 1952, folder 17, box 20, Debo Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Lurie, "Voice of the American Indian," 482. The University of Chicago and the Schwarzhaupt Foundation each contributed \$10,000 to the conference.

determination.<sup>27</sup>

At the 1960 convention in Denver, a large contingent within the National Congress of American Indians embraced Sol Tax's proposal and ushered through a resolution formally pledging the organization's support for it. American Indians had been frustrated by the terminationist juggernaut long enough, President Clarence Wesley (San Carlos Apache) explained in a letter to rally support for the American Indian Charter Convention. They had tired of the Interior Department's ulterior motives, the incompetence of the BIA, bureaucratic inertia, and the government's unwillingness to listen to Indian people's own ideas. "We all know that for a long time the most that any of us could seem to do was register our objection to what we did not want," he continued. "Regardless of whether all or part or none of our recommendations are accepted, we have our first real opportunity to go 'on the offensive'—take the initiative—as Indians working together all over the nation, in putting into a single document our concerns and our hopes for the future."<sup>28</sup>

NCAI Executive Director Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Oglala Lakota) and D'Arcy McNickle lent critical support to the Tax proposal. It was not their first encounter. The University of Chicago anthropology department, under Tax's direction, sponsored the Workshop on American Indian Affairs from 1956 to 1959. During this

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<sup>27</sup> Joan Ablon, "The American Indian Chicago Conference," *Journal of American Indian Education* 1, no. 2 (January 1962); American Indian Charter Convention—June 13-20, 1961, "Historical: Beginnings of AICC" folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records. Lurie, "Voice of the American Indian," 481, 497.

<sup>28</sup> Clarence Wesley to Fellow Tribesman, n.d., folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives; Clarence Wesley to Sol Tax, 1 December 1960, "Historical: Beginnings of AICC" folder, and American Indian Charter Convention, Progress Report No. 1, "Complete Set of AICC Material" folder, box 1, AICC Records.

period, Peterson, McNickle, and John Rainer (Taos Pueblo) all guest lectured there. First through the Workshop and again via the AICC, action anthropology intersected with the NCAI's drive toward an American Indian Point Four program. Both of them took Third World development as the reference point for advocating tribal self-determination, challenged conventional definitions of Indian identity, predicated their ideas on the principle of community action, explicitly drew from social scientific theories of cultural change, and critiqued the mainstream of American life. Symbolic of this synthesis, McNickle's American Indian Development (AID) became the Workshop's permanent sponsor in 1960 and the NCAI spearheaded the Chicago conference.

Midway through the NCAI convention, Tax took leave to rally support among his colleagues at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). Peterson, McNickle, and Wesley simultaneously made plans to draw up a draft charter on Indian policy that could be used as a discussion document in anticipation of the convention.<sup>29</sup> With McNickle as the lead author, they and several others met in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on November 30 and December 1. Latching onto John F. Kennedy's campaign theme, they titled their work "The New Frontier in Indian Affairs." It opened with an historical analysis of Indian policy, praising the Indian New Deal for its emphasis on self-governance and self-determination. It called for a "free choice" program for American Indians, abolition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and creation of a new National Indian Commission. Access to education and capital, along with respect for

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<sup>29</sup> Diary Entries for April to November 21, "Diary Record, Sol Tax, April-December 1960" folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records.

the integrity of tribal governments and “full Indian participation” in all matters filled out its guiding principles.<sup>30</sup> In an effort unappreciated by contemporaries, McNickle labored to insure that the charter would lay the foundation for an Indian Point Four program, a goal he had been pursuing for a decade.<sup>31</sup>

The timing of the Chicago conference could not have been more auspicious. In December, John F. Kennedy announced Stewart Udall, a former Arizona representative, as his Interior Secretary. Athletic, intellectually astute, and aggressive, Udall exuded the same youthful vigor as the president. On January 23, 1961, two days after his confirmation, Udall assembled a special task force to chart a new course in Indian affairs. To do so, he called on W.W. Keeler, Cherokee Principal Chief and Vice President of Phillips Petroleum; Philleo Nash, an anthropologist who had been on the AAIA’s board of directors and lieutenant governor of Wisconsin; and William Zimmerman, a former field representative for the AAIA and assistant commissioner of Indian affairs from 1933 to 1950. James Officer, another anthropologist who had been Udall’s primary advisor on Indian affairs in the past, and John Crow (Cherokee), a veteran BIA administrator

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<sup>30</sup> Cowger, *National Congress of American Indians*, 134; Draft to be photographed on AICC letterhead, “Historical: Beginnings of AICC” folder, and American Indian Charter Convention, Progress Report No. 1, “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records; “The New Frontier in Indian Affairs: Policy and Program for the Sixties,” attached to Clarence Wesley to Fellow Tribesmen, n.d., folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives.

<sup>31</sup> McNickle was embittered by the lack of recognition he received from Tax and others. Scholars have since restored his central place in not only the initial drafting of the declaration, but also the conference itself. See Dorothy R. Parker, *Singing an Indian Song: A Biography of D’Arcy McNickle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992), 192 and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty,” 111. A coordinator for a meeting of Montana tribal leaders reported that McNickle’s emphasis on Point Four was not lost on those who read the document. Dr. Lesa Lekis, a member of the State Department’s Fulbright Program in Brazil, noted the commonalities the declaration shared with the Point Four program in South American tribal regions. American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report, no. 2 (February 22, 1961), “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, AICC Records.

rounded out the group.<sup>32</sup>

The Interior task force provided the Chicago conference planners with a critical entree into policymaking circles. Philleo Nash and Sol Tax shared a long friendship that dated back to their days as anthropology undergraduates at the University of Wisconsin and as fellow graduate students at the University of Chicago. Additionally, D'Arcy McNickle counted William Zimmerman as an old friend, having worked with him in the John Collier administration through the 1930s and 1940s. During the second week of February, Zimmerman traveled to Chicago to observe a meeting of the AICC's Interim Study Group—an all-Indian committee charged with making early preparations for the convention. He observed the proceeding and also shared information regarding the Udall task force. Two days after its conclusion, Tax then flew back to Washington, D.C. to confer with the task force. With Secretary Udall in attendance, he provided a detailed description of the Chicago conference and the principles on which it rested. His performance, Philleo Nash reported to Tax, had been “persuasive both with the Task Force and the Secretariat.”<sup>33</sup>

This sudden turn of events grew, in part, out of the premium the new presidential

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<sup>32</sup> This group foreshadowed the personnel selected for key posts. John Crow became Udall's deputy commissioner of Indian affairs. James Officer served as associate commissioner of Indian affairs. Philleo Nash was chosen as commissioner of Indian affairs. Two BIA insiders, Newton Edwards and Rex Lee, also contributed to the task force. Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 20-21, 26-27, 36-41, 57; Arthur Lathrop Amey, Jr., “Indian Affairs and the Great Society” (master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1980), 43; Philleo Nash to Sol Tax, 9 February 1961, “Philleo Nash” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>33</sup> For quotation, see Philleo Nash to Sol Tax, 13 March 1961, “Philleo Nash” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records. Philleo Nash to Sol Tax 9 February 1961, *ibid*; Sol Tax to La Verne Madigan, 20 February 1961, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives; Lurie, “Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty,” 113; Margaret Connell Szasz, “Philleo Nash,” in *The Commissioners of Indian Affairs*, ed. Robert M. Kvasnicka and Herman J. Viola (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 311-23.

administration placed on social science. Kennedy aggressively recruited economists, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists as advisors on foreign and domestic policies. From his perspective no group better understood the complex challenges of modernity. And so, in late May 1961, Philleo Nash journeyed to Swampscott, Massachusetts, where the Society for Applied Anthropology addressed the theme "Major Issues in Modern Society." David Riesman explored the burdens of "overdevelopment" in urban mass society, while others, including Nash, probed issues related to "Underdeveloped Societies." But he had come not only to talk, but to listen as well. Representing the Udall task force, Nash held council with leading academics, Sol Tax among them, as well as foundation representatives. The Interior Department endeavored to insure "maximum Indian participation in planning, programming and completing projects for American Indian development," Nash stated. He wanted to know how "social scientists can best be brought into active collaboration with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, with the tribes, and with the off-reservation groups."<sup>34</sup> As Nash's foray suggested, still another convergence appeared imminent, one between the thinking of anthropologists, American Indian political leaders, and now the federal government itself.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Society for Applied Anthropology, May 26-29, The Colony Hotel, Swampscott, Massachusetts and Philleo Nash to Gentlemen, 23 May 1961, "Philleo Nash" folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>35</sup> The Udall task force exceeded past efforts of including American Indians in policy development. NCAI President Clarence Wesley served as an official consultant, discussed the group's agenda, and provided them with critical questions it should include on a questionnaire to be distributed to Indian people. Nash, Keeler, and the rest of the members spent considerable time in the field, touring reservation communities and speaking with tribal leaders. In March, the executive committee of the National Congress of American Indians met with personnel from the task force on several occasions. *NCAI Bulletin* IV, no. 1 (May 1961), 1, 4.

As the Udall task force began its research and Tax rallied support for the Chicago conference, the Commission on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian issued a highly publicized report on Indian affairs. Underwritten by the Fund for the Republic, this four-year project culminated in the publication of "A Program for Indian Citizens" on March 15, 1961. The commission consisted of prominent non-Indian intellectuals and former federal bureaucrats, but also included W.W. Keeler, the Cherokee principal chief whom Stewart Udall had selected to lead his own task force. Often striking a decidedly paternalistic tone, the final report recommended a gradualist approach to termination. "Any termination act," it read, "should provide enforceable standards for the quantity and quality of education, health, and other public services to be furnished by the state and local governments."<sup>36</sup> As the title suggested, the authors sketched the outlines of a more humane strategy of substituting American citizenship for Indian political identities.<sup>37</sup> It did not revoke termination, per se. In so doing, the findings resonated with the assimilationist racial egalitarianism common in postwar liberal circles.

As a critique of coercive termination, "A Program for Indian Citizens" received the endorsement of both the AAIA and the NCAI, but it fell short of many individuals' expectations. For his part, Sol Tax made every effort to cooperate with the commission,

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<sup>36</sup> *The Indian: America's Unfinished Business, Report of the Commission on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian*, compiled by William A. Brophy and Sophie D. Aberle (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), 213.

<sup>37</sup> *NCAI Bulletin* IV, no. 1 (May 1961). For more on the Fund for Republic report, see Guy B. Senese, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 43-54; Alvin Josephy Jr., ed., *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1971; Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1985), 31-35; and Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 15-17.

believing that the wealth of quantitative and legal data it generated would strengthen the Chicago conference. Additionally, he arranged to have copies of "A Program for Indian Citizens" sent to all 5,000 people on the Chicago conference mailing list. This did not signal his agreement with its findings. Rather, Tax utilized the report in the spirit of action anthropology—as yet another alternative for Indians to consider as they prepared their own policy statement. Mindful of his circumscribed role as an observer, Tax nonetheless expected that, with NCAI leadership and grassroots involvement, the Chicago conference would launch a much more direct and uncompromising assault on termination.<sup>38</sup>

The central role of the National Congress of American Indians engendered complications of its own. In mid-December 1960, Sol Tax made a three-day swing through New York and Washington, D.C., to meet with Interior and BIA personnel, congresspersons, representatives from foundations, and members of church groups, the American Civil Liberties Union, and various Indian advocacy organizations. The AAIA's Richard Schifter expressed particular concern that relying too heavily on the NCAI would drown out the voices of nonmember tribes and common Indian people.<sup>39</sup> Nancy Lurie, a professor of anthropology in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan and Tax's assistant coordinator, applauded "The New Frontier for American Indians" but shared his qualms. "The NCAI represents the work of exceedingly sophisticated and

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<sup>38</sup> Joan Ablon to Sophie Aberle, 5 January 1961 and Nancy O. Lurie to Sophie Aberle, 25 March 1961, "A General" folder, box 4; and Nancy Lurie to Theodore Stern, 7 May 1961, "N.O. Lurie, April-May 1961" folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Schifter to La Verne Madigan, 15 December 1960, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives.

politically aware Indians,” she wrote, “many of whom are not actually the victims of injustices and ill-conceived legislation and administration they seek to rectify.”<sup>40</sup> The challenge would be to make the Chicago conference accessible to non-elites.

The AAIA soon soured on Tax’s idea, keeping a safe distance without completely abandoning it. A circumspect Oliver La Farge called the project “wooly,” while La Verne Madigan, utilizing a different but no less colorful metaphor, feared it had become “a pig in a poke.” They warned that the National Congress of American Indians would explode in an embarrassing display of tribal infighting and urged Tax not to make the process of reaching a consensus public, but only the final document. Moreover, “A Program for Indian Citizens,” from their perspective, had said all there really was to say. They could not fathom anything more far-reaching being considered plausible.<sup>41</sup>

As the moderate stance of “A Program for Indian Citizens” demonstrated, the Chicago conference confronted a situation more complex than conflict between and within Indian advocacy organizations. In private correspondence with Sol Tax, William Brophy—John Collier’s successor as commissioner of Indian affairs and director of the Fund for Republic study—blasted the Eisenhower administration. He denounced termination as an abuse of human rights and lambasted the undemocratic nature of Public Law 280. The last eight years of decision-making, he confided, deliberately set out to destroy tribal governments and communities and expropriate Indian land and resources.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax, 8 December 1960, “N.O. Lurie, Oct.-Dec. 1960,” box 8, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>41</sup> Oliver La Farge to La Verne Madigan, 6 December 1960, Oliver La Farge to La Verne Madigan, 16 December 1960, La Verne Madigan to Oliver La Farge and Richard Schifter, 23 December 1960, and La Verne Madigan to Sol Tax, 28 February 1961, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives.

<sup>42</sup> William Brophy to Sol Tax, 20 April 1961, “Bod-Bz” folder, box 5, series III, AICC Records.

Oliver La Farge proved no less reticent in expressing his frustration with the state of Indian affairs.

Why La Farge and Brophy would concede to a gradual approach to termination based on Indian consent presented a nettlesome question. The answer resided in their definition of the “politics of the possible.” The AAIA had good reason for finding the strategy outlined in “A Program for Indian Citizens” sufficient. In 1959, they renewed their pressure for an American Indian Point Four resolution, this time in both the House and Senate. Their effort not only went down to defeat, but prompted the introduction of a counter resolution that would have stoked the fires of coercive termination. Oliver La Farge and his organization learned from this experience the virtues of not waking a sleeping giant.<sup>43</sup> “In all our actions,” he wrote to Tax after reading the draft charter, “we must bear in mind that a powerful terminationist element still exists in Congress and has by no means given up its fight.”<sup>44</sup> If the AICC should go through with proposing the BIA’s abolition, it might spur a new round of termination legislation. Moreover, La Farge noted that many policymakers, including Stewart Udall, had come to see HCR 108 as dead—an expression of sentiment binding only to the Congress that introduced it; at any rate, resolutions did not carry the force of law.<sup>45</sup> When he warned Tax of the unintended consequences of trying to revoke it, he was speaking from a very recent and personal experience.

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<sup>43</sup> “Termination Forces Attack Again,” *Indian Affairs* 32 (May 1959): 1. For the AAIA’s legal interpretation of HCR 108, see Hecht, *Oliver La Farge*, 225-27.

<sup>44</sup> Oliver La Farge to Sol Tax, 3 January 1961, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Oliver La Farge to Sol Tax, 26 May 1961, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives.

Talk of abolishing the BIA and revoking termination would stir up faith in an “enthusiastic unreality,” La Farge warned, leaving Indians with “feelings of disallusionment [*sic*] and frustration.”<sup>46</sup> Sol Tax received a similar response from the members of Congress he visited in December 1960. “No change is conceived to be realistic,” he recalled Congressman E. Y. Berry (R-S.D.) and BIA officer Rex Lee telling him that month. A unified statement constructed by Indians would have at best a difficult time compelling politicians to abandon termination completely; at worst, it could unintentionally breathe new life into the policy.<sup>47</sup>

There was truth in the argument that the NCAI did not represent all tribes and that it was plagued by internecine turmoil. Helen Peterson, D’Arcy McNickle, Tax, and others courted nonmember tribes and encouraged the involvement of urban Indians and unrecognized groups. The first cohort included the Navajos and the fiercely independent Senecas and Tuscaroras—many of whom rejected American citizenship and recognized only the sovereignty of their own nations.<sup>48</sup> The second group encompassed individuals who had relocated to the cities either on their own volition or through the relocation program. Finally, unrecognized peoples consisted of terminated tribes and bands, people who had never enrolled as tribal members, and communities that did not have a federal trust relationship with the United States—such as the Abenakis, Houmas, Lumbees,

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<sup>46</sup> Oliver La Farge to Sol Tax, 3 January 1961, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Diary Entries for December 15 to December 20, “Diary Record, Sol Tax, April-December 1960” folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records.

<sup>48</sup> By using the past tense, I am not suggesting that these peoples no longer reject American citizenship. Many of them do.

Pequots, and Narragansetts.<sup>49</sup>

In their attempt to mollify one set of concerns, the Chicago conference planners rushed headlong into another. Just as decolonization, civil rights, cultural dissonance, and the Cold War intertwined with arguments against termination, assimilation, and federal paternalism, the same milieu galvanized countervailing forces. The Cold War nurtured a virulent strain of anticommunism and bolstered feelings of “One Hundred Percent Americanism,” while the civil rights movement triggered a racist backlash and calls for law and order. In the wake of the National Congress of American Indians annual conference in November 1960, these forces coalesced with the equally complicated politics of race and identity.

A pall must have surrounded the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes meeting in Muskogee, Oklahoma, on January 11, 1961. The leaders of the Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Creeks, and Cherokees gathered to discuss, among other things, the NCAI’s endorsement of the Chicago conference.<sup>50</sup> Cherokee Principal Chief W.W. Keeler, attorney Earl Boyd Pierce (Cherokee), and Chickasaw Governor and State Supreme Court Justice Earl Welch, suspected that Sol Tax planned to establish an organization to usurp the NCAI. Detecting an even more nefarious scheme, Keeler

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<sup>49</sup> Laurence M. Hauptman and Jack Campisi, “The Voice of Eastern Indians: The American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961 and the Movement for Federal Recognition,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 132, no. 4 (1988): 316-29.

<sup>50</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 183. Attending the meeting were W.W. Keeler, Napoleon B. Johnson, Dennis Bushyhead, C.C. Victory, Earl Boyd Pierce, and Mrs. Mildred Ballenger of the Cherokees; Floyd Maytubby, E.B. Maytubby, and Earl Welch of the Chickasaws; Harry J.W. Belvin, Jack Davidson, B. Frank Belvin, Grady Anderson, and Reverend Joe Reed of the Choctaws; Turner Bear, Tom Bear, Alfred Deere, Archie Thomas, and Rufus George of the Creeks; and John Brown, James Fife, Allan Crain, and Andrew Walker of the Seminoles. Report of the Meeting of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, Muskogee, Oklahoma, January 11, 1961, 10:00 a.m., folder 36, box 82, Alice Marriott Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

recalled a trip to the Soviet Union in August of 1960. Some Russians “took me aside and explained to me how they would like to work with me in working out plans to set up some Indian Republics here in the United States,” he remembered. “[T]hey talked about freeing the Indians. . .they had the idea Indians are held as prisoners. . .they spoke of the Indians in leg-irons. . . .” But that was not all. “They said it came from the reports of the University of Chicago.”<sup>51</sup>

Though he stopped short of accusing Sol Tax of being a communist, few could have missed the innuendo. Just in case they did, Earl Boyd Pierce charged Tax with laying a “booby trap” that would culminate in nothing less than “an overall Governmental State.”<sup>52</sup> Allen Quetone (Kiowa) and Dennis Bushyhead (Cherokee) attempted to assuage their concerns, but even they agreed that Indians needed to guard against becoming dupes of foreign powers. Pierce, however, took a more aggressive stand. He saw it as his duty to prevent Indians from being seduced by what he considered to be Sol Tax’s communist conspiracy. With deep suspicions in tow, he traveled to Chicago in February to attend the meeting of the Interim Steering Committee—the same meeting that William Zimmerman observed as a member of Udall’s task force.

Over the course of five days, the Interim Steering Committee met in the magnificent grey stone confines of the International House to discuss all facets of the conference. They began with a review of “The New Frontier in Indian Affairs.” In late

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<sup>51</sup> Report of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, January 11, 1961, p. 20, Marriott Collection.

<sup>52</sup> Report of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes, January 11, 1961, p. 21, Marriott Collection.

December it had been sent to some 800 people who met in small groups throughout the country to read, discuss, and critique it.<sup>53</sup> Pierce arrived a day late but swiftly made his presence felt.<sup>54</sup> Taking it upon himself to read aloud the charter as developed to that date, he offered comments throughout and made certain to note the limitations existing law placed on tribal self-governance. Famous for his long-winded grandiloquence, Pierce consumed a two and one-half hour morning session and most of another one in the late afternoon. His discussion of self-government was no doubt a response to William Rickard, a Tuscarora many perceived as a radical for his insistence that tribes be recognized as sovereign nations.

The Interim Steering Committee comprised an eclectic group of tribal leaders ranging from Judge Lacy Maynor of the unrecognized North Carolina Lumbees and the cerebral D'Arcy McNickle to longtime Chicago resident Benjamin Bearskin (Winnebago Sioux) and Native American Church representative Frank Takes Gun (Crow).<sup>55</sup> Disagreement arose over how to interpret the draft charter and, more specifically, the tone it ought to take. When some of the attendees argued for a clear denunciation of termination that would "shock" people out of their complacency," Pierce counseled

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<sup>53</sup> The first mailing included some 800 persons. According to Joan Ablon, the mailing list ultimately contained some 5,000 individuals, 4,000 of them Indian. Ablon, "American Indian Chicago Conference," 447.

<sup>54</sup> He was a substitute for Earl Welch, who himself was to have been W.W. Keeler's representative. It is my reading of the documents that, although Pierce's reputation would have preceded him, the members of the Interim Steering Committee did not know he was going to be there. Nancy Lurie to Alice Marriott, 3 March 1961, "Ma...(cont'd)" folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>55</sup> Others present included Austin Buckles (Sioux), Dibbon Cook (Klamath), George Heron (Seneca), Fred Kabotie (Hopi), George Kenote (Menominee), Howard McKinley (Navajo), Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Lakota), John Rainer (Taos), William Rickard (Tuscarora), Alvin Warren (Chippewa), and Clarence Wesley (San Carlos Apache). American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 2, n.p.

caution and, according to the minutes, “expressed at length his concern that the group might alienate the Indian Bureau and that before incorporating anything in the Charter they should consult with the Bureau and the Secretary of the Interior.”<sup>56</sup> Repeatedly, the Cherokee general counsel made plain his conviction that the Interior Department and BIA should be consulted before Indians took any definite actions. He feared that by being too forceful, they would come off as “an unhappy minority,” or in other words, like African Americans whose direct action methods offended Pierce’s sense of legitimate dissent.<sup>57</sup>

Sol Tax and several members of the Interim Steering Committee pointed out that Pierce’s cautious fawning ran counter to the very purpose of the conference. Although they did not agree on all of the charter’s particulars, everyone save Pierce believed that the AICC should strike out in bold new direction. Here was an unprecedented opportunity for Indians to speak for themselves—to take the offensive, as the NCAI’s Clarence Wesley argued—and they did not need Stewart Udall’s blessings to do it. The Interim Steering Committee emerged from the meetings more unified than ever. “What really pulled them together,” wrote Nancy Lurie, “and they were a diverse group, was Mr. Pierce who was the lone voice raised in protest that we might antagonize the powers that be in the government. . . .”<sup>58</sup>

During their conference, the steering committee renamed the American Indian

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<sup>56</sup> American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 2, n.p.; AICC—Meeting of Indian Advisory Committee, Feb. 10-14, 1961, Chicago, Illinois, pp. 2, 3-4, 5, 8, “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, AICC Records.

<sup>57</sup> Roy P. Stewart, “Indian Charter Groups Merit Long Look,” *Daily Oklahoman*, 2 April 1961, A3.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Lurie to Alice Marriott, 3 March 1961, “Ma...(cont’d)” folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records.

Charter Convention the American Indian Chicago Conference, a move that allowed them to keep the original acronym while mollifying concerns that they endeavored to begin a new organization that would compete with the NCAI. They also appointed a permanent steering committee of eighteen tribal representatives with McNickle as the chairperson. This body divided the nation into nine regions and made preparations for meetings to be held in each of them during late March and April. There, Indians would meet to discuss the model charter—now called the general statement. With McNickle once again taking the lead, the comments that resulted would be integrated into a revised document and sent to all of the persons on the conference mailing list. Finally, they established June 13 to 20, 1961, as the dates for the American Indian Chicago Conference.<sup>59</sup>

Extenuating circumstances forced Pierce to leave before the steering committee disbanded. After his early departure, disagreement turned to ridicule. Nancy Lurie kept notes on all of the participants, briefly synthesizing their substantive contributions. Her comments on Pierce spoke volumes. “Earl Boyd Pierce,” she recorded in her minutes, “Cherokee lawyer and strictly company man.”<sup>60</sup> Pierce suspected that he had earned their derision. But he also knew that a tape recorder had been running throughout all but the first session. So, upon his return to Oklahoma, he requested copies. An almost incredible game of cat and mouse followed, with Pierce pursuing what had become, in his mind, a “black plot against him” and assistant coordinator Nancy Lurie doing all in her power to

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<sup>59</sup> American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 2, n.p.

<sup>60</sup> Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax, 16 February 1961, “N.O. Lurie, Jan-Feb 1961” folder, box 8 and Nancy Lurie to D’Arcy McNickle, 22 February 1961, “D’Arcy McNickle” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

forestall the inevitable surrender.<sup>61</sup>

The Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes wanted a full report of the meeting, Pierce told Lurie, and he wanted the tapes to insure an exhaustive account. For nearly two months she strung Pierce along, offering some valid reasons for the delay and prevaricating others. His deep-seated paranoia over communist infiltration may have been bunk, but the lampooning of his mannerisms, speech, and ultraconservatism were real enough. After mulling over their options, Tax and Lurie agreed that she would send Pierce edited versions of the tapes. But before doing so, she distorted some of the offending portions, going so far as to record blank space over select sections. Pierce would have his tapes but not in time to report to his superiors—and certainly not with the smoking gun.<sup>62</sup>

When Lurie finally did surrender the tapes, she went to great lengths to find a plausible explanation for their “spotty quality and content. . . .” In order to insure a better recording, she claimed that she had asked people to hold the microphone and that they, in turn, accidentally held it “at the turn off button.” “Either this or a loose wire in the microphone must account for large blank sections on some of the last tapes,” she

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<sup>61</sup> Nancy Lurie to Alice Marriott, 3 March 1961, “Ma...(cont’d)” folder, box 8 and Nancy Lurie to D’Arcy McNickle, 22 February 1961, “D’Arcy McNickle” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records. For Pierce’s correspondence, see Earl Boyd Pierce to Nancy Lurie, 18 February 1961, Earl Boyd Pierce to Nancy Lurie, 20 February 1961; Earl Boyd Pierce to Nancy Lurie, 21 February 1961; and Earl Boyd Pierce to Nancy O. Lurie, 6 March 1961, “P general” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>62</sup> “In copying the post-Pierce tapes, blur the parts with comments by speaking into a microphone at those points,” Tax suggested to Lurie. Then he asked, “Technically possible? Time enough?” Tax did not, however, rule out sending the tapes, arguing that Pierce and his superiors deserved to hear the ridicule. Sol Tax to Nancy O. Lurie, 25 February 1961, “N.O. Lurie, Jan-Feb 1961” folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records. A tremendous number of unforeseen complicating factors did arise, from a fall she suffered disembarking an airplane to problems finding another tape recorder, that delayed her getting the copies for Pierce.

continued. Lurie then concluded with the don't-trust-a-woman-with-a-man's-job trick. "The microphone differed from the one on my machine so I had no way of knowing when it was not functioning. As long as the light on the machine blinked, I thought everything was all right."<sup>63</sup> On a carbon copy of the letter sent to Tax, she then confessed, "Sol—I could find no other solution. The letter is true about the blanks, I caught all the 'slurs' which were brief but there are other long blanks. I hope you are not nauseated by my girly final paragraph. I hope my psychology works because while a goof, he can be dangerous."<sup>64</sup>

Earl Boyd Pierce refused to yield in the months that followed. He, along with other officials of the Five Tribes spread rumors that Sol Tax was a communist, that he sought to use the AICC as a means of becoming commissioner of Indian affairs, that a plot existed to deny Oklahoma representation, and that the project received financial support from communist organizations.<sup>65</sup> But the quarrel proved more complex than a contest over political ideology alone. In late March, Pierce expressed concerns over a map that had been distributed by Sol Tax.<sup>66</sup> Originally created by University of Chicago

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<sup>63</sup> Nancy Lurie to Earl Boyd Pierce, 19 March 1961, "P general" folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>64</sup> Mimeograph of Nancy Lurie to Earl Boyd Pierce, 19 March 1961, "P General" folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>65</sup> Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin to Sol Tax, 9 April 1961 and Agenda for Meeting of the Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma to be Held at Muskogee, Oklahoma, District Court Room, Federal Building, April 12, 1961, 9:45 a.m., folder 36, box 82, Marriott Collection; D'Arcy McNickle to Sol Tax, 31 March 1961, "D'Arcy McNickle" folder, box 9 and Nancy Lurie to Alice Marriott, 3 March 1961, "Ma...(cont'd)" folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records. Tax denied any interest in being commissioner of Indian affairs. Sol Tax to Nancy Lurie, 2 February 1961, "N.O. Lurie, Jan.-Feb. 1961" folder, box 8 and Nancy O. Lurie to Donald R. Ames, 31 March 1961, "A General" folder, box 4, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>66</sup> Alice Marriott to Carol Rachlin to Sol Tax, 9 April 1961, folder 36, box 82, Marriott Collection.

anthropology graduate students Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), Sam Stanley, and Bruce MacLachlan in 1956 and updated several times thereafter, it included source material other than BIA statistics—more importantly, it included self-identified Indians and unrecognized tribes in the population figures.

This dimension of the conflict raised the issue of race, identity, and authority. The Lumbees, for instance, were not recognized by the federal government, but had maintained what they considered to be cohesive tribal communities for centuries. They had also intermarried extensively with blacks. A similar kind of racial conflict could be found among the Five Tribes in Oklahoma. All of these tribes had members who enslaved blacks, and after the Civil War, all of them were forced to grant freedmen tribal membership.<sup>67</sup> It should be noted, however, that it did not take African American heritage to cause controversy—Earl Boyd Pierce questioned the authenticity of any person who was not already an enrolled tribal member. Moreover, he was alone neither in arguing that only enrolled members from legally recognized tribes should be allowed to participate, nor in engaging in identity politics.<sup>68</sup> In late May, Pierce made an uninvited appearance at an AICC Steering and Drafting Committee meeting to debate the issue of self-identified Indians. While the attendees invited him to participate in their discussions,

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<sup>67</sup> On the map, see Samuel Stanley, “Staying the Course: Action and Reflection in the Career of Robert K. Thomas,” in *A Good Cherokee, A Good Anthropologist: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Thomas*, ed. Steve Pavlik (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 1998), 3-4. Freedmen is a non-gender specific term that is still commonly used in the continuing debate over the tribal membership of this group of people.

<sup>68</sup> Oliver La Farge, for instance, called unrecognized tribes in the east, and particularly the Lumbees, “pseudo-Indians.” He warned against congressional backlash to the suggestion that they should receive federal aid. Oliver La Farge to La Verne Madigan, 29 November 1960; *ibid.*, 6 December 1960; *ibid.*, 16 December 1960, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives. Divisions also existed between urban and reservation Indians, recognized and unrecognized tribes, advocates of American citizenship and defenders of tribal sovereignty.

they once again dismissed his quarrels.

While historical accounts reveal much about the protagonists of the American Indian Chicago Conference, none have taken Earl Boyd Pierce's dissent seriously. None have taken a phenomenological perspective and asked how he made sense of the world in which he lived, how he came to his particular definitions of the situation, and whether he was exceptional. It would be a mistake to write Earl Boyd Pierce off as nothing more than, to use Lurie's term, "a goof." He did, as she suspected, pose a serious threat to the Chicago conference. If he could not destroy it by spreading rumors and whispering intimations about Sol Tax's politics, he would see to it that the Chicago anthropologist did not advance what Pierce considered to be a radical agenda. The Cherokee general counsel also exhibited intense paranoia. But given what we now know about Lurie's and Tax's evasive shenanigans, he had good reason to think something was amiss. They really were, after all, hiding something.

Pierce saw himself as an Indian American, with the latter serving as his national identity and the former as his heritage. He may have been a tribal member, but that status came secondary to being an American citizen. Genuinely concerned about the prospect of communist world domination, he perceived it as his duty personally to uphold the nation's democratic principles—even if that meant engaging in destructive behavior. He also lived in anxious times. The Cold War reached a fevered pitch in the months preceding the Chicago conference. Shortly after Keeler revealed the details of his trip to the Soviet Union, the American public learned of Premier Nikita Khrushchev's pledge of Soviet support for wars of national liberation wherever they might be fought. Pierce

followed the news and he, like many other Americans, saw the world as an exceedingly dangerous place.

Additionally, the more pronounced civil rights demonstrations, spearheaded by sit-ins and carried forward by the Freedom Rides challenged an entire way of life in the South, one that many Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles, Creeks, and Cherokees accepted as their own. W.W. Keeler perceived blacks as innately inferior to Indians and there is no evidence to suggest that Pierce saw things differently.<sup>69</sup> It followed that race played no minor role in Pierce's claim that people of mixed Indian-African descent—Lumbees and Cherokees among them—had no right to be enrolled members of any tribe. Relatedly, as a staunch advocate of law and order, Pierce bemoaned demonstrations and believed that Indians owed extreme deference to the United States government; hence, his concern that Indians not be associated with “unruly minorities.”<sup>70</sup>

Pierce's actions betrayed prejudicial attitudes toward not only blacks, but Jews, elite intellectuals, urban outsiders, and social critics as well. Foremost, he knew of Sol Tax's Jewish socialist heritage and distrusted him because of it.<sup>71</sup> Here, then, was a not atypical person born and raised in northeastern Oklahoma, an insular part of the world where localism flourished. He acquired its customs and lifeways, had been shaped by the area's strong Baptist and Methodist influence, and identified with the region's ultra-patriotic spirit. He looked suspiciously at outsiders, northerners, and urbanites.

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<sup>69</sup> For a more detailed account of W.W. Keeler and Earl Boyd Pierce and their worldviews, see chapter six.

<sup>70</sup> For Pierce's argument regarding the Lumbees and what he considered to be the inflated population statistics for the Cherokees, see Earl Boyd Pierce to Sol Tax, 22 February 1961, “P general” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>71</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 25 August 1963, folder 6, box 119, series IV, Tax Papers.

These foreigners, as he might have called them, symbolized the antithesis of the small-town American way of life. While this sociological interpretation does not make Earl Boyd Pierce a more appealing person, they do suggest that he was a human being not unlike many others in his place and time.

It should also be said that while Pierce aggressively defended the legal rights of the Cherokee Nation, he knew that many Choctaws, Chickasaws, Creeks, Seminoles, and Cherokees questioned the legitimacy of their leaders. Derisively called the “Country Club Boys,” the latter represented a highly assimilated economic and social elite with stature in exclusive non-Indian circles. They did not gain their political positions through democratic means. Rather, since the nearly complete dissolution of the Five Tribes’ governments in 1906, the President of the United States appointed their respective leaders. Social, cultural, economic, and geographical cleavages separated them from the majority of the persons they purportedly represented. Members of the establishment typically did not speak their native languages, chose not to participate in the ritual life of their people, were highly educated, held professional positions, and lived in the region’s more populous towns. They had become defined as apart from the much poorer, less well-educated, and more traditional communities throughout eastern Oklahoma—in many circles, they were not considered Indian at all. The political relationship that emerged between the two groups might be better thought of in terms of *noblesse oblige*, rather than a shared sense of peoplehood.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This is a complex situation that is explored in more detail in chapters six and seven. Those chapters provide full citations to the sources from which this synopsis is drawn.

W.W. Keeler, Earl Boyd Pierce, and Choctaw Principle Chief Harry J.W. Belvin harbored particular concerns that the Chicago conference might give voice to traditional tribal members. Harry Belvin faced the additional threat of opposition from Choctaws who challenged his decision to terminate the tribe during the late 1950s.<sup>73</sup> “The Choctaws feel, as we do, that the fundamental value and importance of the AICC is the opportunity for Indians other than the country clubbers to make themselves heard in their own behalf,” wrote Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin, two non-Indian anthropologists who served as AICC volunteer workers in Oklahoma.<sup>74</sup> “As far as we can see it, there is only one way to beat the ‘Country Club Boys,’” they added, “and that is with the common people.”<sup>75</sup> Sol Tax concurred. “We have pressures from the opposite extreme from the country-clubbers,” he wrote, “meaning the deepest-dyed traditionalist Indians (particularly, William Rickard, his Long House groups, and other contacts. . . . [I]f they stay through the Convention, there will be no whitewash of anything.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Realizing his mistake—and claiming that he had been misled—Belvin continually requested delays in the termination date for the tribe. Ultimately, they were not terminated.

<sup>74</sup> This quotation is from Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin. They lived together in Oklahoma City and had created Southwest Research Associates to conduct research in the social sciences. They often worked for tribes and had close relationships with many of the western tribes. For more on the political dynamics between local Choctaws, the appointed leadership of the tribe, and the Chicago conference, see Carol Rachlin to Nancy Lurie, 17 January 1961, Alice Marriott to Nancy Lurie, 1 March 1961, Nancy Lurie to Alice Marriott, 3 March 1961 and Carol Rachlin to Nancy Lurie, 14 March 1961, “R General” folder, box 10, series III, AICC Records. On dissent among the Creeks, see Clifton Hill (Creek), interview by Stan Steiner, 1966, tape 16, Series VIII, Stan Steiner Collection, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University. I address the situation in Oklahoma in detail in chapter six.

<sup>75</sup> Carol Rachlin to Nancy Lurie, 6 March 1961, “R General” folder, box 10, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>76</sup> Rickard had already voiced his opinion that D’Arcy McNickle’s draft declaration was inadequate because it implied that “all Indians are U.S. citizens” and argued not for an Indian New Frontier but recognition of tribal sovereignty. He was the son of Tuscarora chief Clinton Rickard and an active opponent of the New York State Power Authority’s attempt to flood Indian lands to build dams. The story of the eastern tribes and the AICC is well told in Hauptman and Campisi, “Voice of the Eastern Indians,” 316-29, quote at 327.

The American Indian Chicago Conference did indeed withstand the tremendous conflicts that threatened to tear it apart through the spring of 1961. At the same time, the nine regional meetings held across the country in April revealed yet another process of convergence. From California to Maine, American Indians voiced their opinion that the AICC should call for a program not unlike those used to rebuild economies overseas. An intertribal assemblage from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, and Michigan reported that “[t]he terrible poverty of the peoples of Asia and Africa prevails today on the Indian reservations. . . .” In Wisconsin, Oneidas and Winnebagos lived in areas with inadequate water supplies, unsanitary sewer systems, deplorable housing, malnutrition, poor healthcare, and inferior schools.<sup>77</sup> Invoking strains of decolonization, tribal representatives from Washington state called for a return to their “original status of ‘tribal self-government’ in the absence of dominance from another. . . .”<sup>78</sup> From Pennsylvania, Richard Bounding Elk, a member of the unrecognized Abenakis of Maine, demanded “the right of self-determination” via “a sort of Marshall Plan for Indians” that would not expect Indians to mortgage their land in order develop their economies. And from Maine, Nebraska, and California, regional conference attendees called for a Point Four program that would develop tribal economies, reject termination, and encourage self-sufficiency. “Surely,” wrote one group, “no one is more deserving than the Indians of foreign aid from

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<sup>77</sup> Five-State Regional Meeting, American Indian Chicago Conference, Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 14-16 April 1961, folder 36, box 82, Marriott Collection.

<sup>78</sup> American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report, No. 4, April 26, 1961, “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, AICC Records.

the U.S. government.”<sup>79</sup>

When the American Indian Chicago Conference opened on June 13, 1961, the political environment was fraught with tension. The state of New York’s plan to flood Seneca lands in order to build a series of dams appeared unstoppable. The ground had been broken in October 1960, and Kennedy indicated the following March that he would not interfere, developments that incensed members of the Iroquois Confederacy. On April 30, Congress formally severed the Menominees’ trust relationship after years of abeyance, and in Mississippi racist BIA personnel discriminated against Choctaws. The specter of termination, the disregard for treaty rights, and the maladministration of Indian affairs loomed large.<sup>80</sup>

If these developments spurred critics of the status quo such as William Rickard, D’Arcy McNickle, and Lacey Maynor, international affairs exacerbated the concerns of those who sought to defend it. In April, the United States launched the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, an event that set the stage for John F. Kennedy’s June summit in Vienna with Nikita Khrushchev. In the meantime, tensions also mounted over Berlin. In Vienna, Khrushchev berated the still unseasoned president, making the latter look embarrassed, weak, and unconfident. In response, Kennedy assured the Soviet Premier that it would be “a cold winter.” On June 6, a week before the Chicago conference, Kennedy told the American people that above all else, Khrushchev “predicted the triumph

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<sup>79</sup> For quotation, see American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 4. The other citations are from American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 5, May 26, 1961 and American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 6, June 7, 1961, “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, AICC Records.

<sup>80</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 49-57.

of communism in the new and less developed countries.”<sup>81</sup> At the very least, Kennedy’s revelation instilled in many Americans a renewed sense of being threatened. From the perspective of Earl Boyd Pierce and his allies, it also called for a demonstration of loyalty and an affirmation of the American way of life.<sup>82</sup>

Sol Tax remained optimistic. The controversies over the Kinzua Dam, Menominee termination, and racial discrimination in Mississippi were long-standing. The Kennedy administration might have been able to take more assertive action in each of these cases, but all of them were largely seen as *fait accomplis*, not products of its mishandling of Indian affairs, per se. Moreover, Interior Secretary Udall and others had stated publically that the federal government would not proceed with termination without tribal consent and consultation. In May 1961, Assistant Interior Secretary John Carver sought to dispel the “termination nonsense” when he told members of the AAIA that the Kennedy administration would observe its trust responsibilities.<sup>83</sup> “There is no Indian Affairs policy now,” Tax wrote in his final letter before the conference. “Therefore, right now is a rare opportunity for Indians to speak for themselves, instead of having somebody else speak for them.”<sup>84</sup>

At the end of April, the AICC steering committee gathered to synthesize the regional conference reports into a penultimate draft of the “The New Frontier in Indian

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<sup>81</sup> Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 185; Giglio, *Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 74-78, quotes at pp. 77 and 78.

<sup>82</sup> According to Edward P. Dozier, they included Robert Burnette (Rosebud Sioux) and Dennis Bushyhead (Cherokee). No doubt, the locus of power rested in the Five Tribes, generally. Edward P. Dozier to La Verne Madigan, 22 June 1961, folder 7, box 59, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives.

<sup>83</sup> John A. Carver, Jr., “Roles and Responsibilities: A Look at the Interior Department’s Function in American Indian Affairs,” *Indian Affairs* 41 (May 1961): 7-8, quote at 8.

<sup>84</sup> Sol Tax to All American Indians, 1 June 1961, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives.

Affairs.” From their efforts came a three-part “Declaration of Indian Purpose” consisting of a creed, proposals for future directions, and a critique of past mistakes. After its completion, they promptly sent it to all 5,000 persons on their mailing list so that it could be used in final preparation for the conference.<sup>85</sup>

Opening on June 13, 1961 and ending on the twentieth, well over 400 Indians and approximately 150 non-Indian registrants assembled at the University of Chicago.<sup>86</sup> The conference opened with a calumet ceremony and the setting of formal procedural rules.<sup>87</sup> Over the next three days the representatives from ninety bands and tribes separated into nine discussion groups, holding general sessions in the mornings and afternoons to discuss and rework the “Declaration of Indian Purpose.” In the evening plenary sessions recapped the progress made during the day. Non-Indians were permitted to sit in on the sessions but were encouraged not to interfere with the proceedings. On Saturday, June 17, a draft was read; amendments and discussions were entertained the following Monday. Though tensions sometimes neared the breaking point, the delegates formally presented the “Declaration of Indian Purpose” to W.W. Keeler and William Zimmerman, representatives of Interior Secretary Stewart Udall’s task force, on the twentieth.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax, 14 May 1961 and “American Indian Chicago Conference Committee Meeting, Drafting, Steering, Regional Organizers, 26-30 April 1961, International House, University of Chicago, “N.O. Lurie, April-May 1961” folder, box 8, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>86</sup> Including many Chicago Indians who did not register, Lurie placed the attendance at approximately 800 Native Americans. She also noted that about half of those who did register were not on the mailing list, leading her to speculate that perhaps twice as many Indians as the 5,000 on the mailing list had, in some way, been made aware of the conference. Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 489-90.

<sup>87</sup> On the politics of rule setting, see Lurie, “Voice of the American Indians,” 490-91, 494-95.

<sup>88</sup> American Indian Chicago Conference, Progress Report No. 5, May 26, 1961, “Complete Set of AICC Material” folder, box 1, AICC Records. Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 489-90, 496-99; Joan Ablon, “The American Indian Chicago Conference,” in *Currents in Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Sol Tax*, ed. Robert Hinshaw (New York: Mouton, 1977), 450.

Anticipation and foreboding, hope and fear, altruism and conniving—all were integral components of the Chicago conference. As the AAIA had warned in January, one faction within the NCAI led by Robert Burnette (Rosebud Sioux) and Walter Wetzel (Blackfeet) used the conference as a forum to challenge Executive Director Helen Peterson and President Clarence Wesley. Meanwhile, Earl Boyd Pierce led his politically cautious cohort against the more aggressive faction led by Lacy Maynor, William Paul (Tlingit) of the embattled Alaska Natives, Irene Mack, a member of the recently terminated Menominees, and the caustic William Rickard.<sup>89</sup>

No doubt a product of heightened anxieties over communism and what he considered to be the seditious anti-Americanism of Rickard and others, Pierce secured passage of “An American Indian Pledge,” an oath of loyalty that would preface the “Declaration of Indian Purpose.”<sup>90</sup> It rejected “the efforts of the promoters of any alien form of government” to sow the seeds of communistic unfreedom. “At this critical hour of human history the American Indians arise as one in pledging to the President of the

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<sup>89</sup> Edward P. Dozier to La Verne Madigan, 22 June 1961, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives. I have been selective in addressing the conflicts surrounding the AICC, focusing particularly on those aspects that have not been dealt with in the past. For detailed coverage, see Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 487-88, 494-95 and “Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty,” 111-13 as well as Hauptman and Campisi, “Voice of the Eastern Indian” and Cowger, *National Congress of American Indians*, 141-42. Alice Marriott remembered the situation somewhat differently. “Any effort to discuss the broader issues of social and financial problems of Indians was defeated by tribalism,” she observed. “The Menominees wouldn’t listen to the Senecas; the Senecas wouldn’t listen to the Lumbees, and the Lumbees didn’t give a damn about the headaches of the Tlingit. Each group had its own problems which it wanted to discuss, and each group discussed them—not the broader problems of American Indians as a minority group.” Alice Marriott, “Broken Treaties—Or Were They?” ca. 1969, folder 23, box 80, Marriott Collection.

<sup>90</sup> Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 495. Here again, Pierce was extreme and vocal but not alone. “To people committed to the struggle for a new federal Indian policy, the Rickard position was not only irrelevant but dangerous,” Lurie later remembered. Interestingly, Lurie added that in retrospect Rickard and the majority of conference goers probably held views that were not as dissimilar as they appeared at the time. Lurie, “Sol Tax and Tribal Sovereignty,” 112, 114.

United States and to our fellow citizens,” it concluded, that they would defend the nation’s institutions. Disgusted by the rhetoric of “loyal citizens,” “our beloved country,” and “absolute faith in the wisdom and justice of our American form of Government,” William Rickard denounced the pledge, the declaration, and the conference itself. Others chose tolerance as a means of placating and, more significantly, silencing Pierce.<sup>91</sup>

The “Declaration of Indian Purpose” withstood the compromising efforts of the political conservatives and made a tempered but forthright call for a definite break from the past. It laid claim to Indians’ right to maintain their cultural distinctiveness, demanded the revocation of House Concurrent Resolution 108, and addressed a broad array of health, education, welfare, and resource development issues. While it underscored the diversity of Indian peoples, it did not discriminate between its demand for federal responsibilities to recognized and unrecognized tribes or urban versus reservation dwellers.

The document also made specific reference to Point Four, and its philosophy undergirded the entire document. Specifically, the AICC called for “assistance, technical and financial, for the time needed, however long that may be, to regain in the America of the space age some measure of the adjustment they enjoyed as the original possessors of their native land” and couched it in terms of a Cold War imperative: “the problem we raise affects the standing which our nation sustains before world opinion.” Continuing

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<sup>91</sup> American Indian Chicago Conference, “Declaration of Indian Purpose: The Voice of the American Indian,” (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), inside front cover. In comments on a draft of this chapter, Nancy Lurie noted that the placement was “no accident” and was intended to make it “easily overlooked.”

the Third World analogy, it asserted that “the basis of life is precariously held, but [Indians] mean to hold the scraps and parcels as earnestly as any small nation or ethnic group was ever determined to hold to identity and survival.”<sup>92</sup>

In his keynote address, University of Arizona anthropology professor Edward P. Dozier (Santa Clara Pueblo) echoed a similar theme. He invoked concepts such as liberty, democracy, individual freedom, and, above all else, community. Second class citizenship had been a bane for Indians no less than African Americans, but it did not mean that they shared common aspirations. “American Indians can be integrated into the total American society without giving up the inherent right of human beings to be different,” Dozier told his audience. “Freedom to be completely assimilated as individuals is always a live option, but freedom to be related to the total society as culturally differentiated groups is also possible.” This included their legal separateness. Dozier related Indians’ struggle within the United States to the global process of democratization. “To remain Indians and yet Americans,” he concluded, “we believe to be a democratic principle and a human right in a free world.”<sup>93</sup>

The Chicago conference and the “Declaration of Indian Purpose” inspired varied responses. Charles Minton, Executive Secretary of the Southwestern Association on Indian Affairs and a leading organizer of Indian youth councils called it a “costly wet firecracker.” “Farthest north in assininity [*sic*] was Tax’s declaration that ‘The Indians are beginning to express themselves for the first time,’” he added. “If he knew anything about

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<sup>92</sup> AICC, “Declaration of Indian Purpose, 4-5, 7, 16-18, 19, 20.

<sup>93</sup> Edward Dozier (Santa Clara Pueblo), Keynote Address, pp. 3-4, American Indian Chicago Conference, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives.

Indians, he would have known that they have been expressing themselves for a very long time, in meetings under their own auspices and under those of this Association.”<sup>94</sup>

Another critic noted, “It was a good idea, but it didn’t work.”<sup>95</sup> The AAIA’s La Verne Madigan and Oliver La Farge considered “A Program for Indian Citizens” to be more significant than the “Declaration of Indian Purpose” and unsuccessfully lobbied the *New York Times* not to run an editorial on the AICC.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the National Congress of American Indians barely survived the conference, due particularly to the coup against Helen Peterson that was orchestrated by Robert Burnette and Walter Wetzel.<sup>97</sup>

Yet the AICC also served as a catalyst for pan-Indian nationalism and a drive for federal recognition. Native Americans had been “ready to move toward self-determination,” Joan Ablon argued, but the conference served as an institutional mechanism for actually doing so.<sup>98</sup> Nancy Lurie echoed her analysis when she wrote, “I feel that the feelings and strivings of Indian people created the American Indian Chicago Conference, rather than the other way around. . . . The Indian views were there before the conference, and I believe would have found outlets one way or another. AICC may have expedited their expression but did not bring them about initially.”<sup>99</sup> D’Arcy McNickle first considered it “the most confused and rumor-ridden conference I ever had the

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<sup>94</sup> Charles E. Minton to Stan Steiner, 7 August 1961, folder 11, box 22, series I, Steiner Papers.

<sup>95</sup> Alice Marriott, “Broken Treaties,” 16.

<sup>96</sup> La Verne Madigan to Oliver La Farge, 29 June 1961 and Oliver La Farge to La Verne Madigan, 23 June 1961, folder 6, box 59, AAIA Archives.

<sup>97</sup> Tax, “Last on the Warpath,” 26; Vine Deloria Jr., “Memo on the Present State of Indian Affairs,” 1967, “NCAI Fund, Inc., (General Support) Spring-1967” folder, 2S454, box 47, Field Foundation Archives, 1940-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

<sup>98</sup> Ablon, “American Indian Chicago Conference,” 454. See also Helen Maynor’s comments in Hauptman and Campisi, “The Voice of the Eastern Indian,” 328.

<sup>99</sup> Nancy Oestreich Lurie, “An American Indian Renaissance?” in *The American Indian Today*, ed. Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 323-24.

misfortune to get mixed up in” but later argued that “out of their deliberations emerged issues and personalities which in the next few years would greatly affect the forces operating in Indian affairs.”<sup>100</sup> Finally, while the National Congress of American Indians suffered, urban Indians, as well as unrecognized and eastern tribes gained critical public attention. Several tribes patterned their attempts to seek federal recognition after the AICC and many attendees came away with a renewed sense of Indians’ shared experiences and common interests.<sup>101</sup>

The Chicago conference therefore left many ambivalent, some frustrated, and others anxious. “Going home from the Conference was uneasy,” Alice Marriott and Carol Rachlin recalled. “There was a feeling that trouble was brewing, and uncertainty as to where it would break out first.”<sup>102</sup> They referred to yet another division manifested at the Chicago conference—one that pitted the old against the young, the timid against the audacious. D’Arcy McNickle and Sol Tax planned at the outset to have students from the Workshop on American Indian Affairs class of 1961 spend the first week of their session in Chicago.<sup>103</sup> They were joined there by several former Workshop students who had

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<sup>100</sup> The first is a quotation of McNickle in Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 190; D’Arcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals*, with a new introduction by Peter Iverson (1973; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 117.

<sup>101</sup> Hauptman and Campisi, “Voice of Eastern Indians,” 317.

<sup>102</sup> Alice Marriott, “Indian Militants: Oklahoma Attitudes” ca. 1972, folder 23, box 80, Marriott Collection.

<sup>103</sup> This revises Stan Steiner’s flawed interpretation of the AICC. Not only did he err on the year, he also suggested that the AICC was the “unwitting host” of the young Indians who “were not invited.” Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968), 36. The AICC was open to everyone’s participation, though there were structural limitations preventing certain groups from attending. Moreover, as Lurie indicated, fully one-half of the persons registered were not on the mailing list. Also, while Steiner suggests that it was only “the Indian establishment” that had gathered, he does not mention the presence of the eastern or unrecognized tribes. The homogeneity he presupposes makes his narrative far more convenient, his story more compelling. With that said, Lurie has indicated that the most under-represented groups were probably elders and those who did not speak English.

become tribal and community leaders. Though perhaps unforeseen at the outset of the conference, the generational divide could no longer be ignored by its end.<sup>104</sup>

McNickle later wrote that these young adults, many of them college students or recent graduates, “infused a spirit of militancy into the discussions.”<sup>105</sup> Disillusioned by the tribal infighting and particularly the timidity of the conservatives, the youths called for more aggressive strategies, such as the direct action techniques used by African Americans throughout the South. Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute) explained, “Indians didn’t want anything to do with any other kind of people and we were supposed to be proud and have dignity, and course we couldn’t understand why we had dignity [while] watching our own people going to hell.”<sup>106</sup> At once inspired by the possibility of Indian unity and disappointed by its current manifestation, they formed a youth caucus after the

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<sup>104</sup> Parker, *Singing an Indian Song*, 190-91; Sol Tax Diaries, November 19, “Diary Record, Sol Tax, April-December 1960” folder, box 1, series I, AICC Records. The Workshop students that attended included Issac Beaulieux and his wife, Norma Bluebird, Wynema Burgess (Creek), Ansel Carpenter (Sioux), Emerson Eckiwady (Comanche), Jacqueline Crow, Gloria Emerson, Charles Emery, Bernadine Eschief, Thomas Eschief, LeRoy Eswonia, Brenda Gillette, Harry Hopkins, Irving J. Eagle, Leo La Clair (Muckleshoot), Harriett Marmon, Howard C. McKinley, Jr. (Navajo), Mary Natani, Karen Rickard (Tuscarora), Katherine Saubel, Cecilia Tallchief (Osage), Clyde Warrior (Ponca), Richard Whitetree, Bruce Wilkie (Makah), Robert Dominic (Chippewa), and David Warren. Registration and Accommodations, Workshop Students Attending AICC, “D’Arcy McNickle” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records. Former or future participants in the Workshop included Herbert Blatchford (Navajo), Gerald L. Brown (Flathead), Dorothy Davids (Stockbridge-Munsee), Mel Thom (Paiute), Tillie Walker (Mandan), Shirley Witt (Mohawk), Bernadine Eschief (Shoshone-Bannock-Pima), Edison Real Bird (Crow), Joan Noble (Ute), John Winchester (Potawatomi), Hattie Walker (Winnebago), Mel Walker (Mandan), Reggie Sargeant (Klamath), Irving Eagle (Sioux), Patrick Duffy (Chippewa), Gerald DePerry (Chippewa) Norman Hayball (Kickapoo), Willie Ketcheshawno (Kickapoo), and Gerald Burger (Chippewa). AICC Registration attached to Edward P. Dozier, Keynote Address, folder 7, box 59, AAIA Archives; *The Indian Progress: Newsletter of the Workshop on American Indian Affairs* 5 (30 March 1962); Tentative Charter Membership, *Aborigine* I, no. 1 (1961), 5-6.

<sup>105</sup> McNickle, *Native American Tribalism*, 117; Shirley Hill Witt, “Nationalistic Trends Among American Indians,” in *The American Indian Today*, 112-13.

<sup>106</sup> Melvin Thom, interview by Floyd O’Neil and Gregory C. Thompson, interview number 625, 6 August 1970, p. 5, American Indian Oral History: The Doris Duke Collection, Department of Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

first day, chaired discussion sections, and drafted their own statement of purpose.<sup>107</sup>

Tactics and temper rather than ideology separated the youths from longtime activists such as McNickle, Peterson, Wesley, Rainer, and others. While the National Congress of American Indians relied on elected tribal leaders, the youths questioned whether they were “really concerned about the poor people on the reservation, the people who would never be heard because they were downtrodden and were never given a chance to speak.” They chafed at what they considered the older generation’s submissiveness and acquiescence. “And we began to question what the leadership really stood for,” Mel Thom recalled, “were they just waiting for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to say well what you guys should do is terminate your reservation and join the mainstream?”<sup>108</sup>

The context of civil rights and decolonization colored the youths’ dissent, just as it had their elders’. They questioned dominant ideas regarding progress and the expectation that Indians would eventually assimilate. Echoing the analysis offered by Robert K. Thomas, Vine Deloria Jr., contended that Indian youths “were born into an era of resurgent nationalism among dark-skinned people the world over. Having conquered

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<sup>107</sup> Herb Blatchford letter, 28 June 1961, *Aborigine* I, no. 1 (1961): 4; John Winchester to Herb Blatchford, 18 July 1961, *ibid.*, 9; Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 498; Lurie, “An American Indian Renaissance?,” 306. Their statement of purpose was tabled, but Thom considered the Declaration to have incorporated many of their basic principles. Steiner, *New Indians*, 37. Again, Steiner exaggerates in his account of the youth’s statement of purpose. “Word for word the incipient nationalism of the ‘Statement of Purpose’ of the conference was identical to the scribbled thoughts of the youth caucus,” he recounted. That may be so, but the declaration was primarily the work of D’Arcy McNickle and did not change much from its authorship in December to the conference itself. What this does indicate, however, is the larger process of convergence between the incipient nationalism of youths and adults. Steiner, *New Indians*, 38.

<sup>108</sup> Melvin Thom, interview by Floyd O’Neil and Gregory C. Thompson, interview number 624, 6 August 1970, pp. 4, 5, *American Indian Oral History: The Doris Duke Collection*, Department of Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

their awe of the technology of Western civilization, the young wish to master it, but not be mastered by it.”<sup>109</sup> Herbert Blatchford (Navajo), a member of the 1956 Workshop and active participant in the AICC, drew this parallel when he argued that “it may be that the Indian people will shed light on our international dilemma.”<sup>110</sup> Shirley Hill Witt (Mohawk) further explained, “At a time when new nations all over the globe are emerging from colonial control, their right to choose their own course places a vast burden of responsibility upon the more powerful nations to honor and protect those rights. The Indians of the United States may well present the test case for American liberalism.”<sup>111</sup>

Many of the youths who attended the Chicago conference came away with a stronger sense of shared experience, common purpose, and impatient idealism. They resolved to create a pan-Indian organization to express their ideas and as a means for youths to take the initiative from an embattled and virtually incapacitated older generation. “It was sickening to see American Indians get up and just tell obvious lies about how well the federal government was treating them, what fantastic and magnificent things the federal government was doing for us,” remembered Clyde Warrior (Ponca). “What was happening was these tribal officials or finks were just going into that gear of appealing to the Great White Father again,” he said of the AICC. “You know, ‘Really, we like you Big Daddy. Keep sending us things. Keep programming for us that’s

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Steiner, *New Indians*, 44.

<sup>110</sup> Herbert Blatchford to Sol Tax, 25 February 1961 and Herbert Blatchford to Sol Tax 12 May 1961, “B-Boc” folder, box 5, AICC Records.

<sup>111</sup> Witt, “Nationalistic Trends,” 94.

causing us more frustration. . . . Keep doing things that'll break up the social system. Keep doing things that'll bust families further apart. . . . It was disheartening to see this happen."<sup>112</sup>

Having stayed in close contact with one another through the summer, this core group descended on Gallup, New Mexico, in August 1961 to organize the National Indian Youth Council. The founders came from cities, small towns, and reservations. Some held professional degrees, others worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, one was a school teacher in Utah and another an anthropologist. What they shared in common with each other—and with millions of other Americans after the Second World War—was access to higher education.<sup>113</sup> In colleges and universities across the Southwest, Indian youth councils formed and soon these were loosely affiliated via the Southwestern Regional Indian Youth Council. Mel Thom, the NIYC's first president, for instance, was born on the Walker River Paiute Reservation in Nevada, won a scholarship to BYU, served as president of the school's Indian club for three years, later became president of the Southwestern Regional Indian Youth Council, and earned a degree in civil engineering.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Clyde Warrior Lecture of Social Movements, tape recording, Montieth College, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich., c. 1966, personal papers of Albert L. Wahrhaftig.

<sup>113</sup> Stan Steiner indicated that the number of Indian college students grew from 6,500 to 17,000 between 1950 and 1960. Steiner, *New Indians*, 31.

<sup>114</sup> NIYC Officers, *Aborigine* I, no. 1 (1961), 7-8. Thom interview, number 624, p. 4. On this point, I am also indebted to Sterling Fluharty, who allowed me to read an early draft of his master's thesis entitled, "'For a Greater Indian America': The Origins of the National Indian Youth Council," (master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2003). For another account based largely on secondary source material, see Marcus E. Jacobson, "'Rise up, make haste. Our people need us!' the National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of the Red Power Movement," unpublished manuscript in author's possession. For a contemporaneous account of the NIYC and its connection with the youth councils, see Steiner, *New Indians*, 28-47.

When they gathered at the Gallup Indian Community Center in August, they pledged themselves to “attaining a greater future for our Indian people” and premised their action on the belief that Indians would not vanish. “The American Indian people are going to remain Indian people for a long time to the future,” Thom averred, “with every right to that identity.”<sup>115</sup> Consonant with what the Workshop on American Indian Affairs had intended, they saw themselves as negotiators of change. In so doing, the National Indian Youth Council advanced a dynamic interpretation of Indian identity. They did not see it as necessarily rooted in a particular place or time. “The Indian way, or what you call Indian culture, is the way the Indian people live today,” Mel Thom explained.<sup>116</sup>

This capacious definition of Indian identity translated into an equally expansive view of community. The National Indian Youth Council questioned the received definition of progress and rejected the idea of tribes inevitably becoming a seamless part of the mainstream. “Our whole interest was to build communities,” Thom argued, “Indian communities. The Youth Council is dedicated to modernizing and preserving tribal society.”<sup>117</sup> “Our community exists at every level of society—in the universities, in the cities, on the reservations, in the government,” he continued. “It doesn’t matter where Indians are anymore. They remain Indians.”<sup>118</sup> In offering these critiques, however, the National Indian Youth Council did not define itself as radical. Indeed, not unlike the “Declaration of Indian Purpose,” they asked only for the right of self-determination, the

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<sup>115</sup> Melvin D. Thom, “Statement of the National Indian Youth Council,” Herb Blatchford comments on letters, July 1961, and The NIYC Record, *Aborigine* I, no. 1 (1961): 1, 8, 12, 13, 15-16.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted in Steiner, *New Indians*, 42.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Steiner, *New Indians*, 58-59.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Steiner, *New Indians*, 41.

latitude to reconcile tribal and urban lifeways on terms of their own making.<sup>119</sup>

The meaning of community, self-determination, and modernity, the need for youth to take purposeful action, the problems of colonization and powerlessness—all of these concerns were expressed by the National Indian Youth Council and all of them had parallels in the larger society. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and Nation of Islam also spoke in terms of community and self-determination. The same ideas informed social scientific theories on juvenile delinquency and urban decay, served as the basis for pilot projects supported by philanthropic foundations, and informed critiques of mass culture. Founded in 1960, the Students for a Democratic Society argued that youths could use political participation to alleviate feelings of isolation and powerlessness. All of these organizations shared the rhetoric of community, fought for self-determination, and utilized collective action.<sup>120</sup>

Indian youths' dissent and the rumblings of discontent running through American society were therefore bound up with one another. It was what was happening—and that was exactly the point made at the Workshop on American Indian Affairs. First at the university Indian clubs, then at the regional youth councils, and finally in the NIYC, Mel Thom explained, "It is kind of, you know. everyone talking about being heavy and all that kind of thing—being with it and tuned in and all of that you know." But they synthesized

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<sup>119</sup> Mel Thom to Tentative Charter Members, 6 August 1961, *Aborigine* I, no. 1 (1961), 13 and Melvin D. Thom, "Statement of the National Indian Youth Council, *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>120</sup> O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 98; Alice O'Connor, "Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight Against Poverty," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 5 (July 1996): 586-625; Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 17, 21, 98-99, 101-02, 103, 105. On SDS, see James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago*, with a new preface by the author (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). The Port Huron Statement is reprinted in his volume on pages 329-74.

general discontentment into a specifically indigenous context. “At that time we seemed to be finding ourselves again answering to the dominant society’s questions he was proposing for us, like saying, ‘The thing for you guys to do is to accept the best of two worlds,’” Thom continued. “We kept debating the issue, we kept talking about it. But, you know, the further we go into it, it didn’t mean anything because we were Indian, you were Indian. And, I mean, how could you be half Indian and half something else?”<sup>121</sup>

Clyde Warrior represented an even more confrontational and aggressive wing of the National Indian Youth Council. Born in Ponca City in 1939 and raised by his grandparents, he was a fancydance champion and active participant in the Workshop on American Indian Affairs and the Southwest Regional Indian Youth Council.<sup>122</sup> He quickly emerged as one of the boldest, most eloquent, and outspoken critics of the dominant society and entrenched tribal leaders he deemed “little brown Americans.” In no veiled allusion to Pierce, Keeler, and the other eastern Oklahoma elites, he explained, “They’re the ones who go around pledging the allegiance. You could play the first chord of the Star Spangled Banner and they’ll jump to attention.”<sup>123</sup>

Warrior’s writings and speeches, like those of Mel Thom and others, evidenced the influence of not only Third World decolonization, but also cultural dissent from the mainstream of American life. The teachings of Robert K. Thomas, to which he was first exposed as a student at the Workshop in 1962, profoundly affected his thinking. “I think

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<sup>121</sup> Thom interview, number 624, 4. I have altered the punctuation of the original transcription to improve clarity. On this point, see also “From Indian Youth,” *Indian Voices* (September 1963), 3.

<sup>122</sup> Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996), 39-44; Steiner, *New Indians*, 65-72.

<sup>123</sup> Clyde Warrior Lecture on Social Movements.

Bob radicalized Clyde Warrior,” Vine Deloria Jr., recalled, “and Clyde pushed everybody else all over the place.”<sup>124</sup> In his public pronouncements, he utilized categories articulated by David Riesman in *The Lonely Crowd* and reiterated by Thomas in his discussions of folk versus urban societies. Though placing his argument in an Indian context, he went to great pains to demonstrate that their concerns were similar to those of other Americans.<sup>125</sup> Having made this point before a group of non-Indian college students, one brave soul asked Warrior what “American problem” he was talking about. “The problem of the American Indian is overinstitutionalization, magnificent bureaucracy, dehumanization, and alienation of the individual,” Warrior responded angrily. “If that doesn’t describe middle-class America, and if there isn’t a relationship between that, then I’m the village idiot.”<sup>126</sup>

D’Arcy McNickle had detected the same feelings emanating from American Indian youths regarding the impact of relocation and urbanization on community and individual identity. Critics of relocation also tapped into broader anxieties over rural decline, automation, and the unemployment caused by mechanization of agriculture.<sup>127</sup> They questioned whether cities offered realistic alternatives. “They have a deep-seated conviction, rational or not,” McNickle observed of those trapped in this situation, “that once they cut loose from the past, abandon tribal ties, and commit themselves to urban-industrial existence, they will become a faceless people in an alien world.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Col., 18 October 2002; Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 6 January 1964, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers.

<sup>125</sup> Clyde Warrior Lecture on Social Movements.

<sup>126</sup> Clyde Warrior Lecture on Social Movements.

<sup>127</sup> *NCAI Bulletin* IV, no. 1 (May 1961): 4.

<sup>128</sup> D’Arcy McNickle, “The Indian Tests the Mainstream,” *The Nation* (September 26, 1966), 278.

Anthropologist David Kertzer has argued that “in situations of political change. . . the nature of the past is contested, and with it people’s identity in the present is challenged.” He went on to explain, “Changing the past threatens to undermine our construction of ourselves, while pressures to change our political identity in the present press us to rewrite the past, that is, to alter the symbolic construction of the past.”<sup>129</sup> This is precisely what Vine Deloria argued when he criticized mass media’s portrayal of Indians and this line of thought can also be found in D’Arcy McNickle’s insistence on including his version of the historical record in the “Declaration of Indian Purpose.” The National Indian Youth Council set out to do same. Herbert Blatchford, elected as executive director in 1961, began the second issue of the NIYC’s journal *Aborigine* with his own rendition of Indian history, one that made sense to them in the present. It was an important symbolic act freighted with political connotations.<sup>130</sup>

As the National Indian Youth Council inaugurated a new era in Indian activism, John F. Kennedy laid the foundation for the New Frontier. Modernization ideology served as its centerpiece. “Modernization,” according to historian Michael Latham, “was. . . a conceptual framework that articulated a common collection of assumptions about the nature of American society and its ability to transform a world perceived as both materially and culturally deficient.”<sup>131</sup> In this regard, modernization had deep roots in the United States—extending as far back as the beginnings of the colonial experience itself.

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<sup>129</sup> David I. Kertzer, *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Part and the Fall of Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 7.

<sup>130</sup> It appeared as “Historical Survey,” *Aborigine* II, no. 1 (1962-1963), 1-5.

<sup>131</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 5.

The Point Four program and, to a lesser extent the Marshall Plan, embodied its spirit as well. But it did not gain a fully self-conscious and theoretical articulation until the 1950s.

Initially crafted by social scientists as they considered the history of world socioeconomic development, it eventually informed domestic as well as foreign policy. According to Walter Rostow, whose *Stages of Economic Growth* best encapsulated its central principles, societies evolved through several stages from primitive, backward societies to advanced industrial ones. The scientific trappings of the model thinly veiled its ethnocentric underpinnings—not unlike the NIYC, it should be noted, modernization theorists rewrote a past to explain their own understanding of the present. Rostow would become a central member of Kennedy's cabinet and modernization informed American forays into the problem of poverty and underdevelopment at home and abroad. Consistent with its profound faith in “the transformative power of capitalist markets,” the United States provided capital and technical assistance to impoverished nations until they reached what Rostow called the “take-off point” to economic self-sufficiency.<sup>132</sup> These ideas formed the heart of Kennedy's Agency for International Development (AID), the Peace Corps, and the Alliance for Progress, as well as the domestic Area Redevelopment Administration<sup>133</sup> Modernization possessed the power of an ideology but retained the elusive qualities of something visceral and taken-for-granted. It was, in other words, ubiquitous—it pervaded the mainstream. This rendering of the past and present

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<sup>132</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 7, 25, 57, 109-49. It is noteworthy that among the places Peace Corps volunteers were trained were reservations. The rationale was that these areas purportedly exhibited the same kinds of cultural deprivation found in the Third World. Ibid., 147-48.

reaffirmed the tremendous optimism of the postwar period.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, it also came to inform Indian policy. Issued in early July 1961, the seventy-seven-page report of Stewart Udall's Indian task force outlined a plan to insure "equal citizenship, maximum self-sufficiency, and full participation in American life."<sup>134</sup> In formal statements, both Stewart Udall and Philleo Nash referred to a transformation of the BIA's role from "custodial" to "developmental."<sup>135</sup> Although the task force report did not abandon termination as an eventual goal, it couched the ideal in the language of modernization. In other words, the federal government would provide assistance, financial and otherwise, until tribes reached the take-off point to self-sufficiency. To do so, it recommended the development of Indian-owned resources, the attraction of outside industries, expanded vocational training, a generous Reservation Development Loan Fund, and expansion of the Revolving Loan Fund. Here, too, was a facet of modernization—a profound faith in free market capitalism.<sup>136</sup>

Sol Tax waited anxiously as Congress scrutinized Philleo Nash's past record during his confirmation hearings. The process proved grueling, and Nash's equivocations on the question of termination troubled him. Tax hoped he would attempt to "shift gears with respect to rhetoric as well as policy." But, he added, "I wonder if you feel you can't publicly change the role of the Bureau—and if you are right."<sup>137</sup> Philleo Nash and others

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<sup>134</sup> "New Trail" for Indians endorsed by Secretary Udall, Interior Department Press Release, 12 July 1961, folder 22, box 57, Ed Edmondson Collection, University Archives, John Vaughan Library, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>135</sup> "The New Trail," *Indian Affairs* 46 (June 1962): 5.

<sup>136</sup> "New Trail" for Indians endorsed by Secretary Udall, 12 July 1961, p. 2; Senese, *Self-Determination*, 62-64; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 9, 13.

<sup>137</sup> Sol Tax to Philleo Nash, 27 September 1961, "Philleo Nash" folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

later confirmed Tax's suspicions. They, like the AAIA, not only questioned whether House Concurrent Resolution 108 was binding on any Congress other than the one in which it was passed, but they also feared reinvigorating terminationist pressures.<sup>138</sup> They opted, both in the task force report and in public presentations, to elude the issue of termination by mentioning it as little as possible. Ignore it, they hoped, and it would go away.<sup>139</sup> And even if they foresaw a day in which tribes would no longer receive federal assistance, they preferred thinking of it in terms of modernization and development, not termination.

The idea of development or modernization carried cultural as well as economic connotations. In order to prepare the ground through "institution building," the government would weed out the deleterious aspects of traditional, pre-industrial societies. By ridding nations of their cultural deprivation, they would prepare them to harness the power of free market capitalism and democratic political culture. Stewart Udall saw the Indian world through a similar lense; he spoke of using "a developing nations approach" with tribes and also thought it best to have educational specialists with expertise working with "disadvantaged children."<sup>140</sup> He was a proponent of tribal self-determination in the same way that foreign policy advisors advocated self-governance in the Third World. He

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<sup>138</sup> Many scholars have pointed out the congressional policy structure as an inhibitor to policies contrary to termination. For the most recent discussion, see Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 5, 8, 11-13.

<sup>139</sup> Philleo Nash in Kenneth R. Philp, ed. *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: Utah State University, 1995), 131; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 10.

<sup>140</sup> Transcript, Stewart L. Udall Oral History, Interview III, 29 July 1969, p. 2, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library; Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 21-31, 77; Christopher K. Riggs, "American Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (August 2000): 461-62.

was, in other words, a modernizer who harbored the same well-intentioned ethnocentricities.

With Philleo Nash as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the “Declaration of Indian Purpose” would not simply get lost in the bureaucracy.<sup>141</sup> Additionally, during the Chicago conference, Stewart Udall sent a telegram to express his support and to insure that they would have an audience with John F. Kennedy. Throughout the late spring and fall of 1961, however, the crisis over Germany intensified, raising fears of a nuclear war. By August, the Soviet Union began constructing the Berlin Wall.<sup>142</sup> Nearly six months after the AICC, Sol Tax wrote to Philleo Nash about Udall’s promise. “No matter what,” he stated, “I hope this ceremony is not forgotten; there are a great many individual Indians and others who will never forget—remember at least 6,000 people have seen the promise in the telegram from Udall—and it will rise to plague.” Invoking the Cold War imperative, he added, “Besides, this will crop up in other countries and contexts.”<sup>143</sup> Nash assured Tax that they had not forgotten, but he went on to explain, “Due to Berlin, etc., it is something that can’t be pushed with the force of a bulldozer.”<sup>144</sup>

It took over a year to secure the White House ceremony. Nonetheless, on August 15, 1962 a delegation of thirty-two participants from the AICC assembled on the South Lawn to present Kennedy with a copy of the “Declaration of Indian Purpose.” To the disappointment of Sol Tax and others, the entourage did not include those persons most

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<sup>141</sup> Lurie, “Sol Tax,” 113.

<sup>142</sup> Giglio, *Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 78-88.

<sup>143</sup> Sol Tax to Philleo Nash, 2 November 1961, “Philleo Nash” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>144</sup> Philleo Nash to Sol Tax, 10 November 1961, “Philleo Nash” folder, box 9, series III, AICC Records.

central to seeing the conference through. D'Arcy McNickle, Helen Peterson, Georgeann Robinson, Clarence Wesley, John Rainer—all had been superseded by the likes of Dennis Bushyhead, Robert Burnette, and Walter Wetzel.<sup>145</sup> Kennedy took the affair lightly, breezing through the “American Indian Pledge” just before walking out to greet his audience. Rather than discussing critical issues, Burnette and Bushyhead, no doubt with the help of Earl Boyd Pierce, took the opportunity to reaffirm American Indians’ shared revulsion to communism.<sup>146</sup> For his part, the President assured his listeners that the visit was “more than ceremonial” and briefly recounted the conditions that demonstrated the depth of poverty in Native America.<sup>147</sup>

In March 1963 Kennedy met with the members of the National Congress of American Indians and announced his intention to address Indian concerns in the months ahead.<sup>148</sup> Over the course of 1962, some facets of Indian affairs had merged with the rising civil rights movement. A special Senate investigating committee conducted hearings throughout Indian Country on discrimination. It served as a powerful critique of Public Law 280, revealing evidence of police harassment and neglect, exploitation by non-Indian traders and merchants without legal recourse, state courts’ unwillingness to

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<sup>145</sup> Sol Tax to Oliver La Farge, 17 August 1962, “La” folder, box 7, series III, AICC Records. Oliver La Farge agreed with Tax and wrote that Burnette was “self-seeking, smooth, and unscrupulous. He keeps trying to stir up a fight between NCAI and us, partly because he doesn’t get very far in persuading us to subsidize his organization and partly because he has been long committed to vicious hostility, going back to when he was chairman of the Rosebud tribal council. He is a bad number, and he is not going to do NCAI any good at all.” Oliver La Farge to Sol Tax, 24 August 1962, *ibid.*; Delegates Present at the White House, August 15, 1962, for the ceremony presenting the “Declaration of Indian Purpose” to President Kennedy, “Delegates to the White House” folder, box 6, AICC Records.

<sup>146</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 80; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 18.

<sup>147</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1963), 619.

<sup>148</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1964), 233-34.

oversee Indian leases, and other acts of discrimination directed toward Indians. The hearings demonstrated how ill-prepared to handle civil and criminal jurisdiction most local and state governments were. The NCAI called an emergency executive council meeting between March 4 and 6 in D.C., held meetings with Udall and other members of the Kennedy cabinet, met with Kennedy in the Rose Garden on the fifth, and some of the delegates testified before the Senate on the seventh. In his address, NCAI President Walter Wetzel asked Kennedy to insure that tribes be given control over local affairs, receive assistance to promote on-reservation economic development, and amend PL-280 to allow for tribal consent.<sup>149</sup>

There can be no doubt that both the August and March gatherings functioned primarily as symbolic acts.<sup>150</sup> But that is no reason to discount them. As anthropologist David Kertzer has observed, rituals connect individuals to organizations, citizens to nation states. They can legitimate or undermine political leaders; they convey power and authority in society.<sup>151</sup> The leaders of the NCAI certainly understood this as did the Kennedy administration. Although not intended as such, the delegation's visit to the White House proved as freighted with symbolic meaning as either of the formal rituals. On the morning of March 6, Jacqueline Kennedy welcomed the "costumed delegates" into the White House where they danced for the children. John, Jr., one of the Kennedy children, ran excitedly into the room and cried, "Those are my Indians!" His father could

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<sup>149</sup> "NCAI Makes History," *NCAI Sentinel* VIII, no. 2 (February-March 1963): 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> Castile, *To Show Heart*, 16.

<sup>151</sup> David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 23-24.

not have said it better.<sup>152</sup>

As Kennedy had promised, his administration set out to incorporate Indians into its development programs.<sup>153</sup> The Area Redevelopment Act made tribal governments eligible for federal monies to attract outside industries into their areas, long-term, low interest loans, training programs, and feasibility studies.<sup>154</sup> The revolving credit loan fund was expanded, and steps had been taken to improve health conditions and educational opportunities. In April 1963, Kennedy announced his support for a National Service Corps (NSC), a domestic version of the Peace Corps, that would send volunteers to underdeveloped areas to improve housing, provide technical assistance for farming, and run education and recreation programs. "Poverty in the midst of plenty is a paradox that must not go unchallenged in this country," Kennedy announced in his NSC proposal. "Ours is the wealthiest of nations, yet one-sixth of our people live below minimal levels of health, housing, food, and education—in the slums of cities, in migratory labor camps, in economically depressed areas, on Indian reservations."<sup>155</sup> One of the first areas to be funded was the Pine Ridge Reservation. In another symbolic act to demonstrate the president's concern, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy appeared before the National Congress of American Indians annual convention in Bismark, North Dakota. Meanwhile,

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<sup>152</sup> "NCAI Makes History," 2.

<sup>153</sup> I have been selective on this point. For full discussions, see Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 44-80 and Castile, *To Show Heart*, 3-21. A bitter denunciation of Kennedy is M. Annette Jaimes, "The Hollow Icon: An American Indian Analysis of the Kennedy Myth," *Wicazo Sa Review* 6, no. 1 (spring 1990): 34-44.

<sup>154</sup> Alan L. Sorkin, *American Indians and Federal Aid* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1971), 91-92; Senese, *Self-Determination*, 59. Emma Gross has argued that making tribes eligible to sponsor programs as state governments "was a precursor to the contracting legislation enacted in 1975." Emma Gross, *Contemporary Federal Policy Toward American Indians* (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 51.

<sup>155</sup> *Public Papers, JFK, 1963*, 320. See also *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1962), 152, 607; *Public Paper, JFK, 1962*, 619.

both the Interior and Justice departments assumed a more pro-Indian posture on land claims, fishing rights, and boundary disputes than had prevailed in the past.<sup>156</sup>

As 1963 came toward an end, many questions, doubts, and reservations had yet to be assuaged. The Kennedy administration presented a poorly received study of Alaska Native land claims, seemed to approach Indians primarily as recipients of services, did not stop the construction of the Kinzua Dam in New York State despite treaty violations, and allowed the termination of the Menominees, Catawbas, Klamaths, Mixed-Blood Utes, Poncas of Nebraska, and several California rancherias to be carried out. Philileo Nash had run into congressional opposition over a plan that would reverse the alienation of fractionated landholdings, and the Interior department's Industrial Development Program sought primarily to spur private corporations to relocate to reservations; it did not, in other words, strengthen tribal economies.<sup>157</sup>

The original supporters of the American Indian Chicago Conference were particularly skeptical. Early in his tenure, Stewart Udall appeared on a television program to discuss Indian affairs. Sol Tax came away feeling that Udall had treated assimilation as inevitable. He not only sent the Interior Secretary material on the process of cultural change, but he also reminded him that assimilation connoted disappearance. If

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<sup>156</sup> Remarks by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy before the National Congress of American Indians, Grand Pacific Hotel, Bismark, North Dakota, 13 September 1963, "Convention Material 1963" folder, box 13, series I, NCAI Papers; "Domestic Peace Corps Chooses Oglala Sioux," *Indian Affairs* 50 (April 1963): 1; Udall Interview, III, LBJL, pp. 6-7. The legislation that would have created the National Service Corps failed to win congressional support. It was later reconstituted as Volunteers in Service to America and passed as part of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. For more on this topic, see chapter three.

<sup>157</sup> AAIA Press Release, 7 March 1963, folder 2, box 385, AAIA Archives; *Public Papers, JFK, 1963*, 291; Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 46-57, 60-67, 73-75.

assimilation were treated as an ideal, he argued in a letter to Udall, "then one can categorize Indians as 'farther along' or 'less far along' a path all must travel; and the word 'backward' becomes associated with 'more Indian.'" He continued, "Being an Indian is to most Indians a good, moral person. Most of them would like to achieve the economic and social adjustment to the larger society that you and I wish for them; but they would like to make this adjustment as Indians. Indeed, it is the notion that they have to choose between that adjustment and their Indian-ness that is a large part of the 'Indian problem.'" <sup>158</sup>

Robert K. Thomas further questioned the Kennedy administration's definition of development. He had gone to the University of Arizona as an undergraduate and knew both Stewart Udall and James Officer. Moreover, he had had an opportunity to talk to them when the Interior Task Force visited the Southwest. "I was very discouraged," Thomas wrote to Tax. "Their idea of working with Indians is to 'con' them into getting involved in programs that will 'benefit' them." Yet he had not lost all hope. Udall had turned to William King, a superintendent at the Salt River Pima and Maricopa reservation, for advice. Robert K. Thomas counted King as "an old friend" and spoke hopefully of the fact that he "really has Udall's and Jim's 'ear.'" "I have been talking to him like a Dutch uncle, and he is beginning to see the light," Thomas reported. "The intellectual climate is ripe for us to throw out some of our ideas." <sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Sol Tax to Stewart Udall, 13 March 1961, "U.S. Government" folder, box 11, series III, AICC Records.

<sup>159</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 17 December 1961, "T General" folder, box 10, series III, AICC Records. William King's role, like that of William Zimmerman's, is yet another area in need of further study. We do know that King was asked to submit a report on Indian policy in the spring of 1961. In it, he and Officer apparently recommended a gradual terminationist approach that suggested that "Indians

Like Bob Thomas, Mel Thom and members of the National Indian Youth Council, hoped for more attention to self-determination via empowerment of local communities. “[T]he grassroots,” Thom wrote, “this is where everything must happen.”<sup>160</sup> They questioned whether Kennedy’s so-called “New Trail” outlined by the Interior Task Force could deliver. To its recommendations for “equal citizenship privileges and responsibilities, maximum economic self-sufficiency, and full participation in American life,” they retorted “how many Indians want to fully participate in American life? Indians have a life. . . .”<sup>161</sup> If the United States wanted to demonstrate its decency, they concluded, it needed first and foremost to respect its treaties with Indian tribes.<sup>162</sup>

By the end of 1963, Robert K. Thomas sensed that Indian youths had neared the boiling point. After attending an NIYC board meeting late that year, he proudly reported to Tax that many were Workshop alumni. “The meeting went very well, and they are all hopped up to ‘making the revolution,’” Thomas continued. They wanted to go on television to “deliver an ‘I’ve had it’ ultimatum to the public. They want to take direct action in the near future like the young Negroes. . . .”<sup>163</sup> Some members had already become involved in the civil rights struggle in the South and attended the March on Washington in August 1963. With Bruce Wilkie (Makah) newly elected to its board at its annual meeting that same month, the NIYC made plans to strike first in Washington state

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must take their place alongside other Americans, must accept the same responsibilities, must have the same (but no more privileges). . . .” Quoted in Castile, *To Show Heart*, 6. The question that arises is to what extent Thomas’s ideas changed those of William King. As will be shown in chapter 5, William King becomes central to the policymaking process again in April 1966.

<sup>160</sup> “For a Greater Indian America,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 2 (December 1963): 1.

<sup>161</sup> Mel Thom, “Indian War 1964,” p. 7, folder 12, box 23, series I, Steiner Collection.

<sup>162</sup> “For a Greater Indian America,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 2 (December 1963): 1.

<sup>163</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 6 January 1964, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers.

in order to defend Indian fishing rights.<sup>164</sup> “Today the Indian life is being threatened by poverty, assimilation, termination, fractionalism,” Mel Thom wrote, capturing the sense of urgency they felt, “and it is not likely that we can challenge the problems facing the Indian people with the ‘wait and see, let the rest of the world go on’ attitude.”<sup>165</sup>

A series of convergences created a volatile and potentially transformative moment in Indian history by late 1963. Indian politics intersected with Third World decolonization and development, the civil rights movement, and cultural dissonance. The American Indian Chicago Conference demonstrated not only a convergence in the thinking of social scientists, advocates, and Indian political elites, but also one between the tribes themselves. A tremendously diverse array of Indian people from across the United States came away with a heightened consciousness of their shared struggles. This was the kind of pan-Indian identity and collective action urged by Francis McKinley, cultivated by Tax, and supported by myriad others. Moreover, as a part of its mission to modernize underdeveloped areas, the Kennedy administration moved away from termination and began searching for another way to articulate its goals in Indian affairs. Freedom of choice, community survival, democratization, and cultural persistence had entered public discourse and policymaking circles in ways unseen since the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>166</sup> Everybody, as Sol Tax posited, seemed to be talking about

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<sup>164</sup> “NIYC Meeting at Fort Duchesne,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 2 (December 1963): 3-4; Jacobson, “Rise up, make haste” 21-23; “March on Washington,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 1 (October 1963).

<sup>165</sup> “For a Greater Indian America,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 1 (October 1963): 3.

<sup>166</sup> See, for instance, Sol Tax, “What the Indians Want,” *Chicago Sun Times*, 11 June 1961, reprinted in Lurie, “Voice of the American Indian,” 492-93; Barbara W. Moffett, “American Indians: Their Role in Society,” “American Indians: Their Role in Society” folder, box 3, AICC Records.

self-determination for Indians. But it was not, however, just about Indians—it was, quite literally, part and parcel of a global phenomenon.

And still many questions lingered. Alexander Lesser, an anthropologist at Hofstra College and former Executive Secretary of the AAIA, offered a particularly poignant critique. “There is a tendency for people in the United States to think. . .that we may be coming of age as a people, that now we may be able to accept diversity in our midst without condescension, and to accept as sovereign equals the many peoples, of many races and creeds and cultures, who coexist with us in the complex modern world,” he observed. “Such a liberalism, however, is not yet the American mood in Indian affairs.”<sup>167</sup> Additionally, John Kennedy’s intentions in Indian affairs remained ambiguous, the United States had not demonstrated its ability to insure justice for minority peoples, and the meaning of modernization was becoming an increasingly contentious issue.

In order to address at least some of these pressing questions, Robert K. Thomas assembled a panel for the American Anthropological Association meeting at San Francisco’s Sheraton-Palace Hotel. Fittingly, it carried the title “Indians of the U.S.—The Right and Possibility of Self-Determination.” The topic proved so provocative as to attract the attention of the redoubtable Earl Boyd Pierce—a man who would continue to be the chief nemesis of Thomas and Sol Tax in the years ahead. Pierce hurriedly made plans to attend the session that was scheduled for Friday, November 22,

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<sup>167</sup> Alexander Lesser, “Education and the Future of Tribalism in the United States: the Case of the American Indian,” *The Social Science Review* 35, no. 2 (June 1961): 8.

1963.<sup>168</sup> It is difficult to reconstruct the exact proceedings of what surely was a spirited and engaging affair. Whatever they determined to be the possibility for self-determination under John F. Kennedy's watch, however, would prove to be irrelevant. For that morning, far away in Dallas, Texas, an assassin took the President's life.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> draft memo, 6 November 1963, "Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning '64" folder, box 27, Earl Boyd Pierce Collection, Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>169</sup> Nancy Lurie was in San Francisco for the AAA meeting in December 1963. In September 2002, she wrote that "I remember well the reaction of Bob Thomas. We all assumed at first a right wing plot, but when Oswald was identified as having lived in the Soviet Union, etc. Bob said, 'There goes the liberal movement in the U.S.' or words to that effect. I'd left a luncheon meeting briefly and got the Oswald news in the hall and came back and told Bob whom I'd been sitting next to."

Part Two  
Fugue, 1963-1968

National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) President Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute) wrote in the pages of *Americans Before Columbus* that the tragedy in Dallas presaged “a critical time—a time in which Indian affairs becomes more confused.”<sup>1</sup> By December 1963, the eleventh hour of the Kinzua Dam controversy loomed, terminationist sentiments stirred in Congress, the state of Washington usurped tribal fishing rights, and in Nevada the Paiutes lost ground in their battle to prevent a further diversion of Pyramid Lake’s precious water. For a moment, a collective sense of being cast adrift pervaded American society. All eyes turned to the fallen president’s successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, a Texan and self-styled populist known primarily for his moderate stance on race and his mastery of the Senate.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to dispel at least some of the confusion, Johnson swiftly embraced John F. Kennedy’s foremost domestic and foreign policy initiatives—a tax cut to stimulate the economy, swift passage of a new civil rights act, continued aid for South Vietnam. He then set out to define an identity of his own. In January 1964, Johnson declared “unconditional war on poverty,” and, four months later, enunciated his vision of the Great Society.<sup>3</sup>

The War on Poverty intersected with the awakenings of discontent that had

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<sup>1</sup> “For A Greater Indian America,” *Americans Before Columbus* I, no. 2 (December 1963): 1.

<sup>2</sup> Lyndon Johnson, of course, had no intimate understanding of Indian affairs. However, as Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle point out, there was still reason for Indians to look to him for direction. “The president sets the tone of the administration,” they argue. “If the president is perceived as being favorable to Indian causes, as was Lyndon Johnson, then the remainder of the executive branch usually reflects this positive attitude and makes decisions and interpretations in tune with Indian desires.” Vine Deloria and Clifford Lytle, *American Indians, American Justice* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 198), 34-35.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-1964*, book 1 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965), 704-07.

converged during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Together, these combined forces propelled the externalizing process forward, wrenching open the breach that had developed in the public sphere. Heretofore marginalized ideas on race, class, culture, gender, war, and international development surged into this space. If the foundation of the prevailing social and cultural order began to fracture in the years preceding 1964, it nearly crumbled thereafter. Community Action, the controversial centerpiece of Johnson's antipoverty campaign, contributed to this process by creating a forum for the articulation of conflicting ideas regarding community, poverty, and identity. American Indians, like many other groups, entered this political arena, but they imbued each of these concepts with distinctive meanings and brought still others to the fore.

Borrowing anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff's evocative phrase, the chapters in Part Two portray the politics of poverty and tribal self-determination as an "intricate fugue."<sup>4</sup> Not unlike this style of musical composition, they introduce a series of overlapping voices or parts that were at once distinct and interrelated. In the pages that follow, one will find the resonant strains of action anthropology, community development, modernization, anticolonialism, anticommunism, and Indian nationalism. Many of the actors will be familiar as well—from participants in the Workshop on American Indian Affairs and veterans of the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) to leaders of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and founders of

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<sup>4</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 26.

the National Indian Youth Council. Bureaucrats and politicians, academics and advocates, tribal leaders and local people—all found themselves engaged in contests over the meaning of community, the causes of poverty, and the identity of the poor.

The final two chapters of this section focus on the politics of Community Action in Oklahoma, but they do not stand alone. Rather, they represent two parts of a much larger composition—a pair of contrapuntal entries organized around the central theme of tribal self-determination. These case studies also lend insight into the non-reservation dimension of the War on Poverty. Given that 50 percent of the Indian population lived in non-reservation communities, Oklahoma Indians' experiences proved to be anything but unique. The small tribes in western Washington, terminated peoples such as the Menominees, state-recognized tribes like the Lumbees, and urban Indians confronted problems similar to those faced by them. Moreover, what happened in Oklahoma did not occur in a vacuum. Here one finds manifold examples of the shared yet distinctive trajectories of Indian and non-Indian histories, of local and national narratives.

In Oklahoma and elsewhere, the personal experiences of ordinary people became bound up with the decisions that were made by elite policymakers. Whether they worked from within to manipulate the system or challenged it from without, they engaged in the continuing encounters between natives and newcomers. Through this process the politics of poverty intersected with and became a vehicle for the politics of self-determination. With roots in the earliest days of the War on Poverty, it continued to evolve through a tumultuous decade of fragmentation and reform. By decade's end, Indian politics converged with domestic concerns over race, class, and war, as well as international

debates over modernization and decolonization. The voices of Indian people would enter the public sphere during the 1960s, but it was not at all clear whether the dominant society would internalize their definitions of the situation. If they were not internalized, the War on Poverty would suffer the fate of so many past experiments in social reform. Full of sound and fury, it would signify nothing.

### Chapter Three

#### Contested Meanings, 1963-1964

How we think and speak about poverty and what we do (or don't do) about it emerges as much from a mix of ideology and politics as from the structure of the problem itself.

Michael Katz<sup>1</sup>

War has been declared on our condition. . . . Is this just stepping up efforts to absorb us into the mainstream of American life?

Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute)<sup>2</sup>

On a cloudy and mild twentieth day of January 1964, members of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) assembled in Arlington Cemetery to commemorate the third anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's inauguration. After the grave-side ceremony, they continued on to the East Room of the White House for a personal meeting with Lyndon Johnson. In a firm statement, NCAI President Walter Wetzel (Blackfeet) outlined their most vital concerns—employment, the protection of trust lands, opposition to termination, prevention of the arbitrary assumption of state criminal or civil jurisdiction over reservations, recognition of solemn binding treaties, and participation in carrying out policies directed toward them. Johnson gave a perfunctory promise that he would consider their proposals, then moved on to what was foremost in his mind. Having read a litany of statistics revealing Indians to be the poorest of the poor, he proclaimed, "Now all of these are reasons why I have directed that in our attack on poverty program we put our Indian people in the forefront."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Mel Thom, "Indian War 1964," *American Aborigine* III, no. 1 (1964): 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1963-64*, book 1 (Washington: GPO, 1965), 150-51; Walter Wetzel to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, 20 January 1964, "EX IN Indian Affairs, 11/22/63-2/29/64" folder, box 1, EX GEN IN 11/22/63-8/20/64 Indian Affairs, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas; "Johnson Pledges Help for Tribes," *New York Times*, 21 January 1964, p. 15; Thomas W. Cowger, *The National Congress of American Indians: The Founding Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 146.

The staggering figures read by President Johnson—family incomes one-third the national average, 85 percent unemployment in some communities, an average life expectancy of forty-two years—left one reporter aghast at what he called the “numbing, spirit-sapping poverty” in which Indians lived. In his mind, reservations must have represented places as foreign as the Third World. Clearly struggling to grasp these conditions, he asked Alexander LaForge (Crow), “What do you eat?” After a moment’s reflection, LaForge casually responded, “Food, mostly.”<sup>4</sup> The parlay with President Johnson and the media coverage that followed demonstrated the intimate embrace that bound poverty and Indian identity in the public mind. If censuses showed a population resurgence that betrayed the “vanishing Indian” stereotype, the reporter wrote after his encounter with the NCAI, economic indicators surely reaffirmed the verity of “Lo, the poor Indian.”<sup>5</sup>

Indians did have much in common with those who lived in poverty: for both of them, a tremendous distance separated popular consciousness from lived experience; the two were cast by the dominant society as the ultimate “Others”; each of them seemed to signify anomalies in an otherwise affluent, modern America; and, consequently, the policies directed toward both of them derived more from politics and ideology than understanding. Central to “determining the political meaning and policy consequences of poverty knowledge,” historian Alice O’Connor explains, “has been the power to establish the terms of debate—to contest, gain, and ultimately to exercise ideological hegemony

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<sup>4</sup> “U.S. Promises Special Assist for Indians,” 23 January 1964, folder 11, box 4, American Indian Institute Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>5</sup> “U.S. Promises Special Assist for Indians.”

over the boundaries of discourse.”<sup>6</sup> Indians shared this reality with the poor as well. It followed that both groups looked upon the War on Poverty as an opportunity to contest those imposed meanings, to redefine what it meant to be poor, and to explain how they understood the causes of the conditions in which they lived.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 launched Lyndon Johnson’s ambitious campaign against deprivation and want in the United States. At its heart rested the Community Action Program, an initiative that channeled federal dollars directly to local communities, bypassing entrenched welfare bureaucracies. Intended to give voice to ordinary people, and particularly those living in poverty, Community Action encouraged local input into the design, implementation, and administration of antipoverty programs. Many of the agencies established to carry them out swiftly became controversial. As poor people gained a degree of control over the programs, they criticized inefficient and degrading welfare delivery systems, negligence, corruption, and deeply embedded, though often sublimated, racial and class prejudices. By empowering different ideas within the cultural field, the antipoverty campaign would be a brief moment in which poor people exercised unprecedented control over who spoke, how often, and about what topics. Less clear was whether anyone would listen.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 57. Peter Marris and Martin Rein add, “As the ideal of community action evolved as a popular social movement, it began to articulate more clearly the need for a community to control not only access to knowledge, but the assumptions and procedures by which knowledge is generated and interpreted.” Peter Marris and Martin Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform: Poverty and Community Action in the United States*, 2d ed., with a new preface (1967; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xii. See also *ibid.*, 296.

A dynamic process led to tribal involvement in the War on Poverty's Community Action Program. Indian inclusion did not come to the fore as an "afterthought," nor did it represent a mere byproduct of a policy "formulated entirely without direct reference to the reservations. . . ."<sup>8</sup> By extension, the consequences of Indian participation cannot be seen as little more than "accidental and unintentional" outcomes.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Indian participation and its political ramifications emerged from a series of encounters that connected the architects of the Economic Opportunity Act—and later, policymakers—with residents of the so-called "target areas." Through this process, and the crafting of the legislation generally, a host of conflicting definitions about the nature of poverty, the meaning of community, and the identity of the poor became bound up with one another.

Poverty haltingly materialized as a matter of national concern during the early 1960s and then only in fragments. Few books had been published on the subject, the government did not approach poverty as a social problem unto itself, and existing programs fell under separate categories such as old age, child welfare, and unemployment. Not until 1964 would the *Congressional Record*, the compendium of proceedings of the House and Senate, adopt "poverty" as a subject heading. Meanwhile, vital center liberals of the postwar era spoke mainly of "the challenge of abundance,"

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<sup>8</sup> George Pierre Castile, "Indian Sign" in *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy*, ed. George Pierre Castile and Robert L. Bee (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1992), 171; George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 111.

while conservatives prioritized balanced budgets over low unemployment.<sup>10</sup>

With the advent of two recessions and rising unemployment during the late 1950s, attention slowly shifted to problems stemming from the automation of industry and the mechanization of agriculture. Academics brought to light the failure of urban renewal and demonstrated the relationship between juvenile delinquency and unemployment. Articles and books authored by Michael Harrington, Harry Caudill, and Gunnar Myrdal, as well as important essays by Homer Bigart and Dwight Macdonald, garnered critical acclaim and a wide readership.<sup>11</sup> Powerful television documentaries such as “Harvest of Shame” and “Christmas in Appalachia” further heightened public awareness by bringing the hardships of migrant farm workers and miners into middle class living rooms.<sup>12</sup> The civil rights movement, too, focused attention on poverty, culminating in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in August 1963.<sup>13</sup> Not least of these, the Cold War imperative required compassion for those left behind. The United States could not preach

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<sup>10</sup> Sanford Kravitz, “The Community Action Program—Past, Present, and Its Future?” in *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience*, Perspectives on Poverty, vol. 2, ed. James L. Sundquist (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 55; Henry J. Aaron, *Politics and the Professors: The Great Society in Perspective*, Studies in Social Economics (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1977), 17, 146-51; James T. Patterson, *America’s Struggle Against Poverty, 1900-1994* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 127; O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 12, 139; James L. Sundquist, “Origins of the War on Poverty,” in Sundquist, ed., *On Fighting Poverty*, 6; Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), 177; OEO Administrative History, 3.

<sup>11</sup> Patterson, *America’s Struggle*, 99-114; Michael L. Gillette, ed., *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 1, 3, 5, 9, 37; Robert Alan Bauman, “Race, Class, and Political Power: The Implementation of the War on Poverty in Los Angeles” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998), 17-18; Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1984), 102; Richard Ward, “Automation and Unemployment,” *New University Thought* 2, no. 2 (winter 1962): 29-46.

<sup>12</sup> Isserman, *Other American*, 181-82; Sam Brown, “Self-Help: New Roots to an Old Idea,” in *A History of National Service to America*, ed. Peter Shapiro. [www.academy.umd/publications/National Service.html](http://www.academy.umd/publications/NationalService.html).

<sup>13</sup> Katz, *Undeserving Poor*, 81-82; John C. Donovan, *The Politics of Poverty* (New York: Pegasus, 1967), 22.

development through free market capitalism to the Third World if it failed to provide for its own citizens. “The good Cold Warrior,” as political scientist Hugh Heclo observed, “was a good Poverty Warrior.”<sup>14</sup>

As tensions with the Soviets abated after the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Kennedy administration focused more intensively on domestic affairs. Criticism from the left regarding his reliance on a tax cut to stimulate economic growth further conspired with a disastrous flood in Appalachia. Already moved by the depth of poverty he witnessed during his 1960 campaign through West Virginia, Kennedy called for a crash relief program for the region. At the same time, he placed Council of Economic Advisors Director Walter Heller in charge of assembling information on poverty. Through the spring of 1963, Heller convened a series of informal Saturday morning sessions with representatives from other cabinet offices. Their work resulted in a report authored by University of Wisconsin economist Robert Lampman. Submitted as chapter two of the *Economic Report of the President* in January 1964, it encapsulated the administration’s approach to poverty. Rather than exploring the political economy of low wages, urban and rural decay, unemployment, maldistribution of wealth, and insecurity, this document defined poverty in terms of a fixed income, social disorganization, and cultural

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<sup>14</sup> Hugh Heclo, “The Political Foundations of Antipoverty Policy,” in *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn’t*, ed. Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 320. See also Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumph and Failure of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 27-31, 52-53; Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 43-47.

deprivation.<sup>15</sup>

Behavioral definitions of poverty did not, of course, emerge *ex nihilo* in the 1960s; the dichotomy between the “deserving” and “undeserving” poor had deep roots. But it did gain the imprimatur of social science during the postwar era.<sup>16</sup> Anthropologist Oscar Lewis conceptualized and refined the concept of a “culture of poverty” through ethnographic research in Mexico and Puerto Rico during the 1950s and 1960s. Locating the concept along the folk-urban continuum, he contended that cultures of poverty developed among peoples who could neither sustain their traditional pre-industrial cultures, nor assimilate into modern urban-industrial ones. Lacking a coherent identity, they utilized adaptive strategies to survive, attain status, and function as a group. Over time, a subculture emerged “with its own structure and rationale” that subsequently evolved into “a way of life that is passed down from generation to generation.”<sup>17</sup> Though cultivated in the context of emerging nations, the concept soon suffused discussions of poverty in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The notion of a people apart, of an underdeveloped nation within, gained currency during the late 1950s and early 1960s. If the diagnosis of the problem crossed over to the

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<sup>15</sup> OEO Administrative History, 13-14; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 102, 152-54, 157; Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 1-9; *Economic Report of the President* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1964), 55-84; James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press, of Kansas, 1991), 117-19;. Poverty was defined as an income of \$3,000 for a family of four and could be recalculated according to family size. Matusow, *Unraveling*, 218-20; Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, with a new introduction by Irving Howe (1962; New York: Macmillan, 1993), xi.

<sup>16</sup> O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 97-98.

<sup>17</sup> Oscar Lewis, “The Culture of Poverty,” in *On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, Perspectives on Poverty, vol. 1, ed. Daniel P. Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 187-88, 196, quote at 187. Douglas Butterworth, “Oscar Lewis, 1914-1970,” pp. 4-6, 8-9, folder 9, box 38, series II, Sol Tax Papers, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.

<sup>18</sup> O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 99-117.

United States, so too did the prescribed remedy—hill folk and ghetto dwellers, just as Third World populations, could be assimilated into the mainstream via modernization.<sup>19</sup> From the vantage point of the dominant society, American Indians did not just reflect select attributes of the culture of poverty, they represented its quintessence. “People with a culture of poverty are provincial and locally oriented and have very little sense of history,” Lewis wrote. “They know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhoods, their own way of life.”<sup>20</sup> With their tribal “social and economic structure. . .smashed” and the “process of detribalization” underway, people caught in a culture of poverty suffered from a “hopelessness and despair that develop from the realization of the improbability of achieving success in terms of the values and goals of the larger society.”<sup>21</sup> This analysis, without question, resonated with Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, many bureaucrats within the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and mainstream culture.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the obvious correlation between Indians and poverty, the Interior Department did not contribute to the formulation of the attack on poverty program until late December 1963. That said, their exclusion mattered very little. Until November

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<sup>19</sup> For the classic text on the American poor as nations unto themselves, see Harrington, *The Other America*. Analyses of the development of modernization in an American context, see O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 9-10, 121-23, quote at p. 123 and Alice O'Connor, “Modernization and the Rural Poor: Some Lessons from History,” in *Rural Poverty in America*, ed. Cynthia M. Duncan (New York: Auburn House, 1992): 215-33.

<sup>20</sup> Patterson, *America's Struggle*, 117. Oscar Lewis carefully distinguished what he had to say about poverty in developing nations from what was prevalent in United States during the 1960s, but he also added that Indians were obvious candidates for living in a culture of poverty. Lewis, “The Culture of Poverty,” 196-97.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, “Culture of Poverty,” 188-89.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the specific traits of the culture of poverty, see Lewis, “The Culture of Poverty,” 189-92. For a good summary of the stances taken by his critics, see Katz, *Undeserving Poor*, 37-43.

1963, the persons involved did not see themselves as engaged in drawing up a comprehensive legislative program, nor did they have a mandate to do so.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, absent an organizing principle, the multitude of studies that had been received by Walter Heller prior to Kennedy's assassination represented little more than a fragmented array of banal ideas.<sup>24</sup> Although Lyndon Johnson threw his support behind the antipoverty program and wanted to announce it in his 1964 State of the Union address, Heller's interagency task force still had nothing definite to show for its labor. Worse yet, cabinet officials began to fight turf battles over who would control the programs.<sup>25</sup>

Into this nebulous and divisive environment, the Interior Department advanced its own studies. Many Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel fashioned themselves as apostles of development. Hildegard Thompson, Director of the Branch of Education from 1952 to 1965, viewed vocational and public schools as essential to preparing Indians for their entrance into urban, industrial life.<sup>26</sup> On December 26, 1963, she wrote a long letter to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Philleo Nash, outlining her understanding of how the war on Indian poverty could be fought. More money for housing, education, vocational training, area redevelopment, relocation, and health lay at the heart of her proposal.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sar A. Levitan, *The Great Society's Poor Law: A New Approach to Poverty* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), 17; Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 11.

<sup>24</sup> Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 20, quote at p. 12; Matusow, *Unraveling*, 120-21; OEO Administrative History, 11; Isserman, *Other American*, 192, 208.

<sup>25</sup> Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 17-22; Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), xv-xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928*, 3d ed., rev. and enl. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 124, 133, 137-39.

<sup>27</sup> Hildegard Thompson, Chief, Branch of Education to Commissioner Philleo Nash, 26 December 1963, attached to Hildegard Thompson to Philleo Nash, 27 December 1963, "Historical Data and Records (Poverty Program Background Material) (3 of 5)" folder, box 2, Records Relating to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Although she made allusions to Indian involvement, Thompson did not aggressively encourage tribal self-determination within her own department or in her proposal. Instead, her strategy essentially called for a larger role for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. “She was really old school. She was part of a colonial system,” former Department of Indian Health official Forrest Gerard (Blackfeet) recalled. “The BIA managed and staffed all the programs.”<sup>28</sup>

Many of the other BIA analyses evidenced that they drew a strong parallel between Indian poverty and what was then commonly attributed to peoples of emerging nations and the rural poor—isolation, cultural deprivation, lethargy, and a need for “adjustment to the ‘outside world.’”<sup>29</sup> Continuing the association, Paul G. Phillips of the BIA’s Projects Development Staff emphasized that illiteracy, traditionalism, and a lack of vocational skills “tend to continue backwardness and underdevelopment” as did “[a]nachronistic traditions and value systems.” He predictably recommended “a complete break with the past starting with the children in the schools and expanding this to affect as many members of the Indian culture as possible.” More surprising was the response of the person to whom he wrote the letter. “Done,” the recipient scrawled in the margins, “but not obviously.”<sup>30</sup> The BIA’s historic antipathy toward indigenous cultures, of

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<sup>28</sup> Forrest Gerard, interview by author, tape recording, Albuquerque, New Mex., 30 May 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Brice Lay to William Finale, 23 December 1963, “Historical Data and Records (Poverty Program Background Material) (3 of 5)” folder, box 2 and James E. Officer to Robert L. Bennett, 13 January 1964, “Historical Data and Records (Poverty Program Background Material) (1 of 5)” folder, box 1, OEO Records, RG 75, NA.

<sup>30</sup> Paul G. Phillips, Projects Development Staff to E. Reeseman Fryer, Asst. Commissioner, Division of Economic Development, 13 January 1964, “Historical Data and Records (Poverty Program Background Material) (1 of 5)” folder, box 1, OEO Records, RG 75, NA. On the parallels between Phillips comments and those made by others in reference to rural poverty, see O’Conner, “Modernization and the Rural Poor,” especially 232.

course, was anything but discreet, and many Indians continued to view a BIA education as a bald attempt at assimilation.

Indian Commissioner Philleo Nash did not incorporate many of the these recommendations into a packet of material he sent for review to Interior Secretary Udall, BIA officials, and members of the cabinet in January 1964. Yet, both he and Udall reasoned that the BIA's past experience with "the pockets of poverty represented by the Indian reservation" made their programs worthy of emulation "for alleviating the misery of other Americans. . . ." The lessons they learned included recognition that welfare fostered dependency, custodianship must be replaced by development, cultural deprivation rendered standard public schooling ineffective, and poverty bred poverty. In other words, their experiences seemingly reaffirmed that poor people lived in an intergenerational culture of poverty and that modernization represented the only means of breaking the "vicious circle."<sup>31</sup>

By the time Philleo Nash submitted the BIA study, planning for the War on Poverty had taken a surprising turn, one that carried significant consequences for American Indians. While Heller's interagency task force all but excluded the Interior Department, and the belated BIA study failed to incorporate Indian voices, David Hackett and the Office of Juvenile Delinquency circulated a proposal that had tribes very much in mind.<sup>32</sup> It was from Hackett's memos, first circulated in early November 1963, that

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<sup>31</sup> Indians and Poverty, 4 January 1964; Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Secretary of the Interior, 10 January 1964; and "Indian Life Example of U.S. Poverty," *Washington Post*, 17 January 1964, attached to Commissioner Philleo Nash to Assistant Commissioners, Branch Chiefs, and Area Directors, 22 January 1964, "Historical Data and Records (Poverty Program Background Material) (4 of 5)" folder, box 2, OEO Records, RG 75, NA.

<sup>32</sup> Matusow, *Unraveling*, 120-21; Unger, *Best of Intentions*, 76.

Lyndon Johnson's attack on poverty received its organizing principle—community action.<sup>33</sup> Rather than focusing on the culture of the poor in isolation, community action considered how “differential opportunity structures” fostered delinquent behavior and perpetuated poverty. In other words, poor people largely shared mainstream aspirations, but impersonal welfare bureaucracies, dilapidated housing, inferior schools, inadequate health services, and unemployment conspired to create a situation in which they could not attain them through legitimate means. It would take cooperation between all members of a community, and particularly the active participation of the poor, to bring institutional reform and generate new opportunities.<sup>34</sup>

No figure proved more central to this sudden turn of events than Richard Boone. Unstinting in his advocacy of community participation, Boone studied with the venerated masters of social ecology at the University of Chicago and also took courses with anthropologists Sol Tax and Robert Redfield. He went on to become police captain in Cook County, Illinois, and later worked on the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas program, an early experiment in community action. In the spring of 1962, David Hackett

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<sup>33</sup> The story of how Community Action became the centerpiece of the War on Poverty has been told very well many times over. The best investigation of the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas program, Mobilization for Youth, and the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency remains Marris and Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform*. See also Alice O'Connor, “Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight Against Poverty: The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program,” *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 5 (July 1996): 586-625. On the Juvenile Delinquency Committee, see Daniel Knapp and Kenneth Polk, *Scouting the War on Poverty: Social Reform Politics in the Kennedy Administration* (Lexington, MA: Heath Lexington Books, 1971). For a highly readable but critical interpretation, see Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*. For an invaluable and well-organized collection of oral histories from the Johnson Library, see Gillette, *Launching*, 1-147. Other useful overviews include Unger, *Best of Intentions*, 49-69 and Matusow, *Unraveling*, 107-15.

<sup>34</sup> On opportunity theory, see Richard A. Cloward and Lloyd E. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity: A Theory of Delinquent Gangs* (New York: Free Press, 1960); Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 101-02; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 131-33; Marris and Rein, *Dilemmas*, 19-20, 53-54.

convinced Boone to leave the Ford Foundation and join the Office of Juvenile Delinquency. There he oversaw the development of the National Service Corps (NSC), a program designed to function as a domestic version of the Peace Corps. Tapping into the high idealism of the Kennedy presidency, it called on Americans young and old to volunteer to serve the country by reaching out to the poorest of the poor.<sup>35</sup> Upon invitation the volunteers would help people help themselves—by building a library, providing medical assistance or daycare, and assisting with self-help housing, model irrigation, or recreation programs.

Formally created in November 1962, the President's Study Group on a National Service Program began ad hoc meetings in Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's office during the summer.<sup>36</sup> Early in these meetings, Boone recalled, the study group "divided the world into urban, rural, migrant, and Indian." They conceptualized poverty in terms of "a series of poverty reservations, so to speak. Not just Indian reservations, poverty reservations—Appalachia, the Deep South, the urban ghettos, the migrant work areas. . . ."<sup>37</sup> More significantly, they considered it imperative to understand poor people's perspectives. Rather than relying on statistics or distant observation, they organized a series of tours that would take them deep into the various "poverty reservations." Among

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<sup>35</sup> Richard W. Boone, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 8 November 2002; Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, 65-66; Matusow, *Unraveling*, 117; United States House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Service Corps: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., part 2, Washington, D.C., 17, 18, 30 July; 8 August; 12 September 1963.

<sup>36</sup> United States House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *National Service Corps: Hearings Before the Special Subcommittee on Labor*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., part 1, Washington, D.C., 22, 24, 27-29 May; 11-12, 18-19, and 26 June 1963, pp. 1-2, 7, quote at 16.

<sup>37</sup> Boone interview.

the peoples they chose to visit were the Mandans, Arikaras, and Hidatsas on the Ft. Berthold Reservation, North Dakota; the Oglalas living on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota; and the San Carlos Apaches in Arizona.<sup>38</sup>

The study group relied on Robert Roessel, a man whom Boone had known since their days as fellow students at the University of Chicago, as their initial contact. During the early 1950s, Roessel worked for the BIA as an educator in the Navajo Nation, first at Crown Point, then Round Rock, and finally Low Mountain. At Round Rock he met and married his wife, Ruth, the daughter of an influential Navajo family. Through this intimate family encounter, Roessel remembered, he came to recognize “the strength and the beauty and the dignity of Navajo culture.”<sup>39</sup> Over time, Roessel grew frustrated with the attitudes taken by the BIA and ultimately decided to pursue a master’s degree in anthropology at Chicago. After receiving a Ph.D. in education at Arizona State University he stayed on the faculty to establish the Indian Education Center.<sup>40</sup>

Knowing of Roessel’s strong connections with the Navajos, Richard Boone invited him to Washington to give a presentation at one of the Saturday morning meetings. With Robert Kennedy present, Roessel questioned why they had selected him to come. “Instead of calling on Indian professionals,” he recommended, “why don’t you get in touch with the Indians? Why don’t you listen to what the people think is important? Why is it that Washington is filled with bureaucrats who think they know best?”<sup>41</sup> “The

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<sup>38</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. iii, 17, 106, 108; House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 2, pp. 506, 589; Matusow, *Unraveling*, 116-17.

<sup>39</sup> Robert A. Roessel Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Round Rock, Ariz., 28 May 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Roessel interview.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Shapiro, ed., *History of National Service*; Roessel interview.

issue is not what people can do for Indians,” Roessel continued, “What is it, first of all, that you can learn from Indians and how can you work with them to plan better lives?”<sup>42</sup> “I think the contribution I was able to make was through telling my faith in the capacity of Indian people to solve their own problems—education or otherwise,” Roessel later recalled. “And they’d never been given that opportunity. The BIA was always ‘father knows best’ and ‘this is what you’re going to do.’”<sup>43</sup>

While Roessel brought personal encounters with his wife and family to bear on his presentation, the study group also spoke with tribal leaders. Boone remembered one meeting in which one of them “came in, in headdress, and he was obviously very distinctive in the room.” “At one point he got up and looked straight at Bob Kennedy and said, ‘I don’t want to go into all of the details about our problems with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. That’s a long history,’” Boone recounted. “‘However,’ looking right at the attorney general, ‘great power is in this room. Please use it wisely. And please don’t say what you can do for us. But listen carefully to our needs and then work with us—not for us. That is the most important thing you can do.’ Then he sat down. I looked at Kennedy’s face, and he clearly got the message.”<sup>44</sup>

Tribal involvement in the National Service Corps served as a central component in the hearings that opened in May 1963. While none of the witnesses or members of the House of Representatives questioned that Indians would be foremost in the program, they

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<sup>42</sup> Roessel interview.

<sup>43</sup> Roessel interview.

<sup>44</sup> Boone interview. In an email to the author on 17 December 2002, Boone indicated that this was probably Henry Black Elk (Oglala Lakota), who later testified in support of the legislation.

did spend considerable time discussing the nature of Indian poverty.<sup>45</sup> Kennedy argued that the conditions in which Alaska Natives and Oglalas lived were reminiscent of those found in “a foreign country,” despite the fact that it was “taking place in the United States at the present time. . . .” Evoking the persistent intrusion of the Cold War into domestic politics, he contended, “Our definitive actions to deal with our ills and our faults are what is going to make the difference in what people think of us around the globe.”<sup>46</sup> Interior Secretary Stewart Udall continued both analogies in his own testimony, likening the BIA’s approach to a “development program” and the causes of Indian poverty to those found in the Third World. In characteristically paternalistic tones, he elaborated, “I think our Indian people, our territorial peoples, have much the same problem that the emerging nations in Africa and Asia have. . . .” They were educationally backward, and unable to cope with “the modern world, to make decisions, [or] to develop their own resources,” Udall asserted. “[T]hey began from a very primitive state, and. . . you have got to develop the things from scratch, and this takes at best a generation, two generations, three generations. . . .”<sup>47</sup>

No stranger to irony, Udall then suggested that “the whole purpose with the Indian program is not to be paternalistic but to develop the capacity of the Indian people to make their own decisions.”<sup>48</sup> The Interior Secretary’s conceptualization of tribal lands also proved troubling. Calling them “our Indian reservations,” Udall explained their origins

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<sup>45</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, pp. 29, 62-63.

<sup>46</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, pp. 11, 13.

<sup>47</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. 66.

and problems thus: “we have given them a piece of land; they are isolated on it, and we are attempting, of course, through our programs, both economically and otherwise, to get them into the mainstream of American life.” If only Native people had the opportunity to break out of their isolation and cultural backwardness, they would embrace “this very modern, fast-moving world” and become just like non-Indians.<sup>49</sup> In taking this position, Udall spoke as a well-intentioned liberal reformer whose views toward tribes and their homelands could be seen as analogous to the great modernizing visions of the Kennedy administration’s foreign policy advisors.

The Indian participants at the hearings provided a strikingly different rendition of the past. Henry Black Elk (Oglala Lakota) confirmed the enormity of poverty on Pine Ridge. Many people lived in tents, some in shacks without electricity or indoor plumbing, reliable sources of clean water were hard to come by, and mechanization had contributed to an unemployment rate of 45 percent. “Health conditions generally are very bad,” he continued. “The infant death rate is four times the national average. Tuberculosis, influenza, and dysentery are still great killers of the Oglala Sioux.” Moreover, he did not deny that these conditions contributed to “demoralization and frustration.” “Many people feel there is no way out,” Black Elk explained. “This results in apathy in despair. These, in turn, contribute to the problem. Our people are thus looking for a source of help that can break the cycle of poverty, disease, and apathy.”<sup>50</sup>

Carl Whitman, Chairman of the Tribal Council of the Three Affiliated Tribes on

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<sup>49</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, pp. 61, 62, 69.

<sup>50</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. 138.

the Ft. Berthold Reservation, revealed a different understanding of how things came to this. After being consolidated on a reservation too small to provide for their people, the Mandans, Hidatsas, and Arikaras of the northwest part of North Dakota lost 150,000 acres of their best land to the Garrison Dam and Reservoir in the 1950s. "Our protests had no effect. The dam was built. There was a mass relocation. You can push any group of people just so long. There comes a time they will give up. My people were no different," he stated. "They gave up." Rejecting the notion that the displaced families had received a "generous settlement" for the rich bottom lands that had been lost, he argued, "This land was considered their mother which provided them with food, shelter and clothing. You cannot place a price tag on a mother."<sup>51</sup>

Both Whitman and Black Elk remained hopeful of the possibilities residing within the National Service Corps. They also contended that it needed to be administered outside of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Neither had any faith in the Bureau's ability to promote local initiative or to win the confidence of local people.<sup>52</sup> Foreshadowing the role that the War on Poverty would play in reservation communities, Whitman contended that it was imperative that the NSC administer the programs. "It would probably. . .create somewhat of a competitive sense that either the Bureau gets left behind," he explained, "or they had better start thinking about the causes [of poverty] and do something about it."<sup>53</sup>

The National Service Corps ultimately died in the House in 1963. But it gained

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<sup>51</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. 130.

<sup>52</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, pp. 132-33.

<sup>53</sup> House of Representatives, *National Service Corps*, part 1, p. 143.

new life as the Johnson administration put together the legislation for its war on poverty. The NSC was transformed into Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), while the Youth Conservation Corps, another stillborn program that placed Indians in the forefront but failed to pass congressional scrutiny in 1963, became the Job Corps. These alone suggested that Indian participation would be central to the War on Poverty. Yet more than the programs carried over into the Johnson administration. Shortly after Kennedy in-law and Peace Corps Director R. Sargent Shriver's appointment to oversee the creation of the antipoverty war on February 1, 1964, he assembled his own Task Force on the War Against Poverty. With Richard Boone playing a central role in this stage, it is questionable whether the task force "lacked a voice dedicated to Indian affairs."<sup>54</sup>

After the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964 was sent to Congress on March 16, Boone and a cadre of staff from the Office of Juvenile Delinquency stayed on to lay the foundation for the Community Action Program. "Experience had taught these men to despise local schools, police, welfare departments, and private charity for dispensing demeaning, fragmented services to the poor," historian Allen Matusow wrote of Boone and his associates. Bringing his past experience with the National Service Corps to bear on this new project, it was not difficult for Boone to draw a parallel between his own concerns over "oppressive bureaucracies" and the paternalistic relationship between the BIA and tribes. If Indians represented the epitome of being poor, then the BIA symbolized the very worst in bureaucratic paternalism.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Matusow, *Unraveling*, 244; Boone interview.

Boone carried more than his antipathy for the BIA bureaucracy with him.

Through the spring and summer of 1964, and working under the direction of United Auto Workers union organizer Jack Conway, Boone, Sanford Kravitz, and Frederick O'R Hayes created an Urban Areas Task Force. They applied the NSC model of "urban, rural, migrant, and Indian" to their conceptualization of the operational and administrative structure of the Community Action Program. By April 1, 1964, Robert Roessel, Francis McKinley (Ute), Forrest Gerard (Blackfeet), and James Officer of the BIA formed a "loose committee" on Indian Community Action. Charged with defining the most basic elements of the program, they considered how to confront problems of discrimination and integration, what degree of involvement state governments ought to have, and how to define community, poverty, and representation. Before the end of the month, they submitted a report that established tribal governments as legitimate sponsors of Community Action Programs.<sup>56</sup>

Given their commitment to the principles of community action and maximum feasible participation of the poor, Boone, Kravitz, and Hayes recognized the need for social and institutional reform and the empowerment of poor people. "It was very threatening to vested interests," Boone submitted.<sup>57</sup> And, as Sanford Kravitz further

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<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, Boone also sought the counsel of the Association on American Indian Affairs. Boone interview; Gerard interview; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 162-63, 168; Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, 95; Kravitz, "The Community Action Program," 60; Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 72, 83, 85-86; Richard Schifter to William S. Byler, 28 April 1964, folder 10, box 404, series II, subseries III, Association on American Indian Affairs Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; Questions to be Answered by Each Community Action Task Force, 1 April 1964, attached to Bill Patrick to Chris Weeks, 1 April 1964; and A Description of CAP, "Community Action Programs (Basic Information)" folder, box 2, Records Re: President's Task Force in the War Against Poverty, General Counsel, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>57</sup> Boone interview; O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 168.

elaborated, they fully understood that the BIA would be one of the vested interests Community Action might arouse. “[T]here was a general lack of sympathy among the program planners for the Bureau of Indian Affairs,” he remembered.<sup>58</sup> During this formulative period, intra-administrative struggles over the program surfaced. The Economic Opportunity Act called for only \$500 million of new money, while the rest of OEO’s budget would come from existing agencies.<sup>59</sup> One of the premises on which the War on Poverty rested was the need to prevent established bureaucracies from taking over innovative new programs. And following this logic, they refused to allow the BIA to control any of the Indian programs—and particularly Community Action. “There was conflict,” argued Boone, “mainly because we said, ‘Absolutely no, BIA’s not going to run this.’”<sup>60</sup> From the first, the task force members guarded against proposals made by the BIA that would wrest OEO programs and transfer them to the Indian Bureau.<sup>61</sup>

Racing against time to set up the administrative structure of OEO, Boone surrounded himself with like-minded people. Forrest Gerard came over on a temporary basis from Indian Health Services, where he had been experimenting with establishing tribal health committees. He speculated that Boone probably considered him for the job because he was “young enough and then not totally corrupted by big government. . . .”<sup>62</sup> Francis McKinley, a leading figure in Ute politics and then assistant director of ASU’s Indian Education Center, shared Gerard’s commitment to extending tribal governmental

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<sup>58</sup> Kravitz, “Community Action Program,” 62.

<sup>59</sup> Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 54.

<sup>60</sup> Boone interview.

<sup>61</sup> Boone interview; Roessel interview; Edgar S. Cahn, interview by author, tape recording, Washington, D.C., 20 May 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Gerard interview.

powers. Community Action, he argued, “stresses the need to get the full participation and involvement of the poor” and would therefore unlock “the dynamic potential of the Indians that is lodged within the family, clan, and community structures.”<sup>63</sup>

While Hackett’s “guerillas” set about constructing the Community Action Program, the House of Representatives convened twenty days of hearings on the Economic Opportunity Act.<sup>64</sup> Given that the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program consisted of many of the same congresspersons responsible for the National Service and Youth Conservation Corps legislation, the centrality of Indian inclusion should have come as no surprise. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, and AAIA General Counsel Richard Schifter each stated their expectations, as President Johnson had assured the NCAI, that Indians would be at the forefront of the War on Poverty. On the first day of the hearings, R. Sargent Shriver opined, “[W]e now have a greater understanding of the complex causes of poverty, what makes people poor, and what keeps them that way. . . .”<sup>65</sup> As the hearings unfolded, however, it became clear that sharply contrasting ideas about poverty, community, and Indian identity persisted.

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<sup>63</sup> On cultural deprivation, see Francis McKinley, “Federal Indian Policy as it Affects Local Indian Affairs,” 12 May 1964, folder 15, box 35, S. Lyman Tyler Papers, Department of Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah. For second quotation, see Francis McKinley, “What Are New Horizons? *Journal of American Indian Education* 5, no. 1 (October 1965): 32-33. Likewise, Jack Conway made reference to “culturally deprived homes” in Jack T. Conway, “And on Indian Reservations,” *Indian Affairs* 56 (October 1964): 1.

<sup>64</sup> Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: The Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford, 1996), 107, 109.

<sup>65</sup> United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., part I, 17-20 March, 7-10, 13-14 April 1964, p. 20. For Kennedy’s statement, see *ibid.*, 301-39. Clarkin excludes Kennedy’s important contribution to the hearings in suggesting that only Schifter and Udall addressed Indian concerns. Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 112.

Just as remarkably little attention was paid to the structural underpinnings of poverty in general, so too did much of the debate about Indians revolve around behavioral and sociocultural attributes. Richard Schifter made a point of underscoring not only the appalling statistics regarding health, delinquency, broken homes, and unemployment, but also what he called “the fundamental human problem of hopelessness, of lack of opportunity, of insecurity and utter frustration, a problem which grips most Indian people, particularly men, in their youths and never leaves them.”<sup>66</sup> Although Schifter used this rhetoric in an attempt to secure an explicit statement that tribal governments could be legitimate sponsoring agencies, several of the representatives seized on it to criticize the federal trust relationship. “The difficulty with the Indians in the United States,” posited Nebraska Representative Dave Martin, “is that they have been more or less wards of the Government for so many years they have lost their individual initiative to improve themselves and to overcome their own problems.”<sup>67</sup> In an unveiled criticism of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, New York’s Charles Goodell carried the argument further. “I hope and pray that we are not going to do to the poverty-stricken people of this country,” he admonished Udall, “what we have done to the American Indians.”<sup>68</sup>

The Interior Secretary stood his ground against this congressional criticism. He pointed to Lyndon Johnson’s mandate, assured the committee that he would fight to

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<sup>66</sup> General Counsel to Executive Committee and Executive Director Association on American Indian Affairs, 2 April 1964, folder 10, box 151, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives. See also United States Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., part 2, 15-17, 20-21 April 1964, pp. 1053-68.

<sup>67</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 1, p. 330.

<sup>68</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 1, p. 369.

insure that Indians received their share of funds from the Economic Opportunity Act, and expressed his belief that the War on Poverty complimented his department's emphasis on development. In a style at once paternalistic and defiant, Udall contended that tribes would sponsor Community Action Programs "because our Indian people do live in Indian communities."<sup>69</sup> He also restated the philosophy articulated in the Interior Task Force report in 1961 and again during the National Service Corps hearings—the twin emphases on getting Indians into the mainstream of American life through development programs on the reservation and providing incentives for others to pursue opportunities in urban America. Perhaps in recognition of the persistent support for termination in Congress, he also intimated rather vaguely that the Economic Opportunity Act would "promote the healthy trend of cooperation between State governments and tribal groups."<sup>70</sup>

Contrasting conceptualizations of Indian communities were bound up with the stances taken on poverty during the hearings. Speaking for California Representative Alphonzo Bell as well, Sam Gibbons (D-FL), could not distinguish between Indian poverty and the communities in which they lived. "What makes these people stay on the reservation?" he asked. "Most reservations that I have seen most human beings could not live on them. Why do they stay on the reservation?" And finally, he asked AAILA General Counsel Richard Schifter, "Don't you think we ought to lure these people off the reservations?" "I have seen so many examples of Indians moving into the mainstream of American life and excelling when they get off the reservations. I have seen so many of

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<sup>69</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 1, pp. 342-43, 347-48, 366, 373, quote at 343.

<sup>70</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 1, pp. 347-48.

these reservations and they just appall you,” Gibbons concluded. “I do not see how anybody can make a living on them.”<sup>71</sup>

Given the strong support termination enjoyed in some circles in Congress, both Udall and Schifter attempted to finesse the issue. He confirmed Gibbons’s assertion that reservations could be likened to “open air ghettos,” an observation commonly made during the period by non-Indians. Drawing on John Kenneth Galbraith’s notion of “insular poverty,” Schifter suggested, “[O]ur growing dynamic society and our productive economy have, by and large, passed by our reservations. These have remained islands of poverty and depression.”<sup>72</sup> He also found merit in the Florida representative’s emphasis on relocation. But this was not, in the least, directed exclusively toward Indians. Throughout the House hearings, many conservative critics of the War on Poverty, questioned the utility of revitalizing impoverished rural areas and threw their support behind relocating these families to the cities.<sup>73</sup> What proved most surprising about the tremendous time devoted to and diversity of perspectives on poverty, however, was the near absence of discussion of its political economic and structural dimensions—no mention was made of exploitation, broken treaties, fraudulent leases, or the need for greater tribal sovereignty and tribally owned resource development strategies.

Between the convening of the hearings in the House in late April and their resumption in the Senate in mid-June, the Council on Indian Affairs held its well-publicized American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty (AICCP). Headquartered at

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<sup>71</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 2, p. 1065.

<sup>72</sup> House of Representatives, *Economic Opportunity Act*, part 2, p. 1056.

<sup>73</sup> O’Connor, “Modernization and the Rural Poor,” 230-31.

the Washington Cathedral and St. Albans School from May 9 to 12, it corresponded with the celebration of American Indian Day. Nearly 900 participants, half of whom were Indian, attended the series of workshops devoted to health, education, welfare, force accounts, and community development.<sup>74</sup> It has been argued that the AICCP was called “[t]o convince official Washington that American Indians should be included” in the War on Poverty and that “[l]argely as a result of the lobbying efforts of those who attended the conference, Indians were included as beneficiaries of the Economic Opportunity Act. . . .”<sup>75</sup> While it undoubtedly heightened public awareness and emphasized the needs of Native people, the House hearings had already revealed strong administrative and congressional support for Indian involvement.<sup>76</sup>

In their official statement, later included in the published Senate hearings, the members of the American Indian Capital Conference acknowledged Lyndon Johnson’s and Sargent Shriver’s prior commitments to Indian participation and stated their

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<sup>74</sup> The Council on Indian Affairs was an umbrella agency used for cooperative action by the National Congress of American Indians; National Council of Churches; Arrow, Inc.; American Friends Service Committee; Unitarian Service Committee; Division of Research, General Federation of Women’s Clubs; Catholic Welfare Conference; Bureau of Catholic Indian Missions; American Civil Liberties Union; Board of Homeland Missions, United Church of Christ; Friends Committee on National Legislation; Home and Christian Social Relations Departments, National Council Episcopal Church; Indian Rights Association; and the United Scholarship Service, Inc. American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty Press Release, Washington Cathedral, Mount St. Alban, 9-12 May 1964, 24 April 1964, folder 10, box 151, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives; “American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 1 (March 1964): 4.

<sup>75</sup> For first quote, see Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, eds., *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom*, 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 143. The second is from Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *Now That the Buffalo’s Gone: A Study of Today’s American Indians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 225. For similar interpretations, see Helen Scheirbeck’s statement in Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 215-18 and Robert Burnette, in *ibid.*, 212. See also Shirley Hill Witt, “Nationalistic Trends Among American Indians, in *The American Indian Today*, ed. Stuart Levine and Nancy O. Lurie (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 117; and Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 113.

<sup>76</sup> Gerard interview.

expectation that it would take place “from its very inception.”<sup>77</sup> What the committees were far more concerned about was that tribal governments would be recognized as legitimate sponsoring agencies. War on Indian Poverty Task Force member Forrest Gerard attended the meeting and later remembered, “There are a lot of anti-Indian people in the United States Congress, and by that I don’t mean they’re racist. They’re anti-Indian because of what federal-Indian relations stands for: tribal sovereignty, tribal self-government, all these good things that they deplore.”<sup>78</sup> Couched in terms of a modest supplication, then, this conference sought to reinforce the integrity of tribal self-governance.

It followed that the AICCP wanted less to insure Indian involvement as individuals than to guarantee that tribal governments, rather than the states or the BIA, controlled federal money devoted to the War on Poverty. Termination, as Gerard attested, still enjoyed considerable support in Congress. Moreover, several representatives had suggested their advocacy of State governmental responsibility over programs for Indians. Both symbolically and pragmatically, tribal control over federal money—a signifier of the government-to-government relationship forged through treaties and agreements—assumed tremendous import.<sup>79</sup>

No less significant, the members of the AICCP contended, was the philosophical

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<sup>77</sup> Findings of the Work Groups at the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty, 9-12 May 1964, United States Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964: Hearings Before the Select Committee on Poverty*, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., 17-18, 23, and 25 June 1964, p. 333.

<sup>78</sup> Gerard interview.

<sup>79</sup> Findings of the Work Groups, United States Senate, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964*, p. 337. Phillip S. Deloria makes this point more generally in Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule*, 200.

underpinnings of the Community Action Program. It would provide reservation-based tribes, as well as off-reservation urban organizations, with opportunities to develop programs independent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. “[T]he initiation, planning and implementation of programs by Indian people,” they concluded, “is consistent with the philosophy of encouraging self-reliance and self-determination by Indian people.”<sup>80</sup> In keeping with this emphasis on self-determination, the AICCP argued for the appointment of a deputy director and staff committed solely to Indian programs and who were “of Indian ancestry.”<sup>81</sup> All of their points stood in sharp contradistinction to the current operation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Staffed primarily by non-Indians from agency offices to the highest levels of the bureaucracy, there had been only one commissioner of Indian affairs of Indian descent—and that was in the nineteenth century.

The American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty displayed a strong sense of pan-tribal unity, but it also evidenced an emerging generational divide between the young and old. As a new brand of activism came to the fore, it signaled a changing of the guards. Indian politics underwent a gradual transformation between 1961 and 1964 as the parliamentary tactics of the American Indian Chicago Conference and the AICCP gave way to an angry indigenous existentialism.

Replacing the patient supplications for incremental reform articulated by non-Native “friends of the Indian,” were the defiant demands of younger Indians in organizations such as the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC). The American Indian

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<sup>80</sup> Findings of the Work Groups, United States Senate, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964*, p. 335.

<sup>81</sup> Findings of the Work Groups, United States Senate, *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964*, p. 335.

Capital Conference coincided with the NIYC's own maturation as a direct action organization. Members of the NIYC brought their deep sense of disaffection with the old guard to Washington, D.C., in May 1964, when they convened a board of directors meeting that ran simultaneously with the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty. Through their active involvement, the conference became a forum for the NIYC to declare its independence from the past.<sup>82</sup>

In January 1964, Clyde Warrior (Ponca) prepared the ground by traveling to Washington, D.C., to attend a National Congress of American Indians executive council meeting. There, one historian recounted, he "laced into the older tribal leaders for having been willing through the years to let the White man rule the reservations and control the affairs of Indian people."<sup>83</sup> Along with Mel Thom, Bruce Wilkie (Makah), actor Marlon Brando, and author Eugene Burdick, Warrior helped to launch the NIYC's "Campaign for Awareness."<sup>84</sup> Three months later, Warrior scanned an assemblage of some 1,000 protesters that consisted of non-Indians and members of fifty-six tribes. "Today, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1964," he proclaimed, "marks the beginning of a new era in the history of American Indians."<sup>85</sup> The protestors had descended on Olympia, Washington, to launch a direct action campaign to defend tribal fishing rights. While they went on record in support of other minority groups' claims to civil rights, NIYC members attempted to distinguish

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<sup>82</sup> Deloria quoted in Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>83</sup> Josephy, *Now That the Buffalo's Gone*, 224.

<sup>84</sup> "National Indian Youth Council Highlights for 1963-64," *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 3 (July 27, 1964): 2.

<sup>85</sup> "Ponca Protests Treaty Breaking By Washington," *Americans Before Columbus* 1, no. 1 [later corrected as 2, no. 2] (May 5, 1964): 1.

their own rights as sovereign nations.

The Makah Tribal Council invited the NIYC to support their challenge to the state of Washington's abrogation of tribal fishing rights in January 1964.<sup>86</sup> This sparked a round of fish-ins in the Northwest that continued for the next three years. "We did not come here to Olympia as militants," NIYC Executive Secretary Bruce Wilkie told an audience assembled at the state capital. "We came in protest, as sovereign nations to a sovereign State, of a militancy directed on us by a few non-Indian citizens."<sup>87</sup> For many of the persons involved, the fish-ins served as turning point in their lives. NIYC member Hank Adams (Assiniboine) wrote that their uncompromising direct action had won them an audience with the governor of Washington and compelled him to appoint a committee to investigate what caused the massive depletion of fish. The lessons were plain enough. "At this meeting," he told his readers, "Indian leaders were doing the talking for the most part. The Indian people were not being talked down to by 'high (or BIA) officials.'"<sup>88</sup>

The NIYC came into its own through the winter and spring of 1964. Board members Joan Noble (Ute), Shirley Hill Witt (Mohawk), and Herb Blatchford (Navajo), joined Thom and Warrior as they traveled across the nation, speaking at youth conferences in Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nevada, and New York.<sup>89</sup> At each of these engagements, they forcefully articulated ideas that conflicted with those enunciated by

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<sup>86</sup> Report, *American Aborigine* III, no. 1 (1964): 28.

<sup>87</sup> "Western Tribes Request Attention of Governor," *Americans Before Columbus* 1, no. 1 (May 5, 1964): 4.

<sup>88</sup> Adams, "NIYC," 7.

<sup>89</sup> "National Indian Youth Council Highlights," 2; Hank Adams, "Washington Tribes and NIYC" and "NIYC and Washington State," *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 3 (July 27, 1964): 4, 7; Niki Barnett, "American Indians Will Change Their Own 'Picture,'" *ibid.*, 8.

policymakers such as Stewart Udall and members of Congress. In one address, for instance, Mel Thom portrayed reservations not as wastelands or insular “pockets of poverty,” but as homelands. “Take away our lands and you are destroying a people; take away our lands and we become a lost people,” he explained. “It is a high price to pay for progress if Indians have to give up their homelands and step aside to this kind of progress. So why step aside?—When we can be a part of this progress by our own choices with our own lands and our own rights?”<sup>90</sup> Tribal lands and indigenous communities, then, were integral to the future and vital sources of strength in any campaign against poverty—not causes of isolation and indigence.

While popular conceptions portrayed the mainstream of American life as a healing salve, Mel Thom and others spoke of the poisons of the dominant society. “A ‘New Trail’ for Indians leading to equal citizenship privileges and responsibilities, maximum economic self-sufficiency, and full participation in American life is the keynote of the present ‘Great White Father,’” he contended in direct reference to the three guiding principles of the Udall task force’s findings in 1961. “While this is deemed the greatest help to Indians, it is also a threat to a more forced assimilation to American life.” Instead of invoking more platitudes about the citizenship responsibilities of Indians, he countered, non-Indians, states, and the federal government needed to scrutinize their own responsibilities—chief among these, the recognition of sovereignty and upholding of treaties.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Melvin D. Thom, “Reservations—Indian Homelands,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 1 (March 1964): 7.

<sup>91</sup> Mel Thom, “Indian War 1964,” *American Aborigine* III, no. 1 (1964): 7.

The NIYC was not recognized as a cooperating organization at the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty until it opened—this despite the involvement of Harvard University student and NIYC board member Robert V. Dumont (Assiniboiné) and George Washington University graduate William Hensley (Eskimo) on the planning committee. A deep suspicion ran through its ranks. The leadership not only questioned the rationale behind the War on Poverty, but judged the Council on Indian Affairs to be an assemblage of well-meaning non-Indians who were essentially mouthpieces for the established bureaucracy. Impelled by “their disappointment with the complacent attitude of older Indian leaders, and the domination of the Indian-interest organizations,” the youth organized a special session within the AICCP to voice their own viewpoints.<sup>92</sup>

In “A Statement Made for the Young People” read by Mel Thom, this younger generation argued that Indian involvement in the War on Poverty, just as the entire concept of development, must be seen to connote something different for tribes than for the dominant society. “As Indian youths, we say to you today that the Indian cannot be pushed into the mainstream of American life,” they contended. “We cannot work to destroy our lives as Indian people of this country.” They did not seek “freedom” from the federal trust status or from their so-called “primitive” cultures. Rather, they wanted freedom from “fear and anxiety.” “There is fear among our Indian people today that our tribal relationship with the Federal Government will be terminated soon,” Thom

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<sup>92</sup> “Newly-Elected Members of NIYC Board,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964); “American Indian Capital conference on Poverty,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 1 (March 1964): 4; “The Indian Progress: Newsletter of the Workshop on American Indian Affairs,” no. 5 (30 March 1962): n.p. For quote, see “National Indian Youth Council Highlights,” 2.

explained. "This fear must be removed and life allowed to develop by free choices."<sup>93</sup>

This socially constructed reality had implications for definitions of tribal cultures as well. Poverty, it followed, did not represent a cultural value specific to tribalism. In response to the notion of "cultural deprivation," they argued, "We do not want to destroy our culture, our life that brought us through the period in which the Indians were almost annihilated." "For any program or policy to work," they concluded, "we must be involved at the grassroots level. The responsibility to make decisions for ourselves must be placed in Indian hands. Any real help for Indian people must take cultural values into consideration. Programs set up to help Indian people must fit into the cultural framework."<sup>94</sup> The youth caucus within the AICCP revealed, in other words, the contested meanings of poverty, community, and Indian identity.

Although they employed iconoclastic rhetoric, NIYC members evoked a profound sense of optimism, hope, and faith in the basic principles on which the United States was founded. At the demonstration in Olympia, Clyde Warrior linked their protest to the great democratic appeals made by Americans citizens in the past. He further bound this to the Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. "Premier Khrushchev has said that no one can respect a nation which has broken so many treaties with Indian tribes," he told his audience at the demonstration. "Can we, as Americans, let that accusation stand?" Answering in the negative, Warrior clothed his appeal in the foundational values of life,

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<sup>93</sup> "Thom Talks of Poverty Among Tribes," *American Before Columbus* 2, no. 3 (July 27, 1964): 1.

<sup>94</sup> "A Statement Made for the Young People," United States Senate, *Economic Opportunity Act*, 340.

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. "America cannot afford to continue a system of repressive internal colonialism which parallels the Soviet treatment of national minorities," he concluded. "Indians need at least the self-determination that other American communities have."<sup>95</sup> The American Dream for Indians, however, meant respect for tribal sovereignty, the realization of self-determination, and economic development without the loss of their distinct legal and cultural identities.<sup>96</sup>

As distinctive as NIYC's concerns may have been, the evolution of their movement followed a trajectory remarkably similar to that of the civil rights and student movements. One could hear the strains of "naming the system" found in the Free Speech Movement, an emphasis on participatory democracy in common with Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a demand for self-determination and liberation in line with Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. "The system under which Indians live, a horrendous combination of colonialism, segregation, and discrimination, has been going on for 100 years," Warrior proclaimed.<sup>97</sup> Having named the system, NIYC retained—like many of the other movements during the early years of the 1960s—a profound faith in the nation's capacity for change. "We believed, and believe, that once the conscience of the American public is awakened," Hank Adams asserted, "they will demand that restitution be made, that justice prevail, that the Indian people be allowed the true choices of self-

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<sup>95</sup> Clyde Warrior, "On Current Indian Affairs," *Americans Before Columbus* 1, no. 1 [corrected as volume 2, no. 2] (May 5, 1964): 2.

<sup>96</sup> "Ponca Protests Treaty Breaking," 1. Warrior further connected Indian issues with contemporaneous conflicts over treaties in Panama and burgeoning student movements in Europe and Asia. On Panama, see Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91-97.

<sup>97</sup> Clyde Warrior, "On Current Indian Affairs," *Americans Before Columbus* 1, no. 1 (May 5, 1964): 2. See also, Thom, "Indian War 1964," 6.

determination and development.”<sup>98</sup> Neither radical nor revolutionary, NIYC members tried to tell the nation, like members of SDS and civil rights demonstrators, that the gross contradictions in the United States were breaking their American hearts.<sup>99</sup>

It is one thing to speak, another to be heard, and something different still to be understood. In January 1964, the NCAI provided Johnson with a litany of specific concerns about the federal trust relationship, treaties, and the assumption of state jurisdiction over tribal lands. The President responded with only a litany of statistics that showed Indians to be the poorest of the poor—the supreme justification for a war on poverty. A similar phenomenon unfolded at the American Indian Capital Conference as contrasting definitions of poverty, community, and Indian identity intertwined. Despite the impassioned statement of the youths, as well as the carefully worded findings of the other work groups, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey—who would soon be selected as Johnson’s running mate for the 1964 election—could still speak of Indians as “totally victimized by the ravages of poverty” and mired in a cultural trap that precluded progress. In so doing, he perpetuated the dichotomy between “tribal life and our modern society.” He demarcated a clear boundary between “us” and “the Other.” “Before we teach everybody else in the world how to live,” Humphrey stated, binding the antipoverty campaign to modernization ideology, “we could well do a little better at home.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hank Adams, “NIYC and Washington State,” 7.

<sup>99</sup> For the non-Indian context of “naming the system” and “breaking my American heart,” see Matusow, *Unraveling*, 317-19.

<sup>100</sup> For first quote, see Donald Jansen, “U.S. Asked to Ease Poverty of Tribes,” *The New York Times*, 10 May 1964. The second is from George Eagle, “Poverty of American Indians Called Mirror of U.S. Problem,” *The Washington Post*, 10 May 1964. The third can be found in Ernest L. Schusky, *The Right to be Indian* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1970), 2. Stewart Udall also spoke at the AICCP and echoes themes similar to those articulated by Hubert Humphrey. Donald Jansen, “Udall Asks Help for

The mainstream media coverage of the conference evidenced the same kinds of missed messages, as if policymakers could hear tribal leaders and young activists, but failed completely to comprehend them. "Poverty-Stricken Redskins Deserve a Better Fate" blared one ostensibly sympathetic article. Forty years after the granting of citizenship, the author brooded, Indians had yet to share in the full blessings of that status.<sup>101</sup> The idea of modernization, paternalism, and victimization crept into other reports, as well. In "Lo, the Aidless American Indian," one reporter opined that Indians needed "our help" no less than "countries emerging from the dark ages of colonialism. . . ." Since Indians were "our responsibility," he called Americans to "help the ancient people we have debased, swindled, degraded and almost destroyed while we were piously pledging them protection."<sup>102</sup> Even the coverage of the NIYC's "Campaign of Awareness," in a effort intended specifically to distinguish treaty versus civil rights, evoked similar coverage. Glossing over Marlon Brando's advocacy of treaty rights, the reporter merely observed that Indians were not just poor, but the poorest of the poor—they were not just discriminated against, but that they had it even worse than African Americans.<sup>103</sup>

The publicity garnered by the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty and the lobbying of the tribal members provided additional momentum to Indian involvement

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Indian Poor," *The New York Times*, 11 May 1964; "Udall Sees Hope of Anti-Poverty Aid for Indians," *Washington Post*, 11 May 1964, A7.

<sup>101</sup> Norman Ross, "Poverty-Stricken Redskins Deserve a Better Fate," *Chicago Daily News*, 2 June 1964, 16.

<sup>102</sup> Milburn P. Akers, "Lo, the Aidless American Indian," *Chicago Sun-Times*, 4 May 1964, 30.

<sup>103</sup> "Brando on Warpath," *The Miami Herald*, 2 February 1964, n.p., folder 4, box 282, Fred R. Harris Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Study, University of Oklahoma.

in the War on Poverty despite these troubling reports. Jack Conway, head of the Community Action segment of the President's Task Force on the War Against Poverty addressed the meeting early in the week, then returned to receive the findings of the work groups in person. When the Senate hearings opened in June, Robert F. Kennedy and Sargent Shriver reiterated their conviction that Indians would be at the forefront of the programs—that they would, indeed, receive preferential consideration.<sup>104</sup>

The Economic Opportunity Act swiftly made its way through the Senate and, on August 20, 1964, Lyndon Johnson signed it into law. Ultimately funded at approximately \$800 million, the EOA established the Job Corps, Community Action Program, Volunteers in Service to America, work training and work study programs, grants and loans to farmers, housing sanitation, education, and day care services for migrant families, small business development loans, and the work experience job training programs.<sup>105</sup> Established as the centerpiece of the War on Poverty, Community Action received \$300 million as an initial appropriation.<sup>106</sup> Amidst tremendous pomp and circumstance, the Johnson administration's antipoverty war had begun.

Yet portents of a less than total victory could be discerned that fall. Though no unanimity existed over the question of rehabilitation versus empowerment of the poor, it was clear that the War on Poverty would not redistribute wealth—it would not ask

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<sup>104</sup> "American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty, Registered Conference Members," attached to "American Indian Capital on Conference Program," folder 10, box 409, series III, subseries V, AAIA Archives; United States Senate, *Economic Opportunity Act*, 122-23, 137-40, 207-12.

<sup>105</sup> OEO Administrative History, 36-37; "A Summary of Educational Implications: Economic Opportunity Act of 1964," National Education Association of the United States Special Report, 4 September 1964, "OEO [1 of 3]" folder, box 28, Departmental, Tom Steed Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>106</sup> Matusow, *Unraveling*, 245.

Americans to make any sacrifices. Predicated on the politics of abundance, it would prepare impoverished people and communities to take advantage of the opportunities presented by a burgeoning economy. Further, while antipoverty planners sought to finesse the issue of race, denying that it was targeted for either African Americans or the inner city, that distinction would become virtually impossible to maintain.<sup>107</sup> And finally, as Lyndon Johnson set about launching his war on poverty at home, another stirred in Southeast Asia. Two weeks before he signed the Economic Opportunity Act, Johnson sought and attained congressional approval for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. In 1963 alone, the United States had already committed twice as much American capital to that little known conflict than it would to fighting poverty through Community Action in its first year. Although he promised no further escalation, Johnson already confronted the dilemma between guns and butter.<sup>108</sup>

In the wake of the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty, Clyde Warrior urged an audience of Indian youths to stop “sitting on the sidelines” of what he considered to be “a tremendously exciting time in history.” Speaking on what he called a “quiet revolution,” he told Indian students gathered at Wisconsin State University—Eau Claire, “very few Americans seem to realize that American students are reforming and changing the very nature and fabric of our society.”<sup>109</sup> That fall, the Berkeley Free Speech Movement blossomed on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, a turning

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<sup>107</sup> Sundquist, ed., *On Fighting Poverty*, 49; Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 55; Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement*, 62-65.

<sup>108</sup> Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 97-106, 146-56; Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 679.

<sup>109</sup> David Farber and Beth Bailey, *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 198-99; Warrior, “Time for Indian Action,” 2.

point for student activism. Clyde Warrior recognized very early the potency of such nascent rumblings of disaffection.

His own brand of activism was fired by the experience of growing up Indian in the notoriously racist town of Ponca City, Oklahoma. He further refined them as a founding member of the National Indian Youth Council and as a budding intellectual under the tutelage of Robert K. Thomas at the Workshop on American Indian Affairs. Along with other members of the NIYC, he integrated the titanic struggles of the day—integration, civil rights, national liberation, decolonization—into a world view distinctively his own. And now he carried his convictions to other youths who shared his experiences. “[W]hen I go to conferences at which these ‘future Indian leaders’ are gathered together,” he told his audience in Wisconsin, “I get the impression many times that these very same adults have structured the conference, defined the problem, and implied the solutions.”<sup>110</sup>

The War on Poverty intersected with, and became a part of, this struggle to establish the terms of debate and redefine the boundaries of discourse. Though its beginning may have been less than auspicious, there would be an antipoverty campaign, and Indians would be a central part of it.<sup>111</sup> They may very well have come through the back door, as it were, but so too did Community Action and the principle of maximum feasible participation. What is more important, Indians actively engaged in the politics of poverty during this formative period—they did not stand idly by as non-Indian elites dictated their future. Instead, through their encounters with Richard Boone, Robert F.

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<sup>110</sup> Warrior, “Time for Indian Action,” 2.

<sup>111</sup> Roessel interview.

Kennedy, Sargent Shriver, and other policymakers, they sought to define the War on Poverty on terms of their own making and to transform the politics of poverty into the politics of tribal self-determination.

Chapter Four  
activists & Manipulators:  
The Politics of Poverty, 1964-1965

What was impressive in OEO was we really understood we didn't know what the hell we were doing. But we also understood that our secret weapon was that we knew that nobody else did either—at least we could be honest about that.

Edgar Cahn<sup>1</sup>

Let's stir up the pot and see what happens.

Dr. Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota)<sup>2</sup>

During the early summer of 1965, Dr. Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota) received an unexpected phone call. Edgar Cahn, a special assistant to Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) Director R. Sargent Shriver, told him that OEO had laid the groundwork for an Indian Division that would coordinate reservation Community Action Programs, and they wanted him to be its head. Wilson's decision to accept the offer did not come easily. He and his wife enjoyed stable teaching positions at Chadron State College in Chadron, Nebraska, had five children to care for, and lived only forty miles from family on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Nonetheless, they ultimately decided that the offer represented too great an opportunity to forgo. That summer they gave most of their possessions to their relatives, packed their remaining things into an old station wagon, and traded the rural comforts of the Midwest for a new life inside the Beltway.<sup>3</sup>

From the moment he assumed his interim post as a program analyst in September 1965, Wilson resolved to use what power he had to advance the cause of reform. The

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<sup>1</sup> Edgar S. Cahn, interview by author, tape recording, Washington, D.C., 20 May 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 7 October 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 5 October 2001; Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 6 October 2001; Dr. Jim Wilson, "Running Wild: Six Years With a Government Checkbook," pp. 1-3, unpublished manuscript in author's possession; "New Indian Exec.," *War Cry* 1, no. 4 (8 April 1966): 1.

strident rhetoric of anticolonialism and national liberation may not have been his forte, but Wilson had been involved in Indian youth councils as a graduate student at Arizona State University and embraced the central tenets of the nascent Red Power movement. The latter's principles, Wilson contended, were consonant with those of the Nation of Islam, the Black Muslims. "Generally," he commented in an interview during the summer of 1966, "I think that it is a nationalistic movement for self-determination." And for this reason, Wilson identified himself as a Red Muslim. "You know, you probably notice here looking at me I have on a striped shirt and brown tie and horn-rimmed glasses and all of this," he told his interviewer, "yet I identify very strongly as an Indian." Simply because he had chosen to work in the federal government did not mean that he had surrendered his own national identity. "Wherever I am, when I think of my people," Wilson explained, "I think of the Indian people first and the American people second. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

In Community Action Wilson discerned nothing less than an opportunity to build a new administrative structure for Indian affairs. Until the mid-1960s, that structure resembled a pyramid with "white men who are running government programs, enhancing their careers" at its pinnacle, "a lot of fighting at the middle over management roles, and, at the bottom, all the poor Indians," Wilson explained. Tribal governments and local people possessed only a modicum of formally-sanctioned, institutionalized power within

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by Stan Steiner, tape recording, Washington, D.C., c. 1966, series VIII, Stan Steiner Collection, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California; "Indian Clubs Report," *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 1 (March 1964); "What's Going On?" *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 2 (5 May 1964).

this structure. “So, my idea was to create an Indian pyramid,” he posited, “to bring some guys with capabilities to the top—like giving them money and program authority and decision making authority. . . .” Through initiatives such as Community Action, Upward Bound, summer pre-law programs, Head Start, and community health representatives, Wilson provided money to tribes that could be used to train people to become political leaders, teachers, school administrators, physicians, and lawyers. If you could get Indians into all of these institutions, he reasoned, then Indians could control them.<sup>5</sup>

But even this surreptitious form of activism placed him in danger of raising the ire of pro-terminationist congresspersons. “I said to myself many times, ‘Maybe I’m wrong. Maybe I’m being an egotistical asshole or something. Maybe one of these days they’re going to pounce on me. Maybe one of these days they’re going to figure this out, and they’re going to cut my throat politically,’” he recalled.<sup>6</sup> Thirty years after he left OEO, he pondered the question of whether he perceived himself as an activist for taking this stance. “Well, yes, with a small ‘a,’” he thoughtfully replied. “I would see myself with a big ‘M’ as manipulator. My goal was to manipulate the system.”<sup>7</sup>

From Wilson’s perspective, one had to distinguish those who worked within a system to affect change from those who went outside of it. But that did not make him any less an advocate of reform. Indeed, the volatile struggle for black equality and divisive politics of the Vietnam War created a milieu conducive to it. “I was smart enough, after a

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<sup>5</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001; Wilson, “Running Wild,” 2.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001.

<sup>7</sup> As president of the Dawa-Chindi Indian Club at ASU, he invited Clyde Warrior to be a keynote speaker. Just before joining OEO, he served on an education committee with Mel Thom, Karen Rickard, and others that had been established by the Council on Indian Affairs. Still later, he would help NIYC secure much needed resources from the Upward Bound program. Wilson interview, 5 October 2001.

great deal of contemplation, to see that these two clouds provided wonderful cover,” Wilson reflected. Even as the politics of race and war invaded all aspects of American life, he consciously avoided taking public stands on them. By remaining silent on these particular issues, he could transcend the internal schisms that wracked the Johnson administration while also evading congressional scrutiny. No good could come from becoming “a target,” he reasoned.<sup>8</sup>

Jim Wilson was not alone in tempering moral conviction with *realpolitik*. One of the most unyielding activists of the time, Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Lakota), Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) from 1964 to 1967, adopted a similar strategy—one that he had learned from longtime veterans of Indian politics such as Joseph Garry (Coeur d’ Alene), Roger Jourdain (Anishinabe), and Frank Ducheneaux (Lakota). Rather than bombast and confrontation, they used diplomacy and mediation in the NCAI’s battles over tribal sovereignty. From Deloria’s perspective, any attempt to wield overwhelming force against terminationists could lead only to defeat. Indian politics, he remembered Ducheneaux telling him, was better likened to stealing horses. “You don’t stand on top of the hill and yell at the Union Pacific, ‘We’re gonna come take your horses tonight!’” the longtime veteran explained. “You’re very subtle, you sneak in there and take the stuff.”<sup>9</sup>

During the formative years of the War on Poverty, Indians and non-Indians used this strategy to great effect. Rather than occupying government facilities or organizing

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<sup>8</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Colorado, 18 October 2001.

demonstrations, they opted for more subtle forms of resistance and accommodation. Theirs was the activism of federal bureaucrats manipulating the system, of social scientists using government programs to advance iconoclastic ideas about the poor, of Indian politicians playing one government agency off on another, of local people organizing Community Action agencies to counteract institutionalized paternalism. These strategies call into question the seductive but ultimately misleading argument that Indian activism somehow emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the American Indian Movement (AIM) burst onto the scene and the Indians of All Tribes occupied Alcatraz Island.<sup>10</sup>

Overt militancy may have erupted on a scale unseen in decades, but activism surely did not. Indeed, indigenous peoples could not have persevered centuries of contact with colonial powers had they not been activists from the first. Their survival demanded it. Rather than passively enduring policies imposed upon them, Indians often engaged in what anthropologist James C. Scott has called “powerless politics.” That Indians and others often adopted strategies at odds with stereotypical definitions of activism did not mean that they failed to act in political ways. Nor did the absence of militant confrontation, as Scott demonstrated with his discussions of “everyday forms of resistance” and “hidden transcripts,” preclude them from exercising power. Through resistance or accommodation, in the public eye or inside the home, as oral testimony or

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<sup>10</sup> This conventional periodization continues to have staying power. “In the past Native Americans had few options but to endure the policies imposed upon them,” historian Thomas Clarkin asserted in a recent study of Indian policy during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, “but by the mid-1960s, Indian activism, though still limited in scope, was a reality.” Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 198.

performative practice, Indians continued to encounter newcomers in political and empowered ways, even as the United States attained the status of a global superpower in the wake of the Second World War.<sup>11</sup>

Attention to these “small a” activists and “big M” manipulators connects Indian history to the growing scholarship on the “other sixties.” They would not confront the system but manipulate it. They would not seek to condemn the white power structure but bore from within it and subtly bend it to their will. The War on Poverty may not have provided an ideal context in which to move, but it did afford an opportunity to upset the status quo. It may not have had the power to compel the Bureau of Indian Affairs to reform itself, but it could be used as leverage toward that end. This was precisely the angle pursued by the Task Force on American Indian Poverty in the spring of 1964. It also informed Jim Wilson’s decision to assume a post within the Office of Economic Opportunity and guided Vine Deloria Jr., as he took the reins of the floundering National Congress of American Indians. Working from within the system, this diverse cohort bound the politics of poverty to the politics of tribal self-determination.

In the summer and fall of 1964, the President’s Task Force on the War Against Poverty set about creating the operational and administrative scaffolding for the Office of

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<sup>11</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). For an application of Scott’s ideas to the civil rights struggle, see Robin D.G. Kelley, “The Black Poor and the Politics of Opposition in a New South City, 1929-1970” in *The “Underclass” Debate: Views from History*, ed. Michael B. Katz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 293-333. For another provocative, and in some ways problematic, look at the semiotics of opposition, see Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Studies of Indian boarding and day schools have provided important insights into everyday forms resistance. A recent treatment is Thomas G. Andrews, “Turning the Tables on Assimilation: Oglala Lakotas and the Pine Ridge Day Schools, 1889-1920s,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (winter 2002): 407-30.

Economic Opportunity. In July, with passage of the Economic Opportunity Act imminent, Richard Boone oversaw the expansion of the original Task Force on American Indian Poverty and charged it with laying the foundation for sixteen reservation-based Community Action programs. Robert Roessel, Francis McKinley (Ute), Forrest Gerard (Blackfeet), and James Officer returned to spearhead the task force. To this core group of advisors were added B. Frank Belvin (Cherokee), James Hena (Tesuque Pueblo), Vernon Jackson (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs), George Smith (Anishinabe), and Helen Scheirbeck (Lumbee). These were ordinary people not elites, Indians with strong ties to their communities not detached white policymakers. Working in concert with non-Indians equally committed to upending the status quo, they would be the ones who defined what the War on Poverty would mean in Native America.<sup>12</sup>

“Everything was moving so fast, and we were trying to get things started and out before things closed in on us,” Richard Boone said of the frenetic pace set by the architects of the antipoverty campaign. He assumed that they would have only eighteen months to realize the full potential of what they had set out to do. “After that, everything closes in on you bureaucratically,” Boone explained. “So, we were trying to do a helluva lot. . .very early.”<sup>13</sup> With BIA assistance, the Indian task force chose to concentrate on

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<sup>12</sup> The BIA offered the support of Billings Area Director James Canan, Wade Head of the Phoenix Area Office, and BIA special assistant for economic development Gordon MacGregor. As the Indian task force set out to fulfill its charge, Boone actively sought additional advice from Association on American Indian Affairs General Counsel Richard Schifter and Executive Director William Byler. William Finale to Phoenix, Portland, Aberdeen, Muskogee, Gallup, Billings, and Minneapolis Area Offices, 5 August 1964 and Gordon MacGregor to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1964, “Community Action Task Force” folder, box 7, Recordings Relating to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>13</sup> Richard W. Boone, interview by author, tape recording, 8 November 2002.

tribes from a broad range of geographical regions—the Papagos (Tohono O’odham), Pimas and Maricopas, Navajos, and Acoma and Santo Domingo Pueblos in the Southwest; the Walker River Paiutes and Tulalips of the Great Basin and Northwest Coast; and the Chippewa-Crees, Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandans, Arikas, and Hidatsas), Spirit Lake Dakotas, Pine Ridge Oglala Lakotas, and Leech Lake Anishinabe from the Plains and Great Lakes regions. Beginning first with these reservation pilot projects, Boone intended then to focus attention on off-reservation communities.<sup>14</sup>

Members of the Task Force on American Indian Poverty brought their personal experiences to bear on the project. Robert Roessel, whom one observer described as “pretty much ‘back to the blanket,’” emerged as one of the preeminent figures.<sup>15</sup> His marriage into a Navajo family profoundly shaped his worldview and added greater depth to an already fervent opposition to paternalism. Accordingly, he viewed the War on Poverty as something more than a service-providing program. “I think all the people on that task force strongly believed in the necessity for Indian involvement and control,” Roessel remembered.<sup>16</sup>

Forrest Gerard, the young head of Tribal Operations for the Indian Division of the

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<sup>14</sup> Jack Conway to John Carver, 14 July 1964 and Ted B. White to Jack Conway, 31 July 1964, “Community Action Task Force” folder, box 7, Records Relating to OEO, RG 75, NA; William Byler to Richard Boone, 22 July 1964, folder 10, box 404, series III, subseries III and Richard Boone to William Byler, 7 August 1964, folder 3, box 35, series I, subseries III, Association on American Indian Affairs Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey.

<sup>15</sup> This observation was made by anthropologist Joan Ablon, a Sol Tax student who conducted groundbreaking ethnographic research in Los Angeles’s urban Indian communities and later taught at Berkeley. Evidencing her profound respect for Roessel, Ablon noted, “I don’t think I want to get into a straight OEO situation without his unique flavor and ethics.” Joan Ablon to Sol Tax, 15 April 1966 and Joan Ablon to Sol Tax, 6 July 1966, folder 4, box 112, Series IV, Sol Tax Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>16</sup> Robert A. Roessel Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Rough Rock, Ariz., 28 May 2002.

United States Public Health Service, concurred. "I don't think there was any question that all of us saw the opportunity for change here. We had no great debates in the task force that I recall as to who should control the money. We saw this as a real opportunity for tribes to begin shaping their own programs," he recalled. "There was never any thought in my mind or the others that this ought to go through the BIA." In fact, he anticipated quite the opposite. The federal government ought to fund Community Action, and the BIA might provide limited technical assistance upon request, but the power to design, manage, and administer the program needed to reside in the tribes.<sup>17</sup>

Drawing from his memories of growing up on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, Gerard had come to discern a parallel between colonialism and the administrative structure that governed federal-Indian relations. "[M]y father was an Indian rancher, and we would come into Browning, it was a town on the reservation. I remember our going to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for some reason. . . . We had to deal with a lease or some business matter. The only Indian people I saw [were], in fact, two of my sisters [who] were secretaries there. The top people were all white," he explained. The spatial arrangement of the reservation told a similar story. "In the town of Browning there was the agency square, and then the rest of us lived in the other part of town," Gerard continued. "So, I don't think that the term 'colonial system' can be claimed by [the] Kennedys or anyone else. Those of use who were Indians recognized what it was."<sup>18</sup>

Members of the Task Force on the War on Poverty therefore invested the

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<sup>17</sup> Forrest Gerard, interview by author, tape recording, Albuquerque, New Mex., 30 May 2002 and Forrest Gerard, interview by author, tape recording, Albuquerque, New Mex., 31 May 2002.

<sup>18</sup> Gerard interview, 30 May 2002.

antipoverty campaign with specific and definite meanings. They particularly recognized its larger philosophical, programmatic, and administrative import. “We viewed OEO,” Gerard stated years later, “as an agency that could bring an end, hopefully, to the colonial administration of Indian affairs.”<sup>19</sup> And yet they also clearly understood its limitations. None of them thought that the War on Poverty could alleviate structural inequalities or lift tribes entirely out of poverty. Rather, it would give professionally trained Indians who might otherwise live in urban and rural non-reservations areas an opportunity, as Gerard noted, “to return home and to try and help their people.”<sup>20</sup>

James S. Hena represented one such leader. Born in Tesuque Pueblo in February 1930, he earned a business degree from Haskell, served in the Army’s ordinance corps, and graduated from St. Michael’s College in Santa Fe, New Mexico. By age thirty-five, he had served four terms in public office—two as lieutenant governor of Tesuque Pueblo and two as governor. After his tenure with the Task Force on American Indian Poverty, he continued to work with the Office of Economic Opportunity, first in Arizona State University’s Indian Community Action Project, then as director of the Eight Northern Pueblos Community Action Program.<sup>21</sup>

Like Gerard and Roessel, personal experience shaped his approach to politics. “When I lived with my grandparents, my grandfather taught me to respect my elders, my grandfather taught me to respect the ways of my people, and, although he is gone, I find

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<sup>19</sup> Gerard interview, 31 May 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Gerard interview, 31 May 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Biography, James S. Hena, “Correspondence (Folder 3 of 4), Eight Northern Pueblos of New Mexico” folder, box 61, Grant Files, 1965-69, RG 381, NA II.

that these things still remain with me,” he recalled.<sup>22</sup> Embracing the role of cultural intermediary, Hena applied the lessons he learned from his family to the strategies he crafted to negotiate change. Public and private life—the personal and the political—were interwoven. Like many of his colleagues, James Hena endeavored to reform the system from within. “His fondest virtue at that point,” Forrest Gerard remembered, “was that he was totally anti-BIA and later went to work for them.”<sup>23</sup>

But Hena did not limit his criticism to the Indian Bureau. In March 1965, the Task Force on American Indian Poverty assembled in Tempe, Arizona, to discuss the progress they had made toward establishing the sixteen pilot Community Action programs. After two days of private meetings, they participated in a conference cosponsored by Arizona State University’s Indian Education Research Center and the Dawa-Chindi American Indian Club. The symposium brought together some 475 delegates from forty tribes in twenty states.<sup>24</sup> “The poverty program will work only if Washington decides to listen to Indian people,” Hena argued before a crowd that included OEO officials. “This act presents the opportunity to us to show that we can manage our own affairs,” he continued, “and especially that we have ideas of our own which someone should listen to if we are going to become self-sufficient.”<sup>25</sup>

Also in attendance at the March symposium was Francis McKinley, Community

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<sup>22</sup> “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference: Use of Educational Weapons in the War on Poverty,” p. 24, 12-13 March 1965, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

<sup>23</sup> Gerard Interview, 30 May 2002.

<sup>24</sup> The Dawa-Chindi Indian Club simultaneously hosted the Southwest Regional Indian Youth Council that year. “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 60; “Dawa-Chindi Hosts Conference,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 5 (June 1965).

<sup>25</sup> “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 10, quote at 26.

Services Director of the Uintah and Ouray Utes and chairperson of the Task Force on American Indian Poverty. "The reason why we have lost so much land, why we have lost so many kinds of opportunities is because we did not know, we did not have the knowledge, we were not articulate enough to present our needs, we weren't able to cope with politicians, with congressmen, with lawyers, with those self-interested who are ready to take over what we have," he told the tribal delegates, speaking from an intimate confrontation with termination. "So as we remain in ignorance, you can bet your life that we'll lose what we got."<sup>26</sup> McKinley specifically called for a renewed commitment to the New Deal's emphasis on self-governance but this time with the concerted involvement of tribal communities at the grassroots level. The War on Poverty, he anticipated, would serve as "a catalyst" for achieving both of these aims.<sup>27</sup>

The same élan drove the people to whom the Indian Task Force reported. Sidney Woolner, the first director of OEO's newly formed Office of Special Programs, had no prior background in Indian affairs. As a veteran of the labor movement, however, he possessed firm convictions about issues concerning social and economic justice. Moreover, he publically rejected the idea of forced assimilation and just as aggressively promoted cultural pluralism. Like many other individuals involved in the early days of the War on Poverty, Woolner saw in the idea of maximum feasible participation of the poor the potential for "a real revolution." The civil rights movement had accelerated the democratization of American life. Now, he argued, its liberating power needed to be

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<sup>26</sup> "Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference," 39; Gerard interview, 30 May 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, NA II.

extended to others.

The War on Poverty may have been “designed for all poor people without reference to any racial or ethnic group,” Woolner noted, but that did not mean it could not be tailored specifically to tribes.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, from the vantage point of Community Action’s designers, institutionalized paternalism represented a shared problem. It did not discriminate on the basis of race, region, or ethnicity. One did not need to be a student of Indian history to believe that if reservations represented the epitome of poverty, then the BIA signified the very quintessence of welfare colonialism. It followed that none of the central planners of the War on Poverty harbored much sympathy for the established welfare bureaucracy, but they reserved particular disdain for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They also understood that wherever Community Action agencies were located and whatever conflict should surround them, they would all have to reckon with the nettlesome question of power—of who had it and who did not. Given these circumstances, it would not be difficult to tailor programs specifically to tribes, nor would it be impossible to anticipate the tension that might result.<sup>29</sup>

The drawing of close parallels between Indians and others was not unique to people within OEO, nor did it necessarily bode well for Native peoples. In print and on television, in casual conversation and in formal debate, allusions to urban reservations

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<sup>28</sup> MacGregor to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1964, NA; Gerard interview, 30 May 2002; Sidney H. Woolner, “The War on Poverty as Applied to the Navajo,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 4, no. 3 (May 1965): 16-21. For quote, see Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, NA II.

<sup>29</sup> Noel Klores, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 10 November 2001. Sanford Kravitz, “The Community Action Program—Past, Present, and Its Future?” in *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience*, Perspectives on Poverty, vol. 2, ed. James L. Sundquist (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 62.

and rural ghettos abounded. By the mid-sixties, popular conceptions of Indian homelands, Appalachian hollows, and inner cities merged. "The difference between the ghettos of Watts, Harlem, and the Indian reservations," one congressman could therefore proclaim, "is only one of geography."<sup>30</sup> To suggest similarities between these areas was one matter, to treat them as homogenous was quite another.

Lost in this process of convergence was the idea so central to Indian activists during the late 1950s and early 1960s—the conception of tribes as developing nations. Evidencing the deleterious effect of this transition, NCAI President John Belindo (Kiowa-Navajo) posited in 1965, "The 'American Indian Point IV Program' is a dream that is still far from becoming a reality. But it promises to be the answer to the Indians' World—an impoverished, undeveloped country in the midst of the richest nation in history."<sup>31</sup> Even as Belindo wrote these words, however, the idea of Indians as an impoverished minority group seemed to be growing virtually impervious to such alternative constructions of reality. Whatever space had been carved out for the recognition of Indians as sovereign political entities in the past now stood in danger of being overrun.

Part of this must be attributed to the War on Poverty, at least insofar as it revitalized a stock of words and images that had long been a part of American culture. Newspapers ran series on poor people and their communities, journals devoted issues to poverty, and the major networks aired documentaries on hunger and homelessness.

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<sup>30</sup> Press Release, Oregon Representative Robert B. Duncan, 13 June 1966, folder 8, box 81, Fred R. Harris Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Study, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>31</sup> John Belindo, "Changing Profile," *The Oklahoma Journal* (1 November 1965), folder 11, box 4, American Indian Institute Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

Those who designed the antipoverty program understood that they would have to win the hearts and minds of the American people—that they would need average citizens to share their definitions of the problems and the remedies. Yet a tremendous perceptual gulf existed between the public and personnel within the Office of Economic Opportunity, between those who were poor and those who were once again rediscovering their existence. And it was not at all clear whether the War on Poverty could bridge this chasm.

The group charged with getting Community Action up and running accepted the challenge, nonetheless. Moreover, Richard Boone, Sandy Kravitz, and Jack Conway extended their activist impulse and aversion to the status quo to Indian affairs. Described by Forrest Gerard as a “sarcastic, brilliant, hard-driving, get things done kind of guy,” Boone told tribal leaders that if poor people secured full participation through the Community Action Program, it promised to be “one of the most controversial acts in the last fifty years.”<sup>32</sup> Before this same audience, James Hena had challenged OEO to live up to its rhetoric. Now Boone reiterated his sincere commitment to making impersonal bureaucracies accountable to the people they purportedly served. “There are a lot of institutions which are not particularly geared to, or interested in doing this,” he warned, “Some of these institutions will fight against change.”<sup>33</sup> Those who listened to this admonition did not need further clarification—Richard Boone was not only referring to

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<sup>32</sup> For the first quote, see Gerard interview, 30 May 2002. The second quotation is from Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 35. For information on the Community Action Task Force of which Richard Boone was a part, see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 168.

<sup>33</sup> Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 35.

the Bureau of Indians Affairs, he was taking sides.<sup>34</sup>

During the summer and fall of 1964, Robert Roessel and Forrest Gerard took the lead in carrying this message to the sixteen tribal communities targeted for pilot Community Action programs. "We visited all the tribal councils, community meetings, and we talked about it," Roessel remembered of his trips through Indian Country. "All we did was say, here's an opportunity. Here's a chance for you to show that you can determine your needs and your problems as well as solutions. It's up to you, not up to me, not up to the BIA. It's up to you."<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Forrest Gerard recalled of his visits with the Tulalips, Chippewa-Crees, and several Anishinaabe communities in Minnesota, "There was a lot of activism taking place down at the reservation level about managing and controlling."<sup>36</sup> Community Action, in other words, tapped into a long tradition of antipathy toward the federal government and its domination of American Indians' lives.

A tremendous outpouring of tribal initiative followed in the wake of Roessel's and Gerard's visits. Navajos Allen Yazzie and Peter MacDonald organized community meetings at various chapter houses in their nation. "[W]orking days, nights, and weekends" for three weeks, the newly formed Community Action Committee defined, prioritized, and finally formalized tribal needs into a program proposal, MacDonald reported.<sup>37</sup> In New Mexico, representatives from four pueblos volunteered their time and

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<sup>34</sup> Years later, he made the point more directly: "There was conflict because we said, 'Absolutely no, BIA's not going to run this.'" Boone interview, 8 November 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Roessel interview.

<sup>36</sup> Gerard interview, 30 May 2002; Gerard interview, 31 May 2002; Forrest Gerard, Trip Report Summary, August 3-14 and August 23, 1964, attached to Carruth J. Wagner to Philleo Nash, 22 September 1964, "Community Action Task Force" folder, box 7, Records Relating to OEO, RG 75, NA I.

<sup>37</sup> Peter MacDonald, "Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference," 15-19.

traveled up to seventy-five miles on weekends so that they could design a Community Action Program.<sup>38</sup> Three hundred Acoma Pueblos attended still another meeting organized by Roessel in July 1964. The tribal council then appointed a Community Action Committee that met with virtually all of the adults living in the Pueblo. Before their work was done, stated one member, they had “met every other night for nearly two months. . . .”<sup>39</sup>

Less optimistic premonitions accompanied the sense of exhilaration that ran through Indian Country during the early months of the War on Poverty. Many of them emanated from within the Task Force on American Indian Poverty. Helen Scheirbeck, a member of the non-federally recognized Lumbees of North Carolina, bemoaned its inattention to non-reservation and urban Indians. In a candid letter to University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax, she expressed her disappointment, writing, “[T]he BIA and tribal attorneys seem to be doing most of the project developments.”<sup>40</sup> Although they took heart in the response of local communities, Robert Roessel and Forrest Gerard shared some of her reservations. They too warned that the bureaucratic rigidity of the application process had already forced tribes to rely heavily on technical assistance from outsiders, and particularly the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

If OEO failed to take into account the disparity between their expectations and those of tribes, and thus rejected tribal applications on these grounds, then they would

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<sup>38</sup> James Hena, “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 25.

<sup>39</sup> Stanley Paytiamo, “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 30.

<sup>40</sup> Helen Scheirbeck to Sol Tax, 1 October 1964, folder 3, box 152, series IV, Tax Papers. She voiced similar concerns to the other task force members. Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, p. 11, NA II. Jim Wilson remembered a similar problem and actively fought against it. Wilson interview, 5 October 2001.

betray the essence of maximum feasible participation and self-determination. “[P]art of the new revolution is to make the White power structure accept the notion that the level of Indian education and technical competence was not readily going to produce a masterful kind of documented and insightful program,” Roessel contended during a meeting of the Task Force on American Indian Poverty in March 1965.<sup>41</sup>

Professionalism, he cautioned, would betray “the very guts of the program. . . .”<sup>42</sup>

The complicated wording of the Economic Opportunity Act, confusion between OEO and BIA initiatives, and “conflicting and confusing information in the press and information received by word of mouth” further complicated matters. Task Force member Vernon Jackson of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs discussed the consequences. “The Washington office is nit-picking in their review of the projects. I am concerned over the absence of support for our proposals,” he exclaimed at the March 1965 task force meeting. “Washington utterly fails to understand.”<sup>43</sup> The Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation, as well as the Navajos, also had their initial proposals rejected and returned for resubmission before they received OEO funding.

At the heart of the matter rested the question of how indigenous Community Action would be. “If the Bureau is involved,” task force member B. Frank Belvin (Choctaw) explained, “some Indians feel the program will not be theirs.”<sup>44</sup> James Hena

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<sup>41</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, pp. 6-8, quote at p. 6, NA II.

<sup>42</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, p. 6, NA II.

<sup>43</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, p. 12, NA II.

<sup>44</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, p. 13, NA II.

echoed similar sentiments. "When we first heard about the program, we were told this would be a tribal program. The tribes could use the Bureau for advice, but actually quite often the Bureau writes it up for the Tribes," he complained. "The ideas must come from the tribes."<sup>45</sup> The same thinking informed a number of additional proposals by the task force members, many of them deriving from discussions with community leaders. They sought foremost to inhibit the professionalization of Community Action by insuring that tribal members had an opportunity to be trained for all of the positions that would be created under its auspices.<sup>46</sup>

A sharp disjunction between Indians' definitions of their needs and the resources available to them through the War on Poverty compounded the problem. Its meagerly funded, human resource-based programs seemed to provide mere bandages for what amounted to gaping wounds. Given the congressional ban on so-called "bricks and mortar" projects, for instance, OEO could not build new homes, improve roads, repair bridges or install water and sewage facilities on a mass scale. Instead, Community Action agencies provided study centers, cultural enrichment programs, limited aid for housing repairs, a modicum of job training, remedial English courses, and health aides.<sup>47</sup> "My people were uprooted, shuttled, and mixed and every semblance of organization was destroyed," Three Affiliated Tribes Chairman Robert Fox said of the destruction wrought by the building of the Garrison Dam in North Dakota. It was difficult to imagine how

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<sup>45</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, p. 13, NA II.

<sup>46</sup> Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, pp. 8 and 10, NA II.

<sup>47</sup> Forrest Gerard, Trip Report Summary, NA I; Task Force on American Indian Poverty Meeting, 10 March 1965, NA II.

Head Start programs for preschoolers and home improvement loans, no matter how welcomed they might have been, could begin to repair this kind of damage. Indeed, some tribal representatives even questioned whether the War on Poverty would last long enough to make any impact at all.<sup>48</sup>

Non-Indian observers shared these feelings of hope and foreboding. AAIA Executive Director William Byler praised the Economic Opportunity Act as “the most important piece of social legislation in the history of Indian affairs.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, he viewed OEO’s commitment to “citizen participation as a kind of ‘third force’ in community development.” Yet he questioned the BIA’s capacity to cooperate. “It is symptomatic of a whole way of thinking on the part of the Bureau that all good things flow from Washington. . .” he declared to AAIA President Alden Stevens. “So often I see in the news clips where some Superintendent is spouting off about the great accomplishments on the reservation, with little or no allusion to the fact that no progress is possible without the leadership of the tribal community.” This, he feared, would be the undoing of the War on Poverty and its emphasis on tribal self-determination.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Forrest Gerard, Trip Report Summary, pp. 4-5 NA I; James Hena, “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 25; Task Force on American Indian Poverty Report, 10 March 1965, p. 2. For quote, see Robert Fox (Three Affiliated Tribes), “Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference,” 21.

<sup>49</sup> William Byler to Sargent Shriver, 5 October 1965 attached to Theodore Berry to William Byler, 29 October 1965, folder 6, box 148, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives.

<sup>50</sup> William Byler to Alden Stevens, 29 July 1964, folder 2, box 46, AAIA Archives. With that said, the AAIA had its own contradictions with which to struggle. Not only did its officers and board members remain almost exclusively non-Indian, General Counsel Richard Schifter continued to be the Democratic Party’s unofficial speech writer for Indian affairs. Schifter had already written a policy statement for the Kennedy administration and a speech for then Senator Hubert Humphrey to deliver at the American Indian Capital Conference on Poverty. He next wrote a speech that was to be delivered by Humphrey—now speaking as the Vice President of the United States—in Window Rock. Ultimately, it was not given in person but sent to Navajo Tribal Chairman Raymond Nakai in September 1964 accompanied by Humphrey’s signature. Interior Stewart Udall then distributed the letter widely, calling it “an

The War on Poverty's emphasis on community development also piqued the interest of the anthropologists involved in organizing the landmark American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) of 1961. Indeed, opportunity theory and action anthropology shared intellectual roots that could be traced to social scientific theories developed at the University of Chicago. For AICC co-coordinator Nancy O. Lurie, however, the excitement generated by the War on Poverty presented a dilemma. In 1961, the organizers and participants of the AICC attempted to convey information to a public that lacked interest in the welfare of Native Americans. Now the reverse seemed to be materializing in that there existed tremendous public interest but no real understanding of Indian people.

Accordingly, Lurie fired an urgent letter to her friend, mentor, and fellow anthropologist Sol Tax, encouraging him to reissue the "Declaration of Indian Purpose." Above all else, Lurie questioned the motivations and sincerity of the people who claimed to be so deeply concerned about American Indians. "Where were all these eager to help people when all Indians wanted was FRIENDS to write letters to Congressmen and Senators in such a blizzard of protest as to hold up Kinzua, prevent appointment of Arthur Watkins to Chief Commissioner post of [the] Indian Claims Commission, protest haste of Menomini and Klamath termination, and argue for water rights in a number of

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authoritative policy pronouncement" that contained "official Administration commitments which should provide the foundation for Administration programs in the Indian country." Hubert Humphrey to Raymond Nakai, 16 September 1964; Richard Schifter to Alden Stevens, 24 November 1964, folder 6, box 408, AAIA Archives.

areas?" she asked Tax.<sup>51</sup>

Lurie's concerns over ignorance and authenticity touched on a series of deeply troubling questions. What was it that made poverty, but not treaty rights, such a compelling issue to non-Indians? Would heightened consciousness of Indian poverty simply revitalize the mainstream American ethos of assimilationist racial egalitarianism? Could average Americans be made to see that it did not represent an isolated problem but was, in fact, bound to much deeper and more complicated issues? Would they be able or willing to distinguish between the aspirations of Indians and other minorities? How would non-Indians respond when Native people made their aspirations clear? Most troubling, did they even possess the capacity to understand? If not, the War on Poverty's bold experiment in reform would bring disappointment to non-Indians and, even worse, destruction to tribal communities.<sup>52</sup>

While Nancy Lurie confided her concerns in private letters to personal acquaintances, the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) leveled public attacks. Its activities ranged from defending fishing rights in Washington through an intensification of its Campaign of Awareness to opposing renewed efforts at termination and forming alliances with First Nations youths in Canada. Spokespersons Mel Thom (Walker River

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<sup>51</sup> Nancy O. Lurie to Sol Tax, 16 October 1964, folder 1, box 132, Series IV, Tax Papers. For additional observations, see Nancy O. Lurie to Sol Tax, 22 October 1964, *ibid.* Sol Tax actually sought to secure OEO funding for a second American Indian Chicago Conference but did not receive a positive response. Hoping that it would make an impression, Nancy Lurie then sent a copy of "The Declaration of Indian Purpose" directly to OEO Director Sargent Shriver. Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax, 9 November 1964; Sidney Woolner to Nancy O. Lurie, 12 November 1964; Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax, 25 November 1964; Sidney Woolner to Sol Tax, 17 November 1964, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> I discuss this in the context of American Indians but consider it generally applicable to the War on Poverty. What would happen when middle class Americans heard what poor people actually had to say? And what would the consequences be if they didn't like what they heard?

Paiute) and Hank Adams (Assiniboine) chided tokenism and incremental change, while Clyde Warrior (Ponca) condemned established tribal leaders for merely passing resolutions and criticized “well-meaning non-Indians.” Likening termination to genocide, Bruce Wilkie (Makah) admonished readers of *Americans Before Columbus* to understand that Indian youths had reached a breaking point. “Public demonstration is a last resort,” he wrote. “All other efforts at ameliorating our people’s conditions have failed.”<sup>53</sup>

A rising tide of grassroots activism accompanied the NIYC’s increasingly militant rhetoric. In Nevada, the Paiutes demonstrated against the violation of their water rights. During the presidential primaries, California Indians picketed outside Democratic rallies for Lyndon Johnson, calling for the removal of the pro-terminationist Arthur Watkins as Chief Commissioner of the Indian Claims Commission. Meanwhile, Senecas protested the imminent flooding of their homelands in New York State and a termination rider that had been attached to a congressional reparations bill.<sup>54</sup> Interior Secretary Stewart Udall attempted to assuage these tensions by assuring tribes that no word of termination would be spoken until poverty had been eliminated. To this dubious argument Hank Adams retorted, “Let us terminate poverty. Period! Let us not speak of termination. Period! These are two separate considerations—not two phrases to be hung on a single comma and single meaning.”<sup>55</sup>

December 1964 also saw the publication of Clyde Warrior’s influential essay

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<sup>53</sup> For Warrior’s speech, see “NIYC Calls for Action,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964): 7. Wilkie’s statement is from “Look for Results and Action,” 3.

<sup>54</sup> “California Indians Fight Claims Comm.” and “Pyramid Lake Paiutes Fight for their Water,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964): 1, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Hank Adams, “Let Us Not Speak of Termination,” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964): 5.

entitled “Which One Are You?” In it he lambasted Indian “slobs,” “jokers,” “redskin white nosers,” “ultra-pseudo-Indians,” and “Uncle Tomahawks”—all of whom failed to take pride in being Indian.<sup>56</sup> He called on a generation of “angry nationalists” to enter the political sphere and to demand a place for Indians in American life that would be on terms of their own making. “I am sick and tired of seeing my elders stripped of dignity and low-rated in the eyes of their young,” Warrior railed. “And I am disturbed to the point of screaming when I see American Indian youth accepting the horror of ‘American conformity’ as being the only way for Indian progress, while those who do not join the great American mainstream of personalityless neurotics are regarded ‘incompetents and problems.’”<sup>57</sup> The diatribe concluded with what amounted to a declaration of independence. “The National Indian Youth Council must introduce to this sick room of stench and anonymity some fresh air of new Indianness. A fresh air of honesty and integrity, a fresh air of new Indian idealism, a fresh air of a new ‘greater Indian America,’” he intoned. “How about it? Let’s raise some hell!”<sup>58</sup>

Needless to say, by the end of 1964, the National Indian Youth Council had reached the point at which its members stood atop the metaphorical hill referred to by Vine Deloria.<sup>59</sup> In a shrill scream, they warned the Union Pacific to make ready, for angry Indian nationalists would be coming down to steal their horses. In so doing,

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<sup>56</sup> Clyde Warrior, “Which One Are You?” *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964): 1.

<sup>57</sup> Warrior, “Which One Are You?” 7.

<sup>58</sup> Warrior, “Which One Are You?” 7.

<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that the NIYC was homogenous. It was no less diverse than any other group of people committed to reform. In the context of this manuscript, however, I am taking the statements of its leading figures to be representative of the organization.

“Which One Are You?” and other public statements invoked an existential rage similar to that found in the speeches of Malcolm X, the controversial spokesperson for the Nation of Islam. Members of the National Indian Youth Council, no less than many young African Americans engaged in the civil rights and emerging black separatist movements, admonished white America to recognize that change would come—by any means necessary.

And yet the NIYC continued to look upon the War on Poverty as a vehicle for advancing tribal sovereignty and revitalizing indigenous communities. For this reason, NIYC President Herb Blatchford told a reporter in December 1964 that the War on Poverty promised to be “a new start” for Indians.<sup>60</sup> In the years that followed, several members accepted leadership positions in their tribal Community Action programs. Sandra Johnson (Makah) oversaw Head Start and later replaced NIYC leader Bruce Wilkie as the Community Action director at Neah Bay. In June 1965, even as he proclaimed the War on Poverty “a state of confusion,” Mel Thom returned to the Walker River Paiute Reservation to head his tribe’s Community Action program. Even the vituperative Clyde Warrior served as a consultant to OEO’s Upward Bound program, along with Robert V. Dumont (Assiniboine), Karen Rickard (Tuscarora), Charles Cambridge (Navajo), Tillie Walker (Mandan), Browning Pipestem (Otoe-Missouri), and others.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> “Canada, U.S. Indians Plan Ties,” *American Aborigine* IV, no. 1 (1965): 8-9.

<sup>61</sup> no title, *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 5 (June 1965); “Biography of Sandy Johnson,” *ibid*; Mel Thom, “For A Greater Indian America,” *ibid*; “Help for Low-Income Groups Available Through Program,” *Americans Before Columbus* (July 1966): 2.

By the spring of 1965, OEO had funded fourteen of the first sixteen reservation-based pilot Community Action programs. While the task force members sought out and often received cooperation from BIA personnel, they considered this feat to be a tremendous coup. To be sure, some individuals within the bureaucracy shared their commitment to democratizing federal-Indian relations, but many others did not. "The BIA said, well, if you can get half of them to develop a meaningful, intelligent program, we'll back off," Roessel recollected. "All fifteen or thirteen developed programs that were in the top ten percent of . . . national programs. And so then the BIA had to back down. They didn't want to, but they did."<sup>62</sup> These early successes paved the way for other tribal applications as the War on Poverty gained momentum and additional funding in the months that followed.

Before disbanding, the Task Force on American Indian Poverty laid the foundation for the administrative structure of OEO's Indian Division. The original design provided for special representatives for Indian proposals in three of the five regional offices OEO planned to create. During meetings in September 1964 and March 1965, however, the Indian task force suggested the creation of a centralized Indian Desk that would consist of four people and receive grant applications directly from the tribes. Arguing that this was no small matter, Forrest Gerard underscored the negative consequences of having tribal programs funneled through state governments and regional offices. "With the tensions existing in the states over sovereignty, jurisdiction, [and] treaty rights. . .," he submitted, "we felt on the task force—at least people like McKinley

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<sup>62</sup> James Hena, "Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference," 24; Roessel interview.

and I—that the good intent of OEO could be lost in that other kind of mire going on continuously.”<sup>63</sup>

Their recommendation of appointing an Indian director of the Indian Division ultimately led to the phone call that brought Jim Wilson to the capital. Robert Roessel and Wilson shared a friendship that extended to the latter’s days as a graduate student at Arizona State University. Roessel, who directed ASU’s Indian Education Research Center, later tapped Wilson to conduct an OEO-funded feasibility study for a highschool on the Spirit Lake Anishinabe Reservation. During an orientation meeting in Washington, D.C., Wilson met OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver and came away feeling that he “did not have any idea how to set up and run an Indian Program within the agency.” He expressed his sentiments to Robert Roessel, who in turn shared them with Shriver’s special assistant Edgar Cahn. Within a month Cahn invited Wilson to become the director of the Indian Division.<sup>64</sup>

Between September 1965 and March 1966, Wilson filled an interim position as a program analyst. The Indian Division did not exist as much more than a name at the time, and it fell upon him to organize the unit, define its purpose, and outline its policies. To begin with, he met with Noel Klores, his immediate supervisor as director of the Office of Special Field Programs. Klores succeeded Sidney Woolner and shared OEO personnel’s general antipathy toward the Bureau of Indian Affairs. “I may have grown up in New York and gone to school in New England, but I wasn’t stupid. We all knew that

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<sup>63</sup> Gordon MacGregor to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1964, NA I; Task Force on American Indian Poverty, 10 March 1965, NA II. For quote, see Gerard interview, 30 May 2002.

<sup>64</sup> Wilson, “Running Wild,” 3-5; Roessel interview; Wilson interview, 5 October 2001.

the BIA had treated the Indians like wards since time immemorial and that they took the money and decided what was done with it," he asserted. "So, we knew that and the whole idea was to try to get around it."<sup>65</sup> When Jim Wilson requested the authority to approve and fund Community Action proposals directly through the Indian Division, he therefore found a receptive audience.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike the Task Force on American Indian Poverty, which adopted the idea that a gradual program based first on demonstration projects would prove the value of Community Action and lay the foundation for future expansion, Wilson shared the view of Lyndon Johnson, OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver, and others who adopted the politics of haste. No less than Richard Boone, he recognized in the War on Poverty a small window of opportunity that needed to be exploited quickly. "I had no intention at that time of sitting there and reading applications as they came by and say, 'Yup, this does take into consideration Indian needs.' I wanted the authority to fund and give money to administer these things," he argued. With that authority, Wilson set precedents that would be difficult to undermine. "Build that base," he explained. "If we get fifty, sixty CAP agencies out there, then try killing them."<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, Wilson forged working relationships with Indian advocacy organizations based in Washington, D.C., and particularly Vine Deloria Jr. at the National Congress of American Indians.<sup>68</sup> Born in Martin, South Dakota in 1933 and trained at the

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<sup>65</sup> Klores interview.

<sup>66</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001; Wilson interview, 6 October 2001; Klores interview; Gerard interview, 31 May 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Wilson interview, 6 October 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, Deloria possessed an incisive analytical mind and caustic sense of humor. He also proved himself a capable administrator. After taking the reins of the NCAI in 1964, he swiftly revitalized the debt-ridden and virtually moribund organization. In order to bring delinquent member tribes back into the fold, he threatened to allow the oldest pan-tribal organization in the nation to go bankrupt.<sup>69</sup> Deloria shifted the center of power away from the eastern Oklahoma delegation and other conservatives by reaching out to small and long neglected tribes in the Southwest, Great Lakes, Pacific Northwest, and California. As a former member of the National Indian Youth Council and staff person for the United Scholarship Service, he further enjoyed the confidence of Indian youths. By 1965, less than a year into his first term, he presided over a formidable and more politically aggressive coalition of tribes.<sup>70</sup>

Wilson and Deloria were, in many ways, kindred spirits. Both found themselves in positions of leadership even though they had not aggressively sought them out. Indeed, Vine Deloria stumbled into the executive directorship while attending the NCAI's annual convention in 1964. He had come as a representative of the United Scholarship Service but soon found himself the candidate of choice due to a bitter struggle between Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Oglala Lakota) and Robert Burnette (Lakota). Moreover,

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Allen Warrior notes that the Lutheran School of Theology was called Augustana at the time of Deloria's education. Prior to attending seminary, Deloria earned an undergraduate degree at Iowa State University. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 30-33; "Summary of the 1964 National Indian Youth Council, August 19, 20, 21, and 22," *American Aborigine* IV, no. 1 (1965): 13; "Vine V. Deloria to Accept New Post," *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 4 (December 1964): 5; Richard Schifter to Alden Stevens, 4 August 1964 and Richard Schifter to Alden Stevens, 27 July 1964, folder 7, box 409, series III, subseries V, AAIA Archives.

<sup>70</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Colorado, 19 October 2001.

just as Deloria knew little about running a national advocacy organization, Jim Wilson had no experience as a bureaucrat. Both of them were, after all, intellectuals pressed into politics largely by unforeseen circumstances. But they were also quick studies.<sup>71</sup>

Their common interest in reforming the administration of Indian affairs resulted in a symbiotic relationship. Channeled through what Deloria called “inside-outside politics,” they used each other to manipulate the system from within rather than confronting it from without.<sup>72</sup> As both of them well knew, the War on Poverty, and particularly Community Action given its emphasis on local initiative, offered a potent critique of paternalism. Consequently, the BIA became their central focus of their attacks, for it not only made an increasingly controversial OEO look appealing but also advanced the cause of tribal self-determination. Even though they understood that the BIA merely carried out congressional mandates and worked within rigid boundaries set by the Bureau of the Budget, Deloria and Wilson also knew that they could not attack those two directly without negative repercussions. Nobody, however, liked the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>73</sup>

Their twin strategies intersected at the National Congress of American Indians annual convention in Scottsdale, Arizona, in November 1965. Indeed, the meeting

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<sup>71</sup> Wilson first met Deloria in June 1965 and vividly remembered the scene. “He was sleeping on the couch in the basement of the [NCAI] building,” he recalled, “and typing the newsletter on an old typewriter, eating potato chips and drinking Coca-Cola to stay alive.” Wilson interview, 5 October 2001. As a neophyte to the national political scene, Deloria spent the entirety of his first year studying Indian law, reading old *Congressional Records*, scouring the files of his predecessors, accompanying tribal delegations on their visits to Capitol Hill, and aggressively pursuing the support of new tribes. Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

<sup>72</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001; Wilson interview, 7 October 2001; Deloria interview 18 October 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001; Wilson interview, 6 October 2001.

symbolized the interconnectedness of the politics of poverty, tribal self-determination, civil rights, and war. Through the spring, summer, and fall of 1965, the Office of Economic Opportunity became embroiled in tremendous controversy, due in large part to the explosion of the Watts riot in Los Angeles and displeasure with what some members of Congress and many mayors considered to be the use of federal money to incite racial and class conflict. Only now did a full debate over the meaning of “maximum feasible participation” commence. At the same time, escalation of the war in Vietnam meant budget restrictions on the antipoverty campaign. OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver and President Lyndon Johnson had clashed over the financial commitment needed to win the War on Poverty, while the former also had to battle to save the grassroots-centered approach of the Community Action Program.<sup>74</sup>

The NCAI convention in Scottsdale, Arizona, provided an opportune forum for R. Sargent Shriver to fight back. Given the depth of bitterness directed toward BIA paternalism and the popularity of Community Action in Indian Country, there could be few better places for the OEO director to reaffirm his commitment to maximum feasible participation. And for Jim Wilson and Vine Deloria Jr., both of whom had been seeking philosophical frameworks for their respective efforts, Shriver’s address afforded the chance to articulate the concept of tribal self-determination.

By the fall of 1965, Jim Wilson had formed what he called “the triangle,” a tightly

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<sup>74</sup> Michael L. Gillette, ed., *Launching the War on Poverty: An Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996), 143; Robert Alan Bauman, “Race, Class, and Political Power: The Implementation of the War on Poverty in Los Angeles” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 1998); 76-79, 139-67; Susan Abrams Beck, “The Limits of Presidential Activism: Lyndon Johnson and the Implementation of the Community Action Program,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (summer 1987): 547-48, 553-55.

knit network of three individuals that allowed him to take full advantage of this opportunity. It consisted of Task Force on American Indian Poverty member and OEO consultant Robert Roessel, Shriver's special assistant Edgar Cahn, and himself. Together they prepared a speech for R. Sargent Shriver to deliver at the NCAI Convention. Cahn, who served as Shriver's speech writer, took the lead in drafting it. At the same time, he arranged to have a press release issued in which the OEO director blasted Congress and the Budget Bureau for betraying the principle of maximum feasible participation.<sup>75</sup>

Shriver's presence in Scottsdale would allow him to be among friends and outside of the Beltway when the media picked up on the story and Congress retaliated. Moreover, the positive coverage in the newspapers and television would serve the War on Poverty well in the critically important realm of public opinion. And finally, by focusing public attention on American Indians, it would potentially direct attention away from the increasingly volatile realm of black-white relations. In the wake of the Watts riot, the civil rights movement began to move north and made economic justice a centerpiece of its platform. The War on Poverty stood to suffer from the anger and controversy stirred by this convergence of race and class politics.

R. Sargent Shriver took full advantage of his extended trip to Arizona, touring Navajo, Hopi, Papago, and Havasupai communities before and after delivering the keynote address at the NCAI meeting on November 5. Formerly a Task Force on

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<sup>75</sup> Wilson interview, 5 October 2001; Joseph A. Califano Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 79; Beck, "Limits," 546; OEO Public Affairs Release, 5 November 1965, attached to Theodore Berry to All Community Action Agencies, 15 November 1965, folder 8, box 24, University of Utah Indian Community Action Project Papers, University Archives, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

American Indian Poverty participant and then Tribal Operations Officer for the Public Health Service's Division of Indian Health, Forrest Gerard attended the convention and clearly remembered the anticipation of tribal leaders as they awaited his arrival. "He was almost like a conquering hero returning," he recalled. Vine Deloria Jr. had a similar recollection of the event. "I can remember him coming into the hotel and, by God, it took him ten minutes to get up on the podium. . . . All these people wanted to show him pictures of their projects or talk to him," he asserted. "Everybody was just shaking hands with him. I hardly had a chance to say two words to him, and I was running the whole thing. . . ."<sup>76</sup>

Authored by Edgar Cahn and drawn from conversations with Robert Roessel and Jim Wilson, the address proclaimed the Office of Economic Opportunity's commitment to championing reform in Indian affairs. In so doing, Shriver drew from his experiences as Director of the Peace Corps and applied them to Native America, just as he did with poor communities in general. Reservation communities, he argued, could be likened to underdeveloped nations, and, therefore, the same kinds of prescriptions for change applied to them. But rather than community development, OEO spoke the language of Community Action.<sup>77</sup> "[W]hite imperialism, white paternalism cannot be replaced by the

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<sup>76</sup> Roessel interview; Gerard interview, 30 May 2002, Deloria interview, 19 October 2001; "Shaping Our Destiny," 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual National Congress of American Indians Convention, Inter-Tribal Council of the State of Arizona Executive House, Scottsdale, Arizona, 1-5 November 1965, "1965 Convention—Scottsdale, AZ" folder, box 20, Earl Boyd Pierce Collection, Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah Oklahoma.

<sup>77</sup> On the centrality of the Peace Corps to Shriver's thinking and to the development of Community Action, see Roessel interview, Klores interview; Gillette, ed., *Launching*, 35, 65-66, 86; and Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 214-15. As evidence of this convergence, Lyndon Johnson initially contemplated calling the War on Poverty the "Point One" program—an allusion, of course, to President Harry Truman's Point Four program for developing nations.

paternalism of experts, the imperialism of professionals,” Shriver asserted to underscore his support for local initiative. “The money is yours—because the whole basis of the poverty program is self-determination—the right of the people—individually and collectively—to decide their own course and to find their own way.”<sup>78</sup>

Vine Deloria considered the performance a tremendous success because it provided the NCAI with much needed leverage against the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Throughout the address, Commissioner of Indian Affairs Philleo Nash and other BIA personnel had to endure the thinly veiled criticisms in silence. This allowed the NCAI officers to turn to them and say, “Okay, we’ll listen to the commissioner, but this better be good.”<sup>79</sup> In response, personnel within the BIA complained of Shriver’s “mixture of facts without explanations and half-truths.”<sup>80</sup> Their resentment of what they considered to be the Office of Economic Opportunity’s unwarranted attacks further complicated an already troubled relationship.

The trip to Arizona left a deep impression on R. Sargent Shriver, who was adopted by the Hunkpapa subdivision of the Lakota Nation at the convention. Though separated from the event by some thirty-seven years, vivid memories of witnessing a

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Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 74. Peace Corps volunteers also trained in inner cities and on reservations. “The tribes might now be thought of as living specimens for the study of colonialism,” observed author Stan Steiner in 1966. “Sort of microcosms of colonial nations.” *The New Indians: Notes* [3 of 13], folder 6, box 15, series III, Stan Steiner Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.

<sup>78</sup> Sargent Shriver, “Tribal Choice in War on Poverty: Rubber Stamp or Communal Decision?” *Journal of American Indian Education* 5, no. 2 (January 1966): 8-13, quotes at pp. 12 and 8.

<sup>79</sup> Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

<sup>80</sup> For quote, see Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 121. See also George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 30-31.

Navajo Yeibichei ceremony remained with Shriver's special assistant Edgar Cahn. "We just sat there for hours, and it was clear to me that I was seeing something that was powerful that I didn't understand but that I could respect," he recalled. As musicians performed sacred songs, Navajo men encircled a large open space and used pulverized materials of different colors to create ornate symbolic representations of the Holy People. These drypaintings, in turn, garnered the spiritual power necessary to cure disease and nurse the sick back to good health. "Both of us were deeply emotionally moved by what we saw, because we saw a healing process that was powerful and seemed to us so authentic that there was no way of even questioning what we had seen."<sup>81</sup>

Although OEO had already signaled its interest in American Indian communities, these at once political and deeply personal encounters reaffirmed and gave additional impetus to their efforts. "We were aware that if we pumped money in there," Cahn attested, "it would be the first money that the Bureau didn't control." Shriver, in turn, forged close working relationships with an array of tribal leaders such as Raymond Nakai (Navajo), Peter MacDonald (Navajo), Roger Jourdain (Spirit Lake Anishinaabe), Wendell Chino (Mescalero Apache), and Ronnie Lupe (White Mountain Apache). The National Congress of American Indians and Office of Economic Opportunity would remain close allies in the turbulent years ahead.<sup>82</sup>

By the end of 1965, OEO's handful of pilot programs had expanded to include

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<sup>81</sup> Cahn interview; Roessel interview; Nancy J. Parezo, "Drypainting," in *Native America in the Twentieth Century: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Mary B. Davis (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 170-72.

<sup>82</sup> Cahn interview; Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

well over thirty tribal Community Action agencies staffed primarily by Indians and run independent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, it forced Americans to engage in a conversation about the meaning of poverty and social welfare, thereby contributing to a breach in the public sphere by adding class to the fractious politics of culture, race, and war. With new topics open to debate, heretofore marginalized voices could now be heard in public discourse. Ideas and issues that once existed only on the periphery garnered national attention. American Indians and their allies aggressively took advantage of the opportunities afforded them.

Struck by this outpouring of tribal activism, some contemporaries asked whether an Indian renaissance had begun.<sup>84</sup> D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead), a battle-hardened veteran with thirty years of experience in federal-Indian affairs, ventured a response. "What has been happening in these later years is that Indians more and more are talking in the language of politics," he observed. "It may not be a renaissance, but the Indians have mounted an appeal to democratic consciousness."<sup>85</sup> Whether they manipulated the system from within or challenged it from without, McNickle suggested, the Indian activists that had arisen during the 1960s were carrying on a long tradition. And like their predecessors, this generation would have to use a language the dominant society could

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<sup>83</sup> "The War on Poverty Continues," *NCAI Sentinel* 10, no. 2 (summer 1965).

<sup>84</sup> In July 1964, Nancy Lurie sent out a questionnaire to eighty people (including anthropologists, government personnel, church workers, and individual Indians) asking whether they thought an Indian renaissance was underway. A year later, Lurie and Stuart Levine edited a special edition of the *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* that contained extended versions of some of the responses. This, in turn, was published as Nancy O. Lurie and Stuart Levine, eds., *The American Indian Today* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968). For more, see Nancy Oestreich Lurie, "An American Indian Renaissance?" *ibid.*, 295-327.

<sup>85</sup> McNickle, "Indian Tests the Mainstream," 276.

understand.

Clyde Warrior of the National Indian Youth Council concurred. "Perhaps, we may have to think as Americans about what kind of country we want to live in so that we as Indian people can find and make our place in it," he told an audience in June 1965. "Of course, the problem of what we want as individuals, as Indians, and as Americans are inseparable. We cannot talk about one without talking about the other because we are individuals, we are Indians, and we are Americans."<sup>86</sup> During the pivotal political contests that awaited them, they would, however, have to find ways to engage in these larger conversations, while preserving their own distinctive voices. Working within and outside the system, they would seek to redefine the boundaries of public discourse, using the War on Poverty to portray Indian communities not as indiscriminate pockets of poverty but as emerging nations.

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<sup>86</sup> Clyde Warrior, "Speech Presented at the Vermillion Conference, University of South Dakota, June 1965," *Americans Before Columbus* 2, no. 6 (November 1965), 6.

Chapter Five  
Nations Within:  
The Politics of Self-Determination, 1966-1967

I have looked closely at poverty programs on Indian reservations and I assure you they violate the fundamental principle of Indian self-determination. . . . Do Indian parents really need Head Start programs so as to transform their children into Whites?!?

Murray L. Wax to Vine Deloria Jr., 29 April 1966<sup>1</sup>

I don't believe you are understanding what is taking place in regard to poverty programs and Indianism—the more educated they get, the more nationalistic they get also. Head Start just provides us with a chance to get them a solid basis for becoming nationalists 2 years sooner.

Vine Deloria Jr., to Murray L. Wax, 2 May 1966<sup>2</sup>

He sat comfortably on his sofa with a cup of coffee and a row of carefully arranged Pall Mall cigarettes resting on the end table. As he methodically went through one smoke after another, Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) recounted stories that had unfolded decades before, stories of the political campaigns he engineered as executive director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) from 1964 and 1967. “At NCAI,” he recalled, “I was looking for some kind of intellectual format of how you would justify overturning termination and at the same time escape this big push for integration that civil rights was doing.” Deloria found it in the twin concepts of nationalism and self-determination. These, he hoped, would serve as countervailing forces to the prevailing assimilationist racial egalitarian consensus. “If we’re gonna say we’re nations, and we got sovereignty, and our treaties are as valid as other treaties,” Deloria remembered saying to his colleagues, “then we gotta talk the language of the larger world.”<sup>3</sup> By talking that language, NCAI pressured mainstream Americans to recognize tribes not as withering enclaves but as nations within a nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Murray L. Wax to Vine Deloria Jr., 29 April 1966, Personal Papers of Murray L. Wax.

<sup>2</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., to Murray L. Wax, 2 May 1966, Personal Papers of Murray L. Wax.

<sup>3</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Col., 18 October 2001.

In terms of circumstance and rhetorical strategy, Vine Deloria had much in common with his predecessors. They, too, couched Indian interests in the semantics and concerns of the dominant society. Throughout the 1950s and into the first years of the 1960s, appeals to Cold War imperatives, Marshall Plans, Indian Point Four programs, constitutional rights, and democratic conscience punctuated the discourse of tribal politics. But Indians and their advocates imbued the language of Third World development, civil rights, the fate of American culture, and containing communism with new meanings that were distinctively tailored to protect the integrity of tribal peoples. What set Deloria and his contemporaries apart, however, was the dramatically changed world in which they moved, the uncompromising way they thrust tribal politics into the public sphere, and how effective they proved to be.

If the language Deloria used bore a striking resemblance to that of developing nations, so too did his strategy for affecting change. In a study of Cold War foreign policy, historian John Lewis Gaddis observed that although Third World countries could not challenge the Soviet Union or the United States militarily, they could manipulate them “by laying on flattery, pledging solidarity, feigning indifference, threatening defection, or even raising the specter of their own collapse and the disastrous results that might flow from it.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the NCAI would not risk a direct frontal assault on Congress or fire abstract ideological missives calling for the overthrow of the system. But in public addresses, congressional testimony, formal resolutions, and the pages of its

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<sup>4</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 154.

publications, its members would use innuendo, warnings of impending crises, fulsome praise, and caustic ridicule to play Congress, the Interior Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and even tribal leaders against one another. This represented a strategy befitting a coalition of emerging nations. And yet it was also something more than mimicry. Indeed, the NCAI adopted an art of diplomacy that had roots in the earliest political encounters between natives and newcomers.

Recognizing the sheer imbalance of power between the NCAI and the federal government, Vine Deloria consistently sought to leverage the organization's limited political clout. "In any fight with an institution, the institution will always win because it's going to be there longer than you," he explained. "So, you gotta screw up the way it operates itself, turn it in on itself, create a crisis for it. And then, they'll give you what you want and alter things."<sup>5</sup> "The only way we're going to get anywhere," Deloria admonished tribal representatives to recognize as he shifted from overarching strategy to specific tactics, "is to praise one agency while kicking the ass of another and get those two competing with each other."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the NCAI spearheaded a movement to transform Indian affairs, but one that was nationalistic rather than militant, incremental rather than revolutionary. Through a complicated process of inside-outside politics, they hoped to compel the system to reform itself.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Col., 19 October 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

<sup>7</sup> The full complexity of Indian politics during the 1960s is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this particular chapter, I am concerned primarily with how the NCAI, as well as other organizations and individuals, utilized the War on Poverty in their struggle to attain tribal self-determination.

To have influence the NCAI needed to be looked upon as relevant, and to be relevant, Indian interests had to be woven into the larger politics of race, class, and war. It was at this point that the War on Poverty came to play an integral role in that it served as a means for Indian voices to be heard in the public sphere. "Community Action provided the focal point. . .," Deloria remembered years later. "I'd say from '65 on throughout about the first year of Nixon, CAP was really where it was happening on the reservation."<sup>8</sup> No sooner had the War on Poverty been launched in 1964, than the NCAI passed a resolution to bind their support for it to their campaign against termination. The nation could not speak of eliminating poverty with any credibility, the organization contended, while adhering to a policy that exacerbated it in Indian Country.<sup>9</sup> In Scottsdale the following year, OEO's philosophy of maximum feasible participation served as a powerful critique of paternalism. Between 1966 and 1967, Community Action would become the very fulcrum of the NCAI's search for leverage.

For five years, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations lurched and convulsed their way toward a coherent federal Indian policy. In 1961, the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) issued its "Declaration of Indian Purpose," the Commission on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian presented its report, and the Interior Department conducted its own study of Indian affairs. In the years that followed, President John F. Kennedy received a copy of the "Declaration of Indian

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<sup>8</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Policy Resolution I, "Convention Resolutions (1964)" folder, box 14, series I, National Congress of American Indians Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

Purpose” from a delegation of AICC representatives, while his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, spoke at an NCAI convention. Shortly after JFK’s assassination, his successor, Lyndon Baines Johnson, met with tribal representatives to reaffirm his commitment to them. But little more than piecemeal legislation, sporadic congressional termination riders, and bureaucratic disarray followed thereafter. All of that changed during the early months of 1966, when a welter of activity brought great disruption and uncertainty to the world of Indian politics.

For several months it had been rumored that Interior Secretary Stewart Udall wanted Philleo Nash removed as commissioner of Indian affairs.<sup>10</sup> Intimations of his forced resignation were greeted with much speculation. Some observers blamed Congress and pointed to Nash’s resistance to termination as the cause. While Interior Secretary Udall later claimed that he merely wanted someone with greater vision and more energy, others questioned his sincerity. “As to Dr. Nash’s resignation, it was Secretary Udall who forced it, not the termination people,” historian and advocate Angie Debo confided to Association of American Indian Affairs (AAIA) Executive Director William Byler. “My personal feeling is that Secretary Udall has ignored the Indian

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<sup>10</sup> Alden Stevens to Philleo Nash, 7 November 1965, folder 6, box 408, series III, subseries V, Association on American Indian Affairs Archives, Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey. For a detailed discussion of policy matters from 1961 to 1966, as well as an interpretation of Nash’s falling out with Udall, see Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2001), 44-186, especially pp. 140-86. See also D’Arcy McNickle, “The Indian Tests the Mainstream,” *The Nation* (September 26, 1966): 275-79; Philleo Nash in Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: University of Utah, 1995), 132; E. Fletcher McClellan, “The Politics of American Indian Self-Determination” (Ph.D., diss., University of Tennessee, 1988), 87-88; and James J. Rawls, *Chief Red Fox is Dead: A History of Native Americans Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1996), 59.

program for five years while concentrating on other matters. Only recently having turned his attention to it, he was embarrassed to find out how little had been accomplished.” “In my very own personal opinion,” she concluded, “I think Dr. Nash has been made the scapegoat.” Undeterred by her friend’s counter argument that Udall long had a “burning desire to appoint an Indian as Commissioner,” Debo quipped, “I have simply added the name of Secretary Udall to my list of untrustworthy politicians.”<sup>11</sup>

Several events over the course of the succeeding months seemed to confirm these misgivings. In mid-March Philleo Nash resigned, and two weeks later Congress opened confirmation hearings for his successor, Robert L. Bennett (Oneida). With a thirty-year career in the BIA and a hand in the termination of the Mixed-Blood Utes, Bennett represented an odd choice to revitalize Indian affairs. Indeed, to the veterans of the American Indian Chicago Conference, many of whom counted Philleo Nash as a personal friend, Bennett represented anything but boldness and innovation. In a letter to University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax, Nancy Lurie portrayed him rather unceremoniously as “a typical Indian who has ‘shaped up’ and expects other Indians to do the same.”<sup>12</sup>

Robert L. Bennett’s confirmation hearings began on April 1 and ended on April

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<sup>11</sup> For Udall’s perspective, see Transcript, Stewart L. Udall Oral History Interview, III, 29 July 1969, by Joe B. Frantz, Internet Copy, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, 2. The Debo and Byler quotations are from Angie Debo to William Byler, 28 March 1966; William Byler to Angie Debo, 1 April 1966; Angie Debo to William Byler 5 April 1966, folder 13, box 87, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy Lurie to Sol Tax 5 January 1966, folder 2, box 132, series IV, Sol Tax Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. On Bennett and the termination of the Mixed-Blood Utes, see R. Warren Metcalf, *Termination’s Legacy: The Discarded Indians of Utah* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

13. Rather than engendering hope, they deepened many observers' concerns as some members of the Indian affairs subcommittee criticized the BIA's laggardness in preparing tribes for termination. Moreover, they submitted a formal report that underscored their expectation that the BIA would produce new information on tribes that were ready to have their federal trust relationships severed. To be sure, Robert L. Bennett did not embrace coercive termination. Nonetheless, it was not at all certain that overwhelming pressure from Congress would not compel him to do so. With the Udall administration floundering, Nash removed from office, and signals that some members of Congress were renewing the effort to get the government out of the Indian business, the fifteen-year fight against termination looked as if it might be eclipsed.

In the meantime, Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota) assumed his post as director of the Office of Economic Opportunity's Indian Desk in March 1966. A flourish of activity followed the inauguration of the War on Poverty in Indian Country, and under his watch the pace quickened markedly. Exercising his newly gained administrative power, Wilson jettisoned the idea of funding a limited number of demonstration projects. Consistent with Lyndon Johnson's and Sargent Shriver's own intentions, he counseled the distribution of Community Action funds as far, wide, and swiftly as possible. By April 1966, more than fifty tribes across thirteen states administered their own or cooperative Community Action agencies.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Wilson New Head of OEO Indian Section," *War Cry* 1, no. 4 (8 April 1966): 1; "OEO Indian Branch Activities," 10 April 1966, "Indians" folder, box 481, Records of the Indian Division Relating to Public Relations, 1965-1970, Records of the Office of Operations, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

Through program development and conduct and administration grants, as well as funds for programs such as Neighborhood Youth Corps, Head Start, Legal Services, community health representatives, work experience, adult basic education, and remedial reading, Community Action created leverage of its own in Indian communities. These programs may not have provided permanent employment for thousands of people, and they may not have been funded adequately, but, as was the case in other communities throughout the nation, they did represent something that impoverished people could call their own.

Community Action made available a panoply of social programs that fostered adaptive behavior. The programs trained local people to serve as health aides, provided preschool, remedial, and adult education classes, established after-school study halls, hired counselors for youths and recovering alcoholics, taught homemaking and vocational skills, and provided employment for community beautification projects. Several factors distinguished the programs of Indian Community Action from those previously conducted by the BIA, but the primary difference rested in the former's emphasis on developing the potential of individuals. Particularly under Stewart Udall's watch, the BIA focused its attention on economic and industrial development by drawing outside industries onto reservations. The social welfare programs it provided, however, suffered from the same problems as those found in the nation at large. Indian people, just as the urban or rural poor, were treated primarily as dependents, wards, and passive recipients.

Under Jim Wilson's supervision, Indian Community Action thus came to represent a significant break from the Bureau of Indian Affairs' paternalistic means of

developing and implementing reservation programs. He not only made a conscious effort to staff his office with Indians who understood reservation life, but also unabashedly advocated tribal self-governance and supported development strategies that had “philosophic goals in relation to Indianess [*sic*], culture, and reservations.”<sup>14</sup> The comments of Raymond Kane, director of the White Mountain Apache Community Action Program, lent insight into the meaning this had from the perspective of local communities. “[P]rofessional people. . .no matter how high a level of education, he hasn’t [*sic*] lived the problem like we have,” Kane argued. “[W]e feel that we are the best qualified whether we are subprofessional or just laymen; we feel that we know the problems; we know how to cope with it.”<sup>15</sup> While the BIA had come to be perceived by many as an instrument for carrying out the arbitrary actions of Congress—and therefore an accomplice to the disastrous policy of termination and partly responsible for the persistence of poverty and paternalism—OEO signified its antithesis. Through Community Action, tribal people organized committees that went into their communities, discussed their most urgent needs, and then created programs accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Joint Economic Committee, *Toward Economic Development: A Compendium of Papers Submitted to the Subcommittee on Economy in Government*, vol. 2, 91<sup>st</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 373.

<sup>15</sup> Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Examination of the War on Poverty: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty*, Part 3, 90<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., Albuquerque, New Mexico, 24 April 1967, 1120-21.

<sup>16</sup> *Examination of the War on Poverty*, Part 3, 1967, pp. 167, 373-76, and 392; Human Sciences Research, Inc., *A Comprehensive Evaluation of OEO Community Action Programs on Six Selected American Indian Reservations* (September 1966), 111; Ian Traquair Ball, “Institution Building for Development: OEO Community Action Programs on Two North Dakota Indian Reservations” (Ph.D., diss., Indiana University, 1968), 126; and National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, *Rural Poverty: Hearings Before the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Tucson, Arizona*, 26-27 January 1967, 124.

The very structure of Indian Community Action stood in sharp contradistinction to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well. Whereas the latter relied on a multilayered bureaucracy that included area and regional offices, the Indian Division provided a more direct and responsive link to the federal government. Indeed, all through the 1960s, the BIA languished beneath the Office of Public Land Management which was itself buried deep within the Department of the Interior. No matter how zealously past commissioners of Indian affairs might have advocated tribal self-governance, they remained subordinate to an assistant secretary whose other responsibilities often ran counter to Indian interests. Consequently, bureaucratic inertia compounded the BIA's inefficacy.

Moreover, whereas the BIA carried one administrator for every twenty-two Indians, OEO's Indian Division had a five-person staff. Wilson had no interest in building a complicated bureaucracy. Instead, he committed the Indian Division to serving as little more than a granting agency. It would funnel money to tribes, but what they did with it was their business.<sup>17</sup> Despite its small size and minuscule budget, the OEO Indian Division provided the foundation for tribal councils to become governing bodies with the same responsibilities as local and state non-reservation institutions. More significantly, this strengthening of tribal governing apparatuses came divorced of any expectation of gradual termination.

The overarching commitment to local initiative promoted tribal self-determination

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<sup>17</sup> Prepared Statement of Vine Deloria, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Examination of the War on Poverty*, Albuquerque, p. 1084. Alvin Josephy Jr., ed., *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 111-12; Edgar Cahn, ed., *Our Brother's Keeper: The Indian in White America* (New York: New Community Press, 1969), 142-63; Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 6 October 2001.

and also undermined the monolithic conception of Indians—an idea that had guided federal policy more often than not in the past. The Office of Economic Opportunity operated on the principle that only individual communities could develop programs that met their distinct and specific cultural, economic, political, geographic, and demographic situations. This philosophy, in turn, called into question the BIA's tendency to prescribe a single grand solution to "the" Indian problem. Maximum feasible participation, the guiding precept of Community Action, conveyed numerous things to any number of people. But for many tribes, it signified empowerment, freedom from paternalism, and a step toward securing greater tribal self-determination.

The impact that tribal control over Community Action made during its first eighteen months of operation was not lost on some personnel within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. In April 1966, as the Senate pressed Robert L. Bennett to take a position on the future of termination, BIA Superintendent William King wrote to Stewart Udall about the dramatic changes he had witnessed on the Salt River Pima and Maricopa Reservation. "Nothing I can think of has so accelerated the changing role of the Superintendent as has the OEO program," he explained. "[I]t has allowed Indians to redefine their relationship with the Federal Government. Tribes, in most instances actually deal directly with OEO; BIA occupies a subordinate position as advisor and provider of technical services as requested. . . ." Arguing that the Indian Bureau had much to learn from this precedent, King recommended that the agency superintendents' powers be shifted to tribal councils

and that they seek ways to contract programs directly to tribal governments.<sup>18</sup>

National Congress of American Indians Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr., came to a similar conclusion. Based on this assessment, he sought to use the Office of Economic Opportunity as leverage against congressional support for termination and the paternalistic excesses of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Deloria also knew, however, that the War on Poverty nearly failed to secure congressional approval for a second year in 1965. Furthermore, the early months of 1966 brought much talk of dismantling OEO by transferring components of it to various federal agencies. During appropriations hearings in the House of Representatives, Secretary Stewart Udall seemed to suggest that his department would not protest a congressional mandate to assume control of OEO's Indian programs. Recognizing these developments as both threats and opportunities, Deloria reacted swiftly and bombarded NCAI members with letters that warned of the BIA's intentions of depriving tribes of what little gains they had been able to make through the War on Poverty.

By the spring of 1966, heightened anxieties over the resignation of Philo Nash, rumblings of support for termination in the Senate, the appointment of a new commissioner of Indian affairs, and rumors of the BIA's designs to take over the Indian Division came to a head. Amidst this tumult, Stewart Udall organized a closed meeting for BIA superintendents, agency directors, and key members of Congress to lay the

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 47-48. For a social historical consideration of Community Action at Salt River, see Paivi Hoikkala, "Mothers and Community Builders: Salt River Pima and Maricopa Women in Community Action," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York: Routledge, 1995), 213-34.

groundwork for a bold new legislative program for American Indians. Arguing that Indian people deserved the right to have a say in the formulation of policies that affected their lives, Deloria requested permission to send NCAI observers to the four-day conference scheduled for April 12 to 15. Udall, however, cited his desire to provide a forum for candid self-evaluation on the part of BIA personnel and respectfully declined.

In response, an irate Vine Deloria decided to confront the Indian Bureau directly. "I just figured, 'Fuck it,'" he remembered, "'Let's take the closest thing we have and hit that thing as hard as we can and see what's going on.'" With these sentiments, Deloria called an emergency meeting of the National Congress of American Indians to be held in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Modeling his strategy after the civil rights movement, he sought to create a "media phenomenon" that would dramatize what he considered to be the BIA's complete disregard for basic democratic principles. Adopting the theme of "Indian Voices Today for Tomorrow," 200 representatives from sixty-two tribes attended a series of panels on Indian affairs at the New Mexico Land Office Building. To dramatize the federal government's gross negligence, they convened their meetings a mere three blocks away from Stewart Udall's closed session.<sup>19</sup>

For three days, and with a reporter from the *New York Times* recording every detail, the NCAI railed against paternalism and indifference. The organization further invited Jim Wilson to represent OEO's Indian Division and showered the War on Poverty

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<sup>19</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001. See also Joe Herrerra to Delegates of NCAI, n.d.; Vine Deloria to All Indian Tribes, n.d.; and Remarks of Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall at his Bureau of Indian Affairs Conference, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 14 April 1966, p. 2, "1966 NCAI Santa Fe Conference" folder, box 20, Earl Boyd Pierce Collection, Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. I have also drawn from Donald Janson, "Indian Bureau Parley Rebuffs Tribes," *New York Times*, 14 April 1966, reprinted in *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 2 (spring 1966).

with fulsome praise. In no small part due to the media coverage, Udall ultimately conceded to several of their demands. Newly confirmed Indian Commissioner Robert L. Bennett first agreed to speak to the NCAI at the New Mexico Land Office Building, then the interior secretary followed suit. On April 15, a delegation of NCAI observers gained admission to the final day of the government meeting. There Udall promised to include tribes in the development of forthcoming legislation and to seek their counsel on any organizational changes that might be introduced. In return, the NCAI did not press its request for the creation of an Indian Advisory Council within the BIA. "But if we start seeing the old bureaucrats showing up on the reservations again with programs all mapped out in advance," Deloria warned, "no dice."<sup>20</sup>

There remains great disagreement over the details and importance of the confrontation in Santa Fe. The primary point of contention has traditionally revolved around the purported transfer of OEO's Indian Division to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Some chroniclers suggest that Stewart Udall did, indeed, intend to carry through with it, while others argue that Vine Deloria essentially manufactured the crisis.<sup>21</sup> In truth, the most significant precipitating event—an exchange between Congressman Ben Reifel (Sioux) and Stewart Udall during the House appropriations hearings in February 1966—is ambiguous. Moreover, as Udall suggested at the time, Deloria may very well have taken

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<sup>20</sup> Donald Janson, "2 Indian Demands Granted by Udall," *New York Times*, 15 April 1966, reprinted in *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 2 (spring 1966). For quote see, Donald Janson, "Indian Bureau Head Hails Udall Plan," *New York Times*, 17 April 1966, *ibid.* Riggs quotes Deloria as saying Santa Fe was a major victory because it compelled Interior "to allow them to attend a planning meeting for the first time in history." Christopher K. Riggs, "American Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (August 2000), 449.

<sup>21</sup> For varying accounts, see Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 200-05; Riggs, "American Indians," 448-49; and Stan Steiner, *The New Indians* (New York: Delta, 1968), 251-61.

the liberty to “misconstrue” his remarks enough to excite the passions of NCAI members.<sup>22</sup>

Many departments, however, sought administrative control of War on Poverty programs. Indeed, even the directors of the regional offices within OEO made repeated attempts to have Indian Division funds dispersed to them. “On day one we had pressure from the BIA,” argued Noel Klores, head of OEO’s Office of Special Field Programs and immediate superior to Jim Wilson. Klores constantly defended the integrity of his programs. “First you try to get the money out of Congress, then you got the other bureaucrats in the other agencies that feel that you’re on their turf,” he remembered. “The BIA wanted it, the tribal governments wanted it, the regional directors wanted it. Everybody wanted it.”<sup>23</sup> Deloria, then, was not alone in considering the threat to be real.<sup>24</sup>

Pre-existing tensions between OEO and BIA made even the subtlest hint of a transfer even more explosive. When the Task Force on American Indian Poverty laid the foundation for Indian inclusion in Community Action, representatives from both agencies

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<sup>22</sup> For Udall’s denial, see “Editorial,” *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 2 (spring 1966). A transcript of his address at the Santa Fe meeting reveals that Udall stated, “I do wish our friends would talk to us before they misconstrue our remarks.” He went on to say, “And I think maybe having OEO in our midst makes us rethink things. Maybe they can help fill some of the gaps.” Stewart L. Udall Remarks, 14 April 1966, p. 14, “1966 NCAI Santa Fe Conference” folder, box 20, Pierce Collection.

<sup>23</sup> Noel Klores, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 10 November 2001. For examples, see Chris Weeks to Sargent Shriver and Bernard Boutin, 1-6-65, “CAP January 1966-” folder, box 8, Personal Papers of Bernard Boutin, LBJL; Statement of Walter H. Richter, Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, *Examination of the War on Poverty*, Part 3, Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1250; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 46; and William Byler to Angie Debo, 1 April 1966, folder 13, box 87, series II, subseries I, AAIA Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Roessel to Stewart Udall, 3 March 1966, attached to Stewart Udall to Robert Roessel, 8 April 1966, “Arizona State University—Correspondence, Arizona State U.” folder, box 18, Grant Files, 1965-1969, Records of the Office of Operations—Indian Division, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Groups 381, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

underscored their desire to cooperate with one another. At the same time, they failed to reach a consensus on what that would actually mean in practice. No sooner had the initial OEO grants been made, than BIA personnel warned that the tribes too readily used the money to distance themselves.<sup>25</sup> In response, Jim Wilson, Noel Klores, and others within OEO chided the Indian Bureau for not being able to resist planning Community Action programs for the tribes. They undoubtedly realized that there were political points to be scored. "You could. . . stick it to the BIA," Klores noted accordingly, "because nobody liked them."<sup>26</sup>

It is not clear whether Stewart Udall would have actually usurped control of OEO's Indian Division had he been given the opportunity. More important, however, was the NCAI's ability to convince the public and other tribes that this was his intention. Vine Deloria, who referred to some of his writings in the *NCAI Sentinel* as "yellow journalism," certainly understood that perception mattered as much, and perhaps more, than objective reality.<sup>27</sup> And in this sense, the War on Poverty provided the leverage he needed against the Bureau of Indian Affairs. During the confrontation, Deloria and other members of the NCAI juxtaposed the "spectacular success" of local initiative via Community Action with the BIA "a thousand miles away" in order to compel the latter to

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<sup>25</sup> Gordon MacGregor to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 22 September 1964, "Community Action Task Force" folder, box 7, Records Relating to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C; Task Force on American Indian Poverty, Office of Economic Opportunity, Report of Meeting, Tempe, Arizona, 10 March 1965, "Arizona State University Correspondence, Arizona State U." folder, box 18, Grant Files, Records of the Office of Operations—Indian Division, RG 381, NARA II; James Officer, "Sixth Annual American Indian Education Conference: Use of Educational Weapons in the War on Poverty, 12-13 March 1965, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, pp. 54-55.

<sup>26</sup> Klores interview, 10 November 2001; Wilson interview, 8 October 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., to Murray Wax, 27 August 1966, Personal Papers of Murray L. Wax.

operate “less paternalistically and more like the Office of Economic Opportunity.”<sup>28</sup> The *New York Times* articles, he later recalled, thus delivered the following message: “Here are the Indians who are managing their own affairs, and they’ve got poverty programs and everything. Here’s the Bureau trying to put them back in the nineteenth century.”<sup>29</sup> As long as the public came to understand the need for change, it hardly mattered to Deloria whether this analysis was fair or objective.

The crisis in Santa Fe further afforded an opportunity to make Indians more relevant to the larger politics of the War on Poverty. Even as the NCAI praised the antipoverty campaign that April, critics from urban Community Action programs booed OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver off the stage at a meeting sponsored by the Citizens Crusade Against Poverty in Washington, D.C. In response to his being “personally vilified and repudiated” by the group of protestors, the NCAI sent a telegram that indicated their “wholehearted support” for the Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>30</sup> “They said the ‘creative’ efforts of the agency had become ‘an inspiration and hope for the American Indians,’” the *New York Times* reported. “The Indians, the nation’s poorest Americans, deplored the heckling of Mr. Shriver by some of the urban poor who attended. . . .”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For quotations, see Janson, “Indian Bureau Parley Rebuffs Tribes” and Janson, “2 Indian Demands Granted by Udall.”

<sup>29</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

<sup>30</sup> For the first quotation, see Peter Marris and Martin Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform: Poverty and Community Action in the United States*, 2d ed., with a new preface (1967; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 252. The second quotation is from Donald Janson, “Udall Promises ‘New Approach’ To End Poverty of Indian Tribes,” *New York Times*, 16 April 1966, reprinted in *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 2 (spring 1966).

<sup>31</sup> Janson, “Udall Promises ‘New Approach’ To End Poverty of Indian Tribes.”

In the wake of the Interior-NCAI showdown, it became clear how effective powerless politics could be. Praising OEO while criticizing the BIA fostered the kind of competition that Deloria hoped would prove advantageous to tribes. To be sure, R. Sargent Shriver could ill afford to lose one of the few friends his organization had left, particularly at a moment when Congress considered amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act that would curtail funding for local initiative in favor of national emphasis programs, due in large part to controversy in urban areas. In response, Deloria continued his strategy. "Certainly there has been no single program or theory of government that has caused such excitement on Indian reservations in 100 years as the Poverty Program," he expounded in the pages of the *NCAI Sentinel*. But in keeping with the strategy employed by other developing nations during the Cold War, he added a dire warning: "There is now a good chance for wholesale collapse of enthusiasm on reservations if the basic philosophy of the OEO is changed to conform to what is happening in the large cities."<sup>32</sup>

Through the spring and summer of 1966, black-white coalitions fragmented, calls for Black Power and welfare rights peaked, and the inner cities exploded. Amidst this tumult, the NCAI began to cultivate an image of Indians as the minority group that the Johnson administration could safely champion without the fear of white reprisal. "You could see stuff developing all the way along," Vine Deloria asserted. "You could take advantage of the backlash against blacks and get all kinds of Indian things going."<sup>33</sup> With

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<sup>32</sup> Editorial, *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 3 (summer 1966).

<sup>33</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

public support for the War on Poverty waning, OEO found that by emphasizing the success of Indian programs it could defend itself against critics who charged that it had done nothing for the poor and politicians who said it had done little more than incite racial and class antagonisms.

Shortly after the protest in Santa Fe, the Interior Department moved ahead with the development of its landmark legislation. Known as the Indian Resources Development Act (IRDA), it represented the most ambitious attempt to give a programmatic structure to Indian policy during the 1960s. Led by the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), however, Indians immediately castigated Udall for excluding them from drafting the bill. Although Robert L. Bennett convened nine regional hearings to gather Indian opinions, these organizations argued that it presented only the illusion of tribal input. By August, as Bennett prepared to tour the country purportedly to invite Indian ideas on the development of the legislation, Vine Deloria and NCAI President John Belindo (Kiowa-Navajo) acquired a complete draft of it. Disappointed with what it revealed, they resolved to do all in their power to kill it.

In addition to pointing out Interior's hypocrisy, the NCAI leveled a devastating attack on several of the legislation's key components.<sup>34</sup> Particularly vexing was a provision that allowed tribes to use land as collateral for development loans. The high

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<sup>34</sup> Resolution No. 4, NCAI 25th Annual Convention, Omaha, Nebraska, September 24-27, 1968, "NCAI Fund, Inc. (General Support) Spring-1967," 2S454, box 47, Field Foundation Archives, 1940-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin; Josephy, ed., *Red Power*, 67; Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy*, 205-06, 217-19, 219-25; Castile, *To Show Heart*, 50-52, 57-58, 60-63; Riggs, "American Indians," 431, 449-63.

probability of default portended a massive loss of Indian lands, NCAI contended.<sup>35</sup>

Another component of the IRDA would have allowed off-reservation tribal members to relinquish their individual legal status as Indians in return for per capita portions of their tribes' assets. In a memo to Lyndon Johnson's special assistant Joseph Califano, the Budget Bureau pointed out a second potential consequence: "This would add an option to the Indian who is still living on the reservation, perhaps to protect his share in the tribal holdings, but is thinking about leaving for employment or other purposes."<sup>36</sup> Troubled by the ambiguity of its intent and the virtually complete disregard for tribal input, the National Congress of American Indians dubbed Interior's legislation the "Ominous Bill."<sup>37</sup>

In late August 1966, President Johnson expressed his desire to have an Outside Task Force on Indian Affairs organized to clarify the administration's Indian policy. It began with a meeting between Stewart Udall, special assistants Joseph Califano and James Gaither, Larry Levinson from the Bureau of the Budget, and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Undersecretary Robert Wood and revolved, in large part, around the possibility of "organizational changes."<sup>38</sup> One option called for a complete transfer of all Indian education programs to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW),

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<sup>35</sup> Christopher Riggs, "Indians, Liberalism, and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, 1963-1969" (Ph.D., diss., University of Colorado, 1997), 113-18.

<sup>36</sup> Memo for Joe Califano, "Indians" folder, box 330 and Richard Schifter to Walsh McDermott, 20 January 1967, attached to Walsh McDermott to James Gaither, 23 January 1967, "American Indians" folder, box 329, Office Files of James Gaither, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>37</sup> *NCAI Sentinel Bulletin* 9, no. 2 (Late Winter 1967), attached to Joseph Carter to James R. Jones, 2-28-68, "Ex In 3/1/68-9/30/68" folder, Ex In Gen In 11/22/63-8/20/64, box 1, White House Central Files, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>38</sup> Agenda Indians Meeting, Thursday, August 25, 1966, "Indians" folder, box 330, Office Files of James Gaither.

with Interior assuming control of OEO's Indian programs.<sup>39</sup>

At the initial meeting, Interior Secretary Udall and HUD Undersecretary Robert Wood underscored their support for an Indian policy guided by the "developing nations concept." Crafted along the lines of modernization theory, they suggested that it would "enable the Indian to enter the mainstream of American life."<sup>40</sup> They proposed, in other words, a reassertion of the Point Four strategy that had been applied to emerging nations since the administration of Harry S Truman—technical assistance and outside capital investment would promote industrial development and lead to economic self-sufficiency. Had their intentions been to facilitate the emergence of sovereign Indian nations, this strategy would have been well received. But, as with global modernization, it remained to be seen who would benefit most from these so-called development schemes.

In keeping with this theme, the Johnson administration called on people with strong backgrounds in international development to staff the task force. At its first meeting on October 11, 1966, American Indian Chicago Conference coordinator and University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax joined OEO partisan Robert Roessel, as well as several individuals with experience in the Agency for International Development (AID). Among the prominent names that appeared was that of W.W. Keeler, the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation and the lone Indian on the task force. An executive with Phillips Petroleum, Keeler had previously served on both the Commission

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<sup>39</sup> Stewart Udall to Joseph Califano, 27 April 1967 and John Gardner to LBJ, 22 March 1967, "American Indians" folder, box 329, Office Files of James Gaither.

<sup>40</sup> Meeting on Indians, Thursday, August 25, 1966, "American Indians" folder, box 329, Office Files of James Gaither.

on the Rights, Liberties, and Responsibilities of the American Indian and the Interior Department study group. Kennedy and Johnson administration confidante and AAIA General Counsel Richard Schifter also accepted an invitation to participate in the Outside Task Force on Indian Affairs.<sup>41</sup>

Although the Johnson administration intended to keep the task force's existence and final report confidential, they proved to be two poorly kept secrets. No sooner had the task force assembled, than its members began to call Indian advocacy organizations for statistics and contact information. As longtime proponents of Indian consultation and consent, Robert Roessel and Sol Tax expressed their dismay at the failure to include more Indians during the initial gathering. Tax particularly went on to correspond widely with colleagues and friends such as Vine Deloria, Nancy Lurie, D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead), and Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), informing them of the progress they were making. They, in turn, passed on the information to others. Soon all of Indian Country was abuzz with talk of the task force.<sup>42</sup>

Issued on December 23, 1966, the Outside Task Force's final report, "A Free Choice Program for American Indians," anticipated the central role the War on Poverty

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<sup>41</sup> The members and their affiliations were as follows: Charles Abrams (Urban Planning Department, Columbia University), Lewis Douglas (Mutual Insurance of New York), Everett Hagen (Professor of Economics and Political Science, MIT), Bruce Jessup (California State Department of Public Health), W.W. Keeler (Chairman of the Executive Committee, Phillips Petroleum Company), Richard Lasko (Technical Adviser, Battelle Institute), Walsh McDermott (Chairman, Department of Public Health and Preventative Medicine, Cornell University Medical College), Robert Roessel (Director, Rough Rock Navajo Demonstration School), Richard Schifter (Strasser, Spiegelberg, Fried, Frank, and Kampelman, Attorneys at Law), Milton Stern (Union Carbide Corporation), Herbert Striner (Director of Program Development, W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research), and Sol Tax (Professor of Anthropology, University of Chicago. Members of Task Force on Indian Affairs, "Indians" folder, box 976, Office Files of John Macy, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>42</sup> Deloria interview, 18 October 2001.

would play in the future direction federal Indian policy. Beyond the Office of Economic Opportunity, the members of the committee found, there had been no meaningful commitment to Indian involvement in policy development. At a time when NCAI continued its assault on Interior Secretary Stewart Udall's yet to be introduced Indian Resources Development Act, this recommendation undoubtedly struck a devastating blow. Bearing the impress of Sol Tax and Robert Roessel, the Outside Task Force further recommended a presidential message that disavowed termination, pledged administrative support for cultural pluralism, recognized Indian lands as inviolate, and supported Indian participation in all stages of federal program and policy development.<sup>43</sup> In this final instance, the task force specifically recommended that the Johnson administration model its initiatives after the Office of Economic Opportunity.<sup>44</sup>

The Outside Task Force's final recommendation, the transfer of Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, imperiled many of the more substantive aspects of their report.<sup>45</sup> Two task force members, Lewis Douglas and W.W. Keeler, openly opposed the transfer. In a letter to Task Force Chairman Walsh McDermott, Douglas wrote, "I dissent completely with the concept that the Indian is a welfare subject. He can and ought to be a self-sustaining and self-reliant personality."<sup>46</sup> Richard Schifter initially concurred with the proposal but, in January 1967, reversed his

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<sup>43</sup> A Free Choice Program for American Indians: Report of the President's Task Force on American Indians, December 1966, pp. 3, 10, "Pricing Files: Indians [2 of 2]" folder, box 10, Office Files of John E. Robson and Stanford G. Ross, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>44</sup> Free Choice Program, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Free Choice Program, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> L.W. Douglas to Walsh McDermott, 3 January 1967, "Pricing Files: Indians [1 of 2]" folder, box 10, Office Files of John E. Robson and Stanford G. Ross.

position. In light of the controversy swirling around the Indian Resources Development Act, he explained, "the transfer would be interpreted as another termination move. . . . I am inclined to think that a proposed transfer to HEW would give rise to a hurricane."<sup>47</sup>

The Johnson administration divided over the recommendations of the Outside Task Force. Personnel within the Budget Bureau supported shifting Indian affairs to Health, Education, and Welfare and thought that OEO's Indian programs ought to go along with it.<sup>48</sup> Yet they and representatives from HUD questioned the wisdom of committing to on-reservation development, contending that the high birth rates and general lack of economic development would necessitate too exorbitant a financial commitment. The Budget Bureau also took issue with the recommendations that the president proclaim Indian lands inviolate, and that he advocate absolute tribal discretion in regard to termination. Indians ought not to assume "a perpetual Federal guarantee of ownership and a right forever to live on the reservations supported by the federal government," a memo from the Budget Bureau read, lest they never willingly relinquish "their special tax status and other benefits."<sup>49</sup> In complete disregard for tribal sovereignty, these words reinvoked the pernicious idea that Indians represented no more than a minority group that refused to relinquish its unjustified claims to federal largesse. Treaties, according to this construction, signified little more than a dole.

Recognizing the internal divisiveness and the explosive potential of the debate,

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<sup>47</sup> Richard Schifter to Walsh McDermott, 20 January 1967, attached to Walsh McDermott to James Gaither, 23 January 1967, "American Indians" folder, box 329, Office Files of James Gaither.

<sup>48</sup> Memo for Joe Califano, 30 December 1966, "Indians" folder, box 330, Office Files of James Gaither.

<sup>49</sup> Memo for Joe Califano, 30 December 1966, "Indians" folder, box 330, Office Files of James Gaither.

Outside Task Force Chairman Walsh McDermott counseled “no mention of termination.” He suggested that if his colleagues were neither to “affirm nor deny” it, they could “preserve [the Johnson administration’s] options.”<sup>50</sup> The positions taken by Douglas, Schifter, the Budget Bureau, and McDermott underscored the basic philosophical bifurcation between the goals of HUD, HEW, and Interior as opposed to those of the Office of Economic Opportunity. Moreover, they accentuated the theme of a constant dialectic between the concepts of self-determination and termination, separation versus integration, and distinctness versus assimilation. These tensions were manifested throughout the rest of Lyndon Johnson’s tenure. Indeed, they compounded his administration’s inability to pull its myriad programs together as a cohesive policy.

Despite sustained Indian opposition to the Indian Resources Development Act, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall had a presidential message drafted in January 1967 to coincide with its introduction. Demonstrating how limited Interior’s vision remained, the draft included no refutation of termination, no commitment to on-reservation economic or cultural development, no discussion of treaties or inviolate lands, and no mention of the importance of tribal self-determination.<sup>51</sup> The message, however, never came to fruition. Due in large part to the negative reception the omnibus legislation encountered, Johnson lent only lukewarm support.<sup>52</sup> Though Congress did not enact the Indian Resources and

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<sup>50</sup> notes, n/d, box 10, Office Files of John E. Robson and Stanford G. Ross.

<sup>51</sup> President’s Message on Indians, draft, 26 January 1967, attached to Joe Califano to Doug Cater, 27 January 1967, “Panzer: Indian Message Response” folder, box 368, Office Files of Fred Panzer, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>52</sup> Lee C. White to Joe Califano, 20 November 1967, “Gaither: Indians General (3)” folder, box 15, Office Files of James Gaither.

Development Act and Lyndon Johnson declined to deliver Interior's message, both of them provided vivid reminders that Interior seemed to be committed to outmoded ideas and content with dictating policy.

As Interior's effort to regain primacy in Indian affairs foundered, the War on Poverty emerged from its shadow. Not coincidentally, Stewart Udall found himself on the defensive at the same moment that OEO enjoyed strong tribal support. Indeed, from his post in the Indian Division, Jim Wilson actively courted it. By early 1967, the symbiotic relationship between OEO and the National Congress of American Indians resulted in a carefully planned meeting in Washington, D.C. On February 2, a delegation from NCAI issued a statement that rejected the IRDA and called for an approach modeled after international aid to emerging nations. The tribal representatives promptly proceeded to hold a press conference with R. Sargent Shriver in which they praised OEO for the great advances that had been made on reservations through the War on Poverty.

Vine Deloria had prepared the ground for this symbolic demonstration with a terse letter to Sol Tax dated January 20, 1967. Indians perceived the Santa Fe conference to be a "betrayal," he wrote, and they considered the legislation that followed to be no less antithetical to Interior Secretary Udall's promise of Indian participation.<sup>53</sup> "The Poverty Program is extremely popular," Deloria wrote, "and for the first time tribes can plan and run their own programs for their people without someone in the BIA dictating to them."<sup>54</sup> In reality, Tax and Deloria had decided in advance that in this correspondence Deloria

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<sup>53</sup> Vine Deloria to Sol Tax, 20 January 1967 attached to WPG to LEL, 27 January 1967, "Ex In 10/5/64-2/29/68" folder, Ex In Gen In 11/22/63-8/20/64, box 1, WHCF.

<sup>54</sup> Vine Deloria to Sol Tax, 20 January 1967, box 1, WHCF.

would lay out exactly what NCAI wanted the Johnson White House to hear. Tax then forwarded the letter to Outside Task Force chairman Walsh McDermott as though it were confidential. It took on a life of its own at that point, and from McDermott it worked its way into the hands of Lyndon Johnson's top domestic advisors.<sup>55</sup>

The proceedings of the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty also increased the visibility of Indian Community Action. Established in September 1966, it focused particular attention on the effectiveness of OEO programs in small towns and reservations. Once again, Robert Roessel stepped forward to serve as one of the leading members. After serving on the Task Force on American Indian Poverty, he became the director of Arizona State University's Indian Community Action Project, then helped to establish the OEO-supported Rough Rock Demonstration School in the Navajo Nation. Founded in 1966, Rough Rock represented what one contemporary study called, "[a] radical departure from the conventional approach [to Indian education]," because it incorporated tribal language and culture into the curriculum and placed policy matters in the hands of an all-Indian school board.<sup>56</sup> In addition to providing a bicultural and bilingual curricula, the school set a precedent for using Navajo as a medium for instruction, treated English as a second language, sponsored a Navajo Curriculum Center, and employed people from the surrounding community to serve as

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<sup>55</sup> Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Bergman, Joseph Muskrat, Sol Tax, Oswald Werner, and Garry Witherspoon, *Problems of Cross-Cultural Educational Research and Evaluation: The Rough Rock Demonstration School*, ed. Arthur Harkins and Richard Woods (Minneapolis: Training Center for Community Programs in coordination with the Office of Community Programs Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1969), 5.

dorm hosts, staff, and teachers.<sup>57</sup>

The decision to have Robert Roessel on the advisory commission reflected President Lyndon Johnson's commitment to press Indian affairs as a major part of his domestic agenda.<sup>58</sup> In February, just after the NCAI endorsed OEO and attacked Interior's legislation, Roessel and Shriver privately discussed how they might craft an Indian policy based on the ideas embodied in the Rough Rock Demonstration School. By highlighting in what ways the "uneducated school board has disagreed" with educational experts, Roessel opined, he could provide Shriver with "a real indictment of professionalism and an example for local involvement." This, in turn, would serve as important ammunition in his upcoming fight with Congress.<sup>59</sup>

In congressional hearings on the Economic Opportunity Act and numerous other forums, Indian people engaged in the politics of poverty. In so doing, they brought their personal experiences into the realm of public policy debates. In October 1966, several months before the rural poverty hearings would amplify their voices, for instance, Navajos had already driven their point home to personnel within the Office of Economic Opportunity. "Most Navajos with whom I have talked want political and economic

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<sup>57</sup> Bergman, et al., "Problems," 5, 19; James S. Olson and Raymond Wilson, *Native Americans in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 202; Peter Iverson, *Diné: A History of the Navajos* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), 232-36; Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928*, 3d ed., rev. and enl. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 114, 142, 153-55, 171-77, 195.

<sup>58</sup> Jerry Fitzgibbon to Herb Kramer, 11 January 1967, "Ariz. Rough Rock Demonstration School" folder, box 486, Indian Program State File, 1965-1972, Records of the Office of Operations, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Roessel to Sargent Shriver, 21 February 1967, "Ariz. Rough Rock Demonstration School" folder, box 486, Indian Program State File, RG 381, NA II.

sovereignty—to shape their own destiny as a separate society—some even advocating a separate Navajo state in the Union,” one OEO inspector reported after a tour through the Navajo Nation. “These Navajos say the United States Government has paid only lip service to the sovereignty promised them in the Treaty of 1868, and that they remain today as wards of the government, with only a semblance of self-determination through their Tribal government.”<sup>60</sup>

Quiet conversations in an Indian community, a discussion in a tribal or federal office, or a congressional testimony did not carry the dramatic appeal of a demonstration. Nonetheless, to draw on historian Frederick Hoxie’s evocative phrase, each of them represented acts of “talking back.”<sup>61</sup> In each instance, drawing from history, memory, and experience, the participants spoke in political ways with political ends in mind. This certainly proved to be the case at the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty hearings in Tucson, Arizona, between January 26 and 27, 1967, and again in Memphis, Tennessee, from February 2 to 3. Whether they were Navajo, Lakota, Papago, Cheyenne, Apache, Pueblo, or Ponca, the witnesses spoke not only of the War on Poverty’s successes and shortcomings but also related them to larger questions that carried even greater import—cultural survival, sovereignty, development of natural resources, and an end to exploitative lease agreements.

At the rural poverty hearings in Tucson, National Congress of American Indians

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Weeks to Edgar May, 7 October 1966, pp. 10-11, attached to Edgar May to Ted Berry, 10 October 1966, “Correspondence (Folder 2 of 5)” folder, box 6, Grant Files, Records of the Office of Operations—Indian Division, RG 381, NA II.

<sup>61</sup> On the concept of “talking back,” see Frederick Hoxie, ed., *Talking Back to Civilization: Indian Voices from the Progressive Era* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001), especially pp. vii-ix.

President Wendell Chino (Mescalero Apache) underscored the importance of differentiating reservation and other rural communities and specifically cited Indians' cultural distinctiveness, unique legal status, and desire to preserve tribally-held land bases. Tribes welcomed additional federal aid, he argued, but these agencies would have to recognize tribal separateness.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, White Mountain Apache Chairman Ronnie Lupe provided a succinct rebuttal to the assertion that cultural assimilation was both inevitable and desirable. "I gather the question is within the area of giving up my culture or not," Lupe replied. "Now the question as stated there asks, Do you want to become a foreigner; and I don't believe so."<sup>63</sup>

In still another testimony, Agustin Aguilar, a seventy-three year old Santo Domingo Pueblo, critiqued the federal government's past policies. "[A]ll efforts to improve the conditions of life at Santo Domingo will prove futile, if two general wishes of the people are not respected. The people will not sacrifice their tradition, their culture, and their history as a sovereign tribe in order to more cheaply purchase the benefits of modern American society. The people will not sacrifice control of their land and their affairs as guaranteed by solemn binding treaties," he argued. "Through the years, many well-meaning agencies and officials have disregarded these wishes; and by doing so, they have already taken far too much from the Indian people. . . ." Juxtaposing this with the advances made through Community Action, Aguilar continued, "[I]t is encouraging that many are beginning to recognize the critical needs of the special problems of Indian

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<sup>62</sup> NACRP, *Rural Poverty, Tucson*, 144-45.

<sup>63</sup> NACRP, *Rural Poverty, Tucson*, 125.

people, and that the community action program is demonstrating its responsiveness to these needs and problems. . . . Community action represents a new spirit on the reservation: a spirit of cooperation that should be encouraged and strengthened.”<sup>64</sup>

To be sure, Indian Community Action had not met many of the high expectations it engendered. Programs were ill-conceived or poorly funded, some foundered under the weight of tribal factionalism, and still others simply bolstered tribal councils that many Indians perceived to be unrepresentative of their communities.<sup>65</sup> National Indian Youth Council President Clyde Warrior made this point in his testimony before the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty in Memphis, Tennessee, on February 2, 1967. In what would become a widely distributed and profoundly influential speech, he railed against OEO’s failure to foster self-sustaining communities and criticized Head Start for promoting assimilation. In Oklahoma, OEO funded Community Action agencies on a countywide basis, thereby preventing Indian people from controlling them. Rather than serving as a means of empowerment, they strengthened established institutions that most Indian people did not recognize as their own.<sup>66</sup>

Binding his specific experiences to a larger critique of American society, Warrior

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<sup>64</sup> NACRP, *Rural Poverty, Tucson*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> For criticisms of Indian Community Action or OEO Indian programs in general, see Human Sciences Research, Inc., *Comprehensive Evaluation*; Donald L. Parman, *Indians and the West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 151-52; Guy B. Senese, *Self-Determination and the Social Education of Native Americans* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 87-114; and Steiner, *New Indians*, 203-07.

<sup>66</sup> National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, *Rural Poverty: Hearings Before the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Memphis, Tennessee*, 2-3 February 1967, 149. A case study of the politics of the War on Poverty in Oklahoma follows in chapters six and seven. Warrior’s testimony at the NACRP is widely known today as “We Are Not Free.” It can be found reprinted in textbooks, primary document readers, and many other sources. This, in itself, suggests how powerful a political act Warrior’s testimony at the rural poverty commission turned out to be.

contended that Indian people had long been denied the power to make choices that affected their lives and their communities. This, in turn, cultivated a “poverty of spirit” that destroyed individuals, families, kin groups, and tribes. “We still have human passions and depth of feeling which may be something rare in these days,” Warrior continued, “but we are poor in spirit because we are not free—free in the most basic sense of the word.” In these shared experiences of unfreedom and humiliation, Indian people could find solidarity with other groups of people mired in poverty. “We are not free. We do not make choices. Our choices are made for us,” Warrior inveighed, drawing a powerful analogy. “We are the poor.”<sup>67</sup>

If the NIYC president’s description of the structural underpinnings of powerlessness could be used to criticize the War on Poverty, it also lent insight into why the antipoverty campaign was generally well received in Indian Country. To be sure, Indian people were reminded of their lack of power each time they saw white school administrators, white bureaucrats, white police officers, white social workers, white missionaries, and tribal governments that served as “yes men” to a white federal government. But it was for this reason that OEO Indian Division Director Jim Wilson’s attempt to develop a professional class of Indians to assume responsibility for all of these roles resonated with them. Through control came power and through power, freedom.

Given his own extensive involvement in Community Action, Robert Roessel reached the same conclusion. “The approach used under the Office of Economic Opportunity, the involvement of the Indian people and their participation,” he wrote

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<sup>67</sup> “Warrior Testifies at Rural Poverty Hearings,” *Americans Before Columbus* (May 1967): 4.

during a private meeting of the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, "is one that I believe offers the only hope for the future." As they wove their findings into a final report, he contended that prospective Indian legislation should expand the scope of this philosophy. "What we have here is not something new," Roessel opined. "We ought to say that it should be expanded because we have a program already."<sup>68</sup>

The collapse of the Indian Resources Development Act and the consistent support tribes gave to the Office of Economic Opportunity had already paid dividends in the recommendations of the Outside Task Force on American Indian Affairs. This continued to be the case as a proposed transfer of the BIA to the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare met with derision in the spring of 1967. This jolt, as well as constant internal conflict, proved sufficient enough to move the philosophy of maximum feasible participation to the forefront of federal policy.

In August 1967, the Johnson administration assembled an Interagency Task Force on American Indians to follow up on the work of the outside study group. This second task force brought together representatives from Interior, Health, Education, and Welfare, Commerce, Labor, Housing and Urban Development, Treasury, the Budget Bureau, and OEO.<sup>69</sup> Following the recommendations of the Outside Task Force, it resolved to articulate a program that would be "consistent with Indian self-help, eventual self-

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<sup>68</sup> Minutes, 25 June 1967, "The Fourth Meeting of the NACRP" folder, box 12, National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Federal Records, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>69</sup> Rebecca Robbins, "The Forgotten American: A Foundation for Contemporary American Indian Self-Determination," *Wicazo Sa Review* 6, no. 1 (1990): 30.

sufficiency, and long-term social and economic development.”<sup>70</sup>

In its final report, the interagency task force reaffirmed the prior recommendation for a presidential message. And like its predecessor, it too counseled no formal repudiation of House Concurrent Resolution 108. Their rationale, though seeking to appease Congress rather than Indians, was prompted by its continued support for termination. A direct frontal assault that included a repudiation of termination, the task force reasoned, would “jeopardize the substantive aspects of the Indian program.”<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, it went on to note, “Indians need, above all, to develop the community, social, and political skill required for long-term self-help. OEO’s Community Action Programs have already shown considerable success. . . . The uniqueness of the CAP approach—funding tribal councils directly—has brought a new Indian leadership to the forefront; this largely explains the overwhelming Indian acceptance of the program.”<sup>72</sup>

Moreover, in what amounted to yet another major victory for both the Office of Economic Opportunity and the NCAI, the final report found, “The success of OEO, and to an even larger extent of the Peace Corps, in capturing the public’s imagination and in recruiting energetic, enthusiastic personnel, suggests that BIA could profit from the agencies’ experiences.” Indicative of the coming to fruition of the NCAI’s emerging nations analogy, self-determination had become the centerpiece of the Johnson administration’s soon-to-be delivered Indian policy statement. In an additional

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<sup>70</sup> Report of the Interagency Task Force on American Indians, October 23, 1967, p. 33, “Indians 1968” folder, box 142, Office Files of James Gaither.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Riggs, “Indians, Liberalism, and Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society,” 130.

<sup>72</sup> Report of the Interagency Task Force on American Indians, pp. 35-36.

recommendation to which some feared Stewart Udall would take offense, the interagency task force concluded, "OEO and the Peace Corps should make available some experienced people to assist BIA and the Office of Territories in adjusting their programs."<sup>73</sup>

Office of Economic Opportunity personnel took great satisfaction in the task force's recommendations. On November 2, 1967, Office of Special Field Programs Director Noel Klores dashed off a short but instructive memo to R. Sargent Shriver that revealed as much. Klores had just read the Interagency Task Force's findings, and after providing Shriver with a brief synopsis of it, he wrote, "You should also be aware of one other paragraph in the report that might come up." Preceding a verbatim transcription of the passage that directed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to seek assistance from OEO and the Peace Corps, Klores crowed, "I quote without comment."<sup>74</sup> And, of course, no further elaboration was needed.

For a man who had proclaimed that OEO fought "a war for self determination. . . for the liberation of all men from all forms of colonialism," this undoubtedly came as welcome news. The emergence of tribal self-determination may have proved to be unforeseen, but it was undoubtedly consistent with what R. Sargent Shriver had intended the War on Poverty to accomplish. The National Congress of American Indians came to a similar conclusion. "[P]erhaps the most successful operations of the Office of Economic Opportunity have been on the Indian reservations because Indian people have

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<sup>73</sup> Report of the Interagency Task Force on American Indians, p. 35.

<sup>74</sup> Noel Klores, Memo for the Director, 2 November 1967, "Task Force on Indians—11/6/67" folder, box 13, Grant Files, Records of the Office of Operations—Indian Division, NA II.

long sought more freedom and funds for the various developmental programs in social services that their people have long needed,” the organization reported. “OEO came along at a time when Indian people were desperately searching for funds and programs to work on obvious social problems. So the War On Poverty seeds fell on fertile ground when it came time to fund reservation programs.”<sup>75</sup>

And yet during the waning months of 1967, promise and peril surrounded Indian affairs. The war in Vietnam had already drained precious resources from the War on Poverty. Now it threatened the future of Lyndon Johnson’s presidency. Moreover, Congress stood poised to make even deeper cuts in the domestic budget. It was not at all clear what would become of the Great Society. Amidst these troubled times, Robert Roessel had a difficult decision to make. In November, President Johnson invited the members of the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty to meet with him in the Capitol where they would publically present their findings. To be sure, the War on Poverty had no stronger advocate than Roessel. But the lack of congressional support for it and Johnson’s unwillingness to save his domestic agenda from falling victim to the conflict in Vietnam had left him distraught. In a letter that was undoubtedly difficult to write, he declined the invitation. Capturing the feelings of uncertainty that were not his alone, Roessel explained, “I believe you need my prayers more than my presence. . . .”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *NCAI Sentinel* 12, no. 2 (Late Winter 1967), attached to Joseph Carter to James R. Jones, 28 February 1968, “Ex In 3/1/68-9/30/68” folder, Ex In Gen In 11/22/63-8/20/64, box 1, WHCF.

<sup>76</sup> Bob Roessel to C.E. Bishop, 7 November 1967, “Robert A. Roessel” folder, box 1, NACRP.

Chapter Six  
Understanding the Basics:  
Community Action in Eastern Oklahoma, 1963-1967

It's not a question of who's right and wrong. It's a question of who's got the power.  
Clyde Warrior (Ponca)<sup>1</sup>

We are now a powerless people and we have very little left except our integrity as a people. And that we will not sacrifice even to survive.  
Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee)<sup>2</sup>

The War on Poverty mattered in Picher, Oklahoma. At the turn of the century, lead and zinc mining breathed life into this small community nestled in the extreme northeastern corner of the state, but they had been exhausted long ago, leaving little more than scarred earth, pollution, and poverty in their wake. Caught up in a rural-to-urban demographic shift that affected the entire state, the population declined by more than half between 1940 and 1960. Virtually all the families that stayed behind—some 2,533 souls in all—survived on the barest of incomes.<sup>3</sup> The civic leaders of Picher agreed, however, that Community Action had fostered a sense of hope in this hollowed out former

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Warrior, interview by Stan Steiner, tape recording, Tahlequah, Okla., September 1966, tape 15, series VIII, Stan Steiner Collection, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.

<sup>2</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Vera, 27 November 1967, folder 9, box 119, series IV, Sol Tax Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>3</sup> W. David Baird and Danney Goble, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 280, 438-42, 452, 457, 466-67, 469; U.S. Census Bureau, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960*, vol. I, *Characteristics of the Population*, part 38, *Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1963), 28; Jess Fronterhouse to Ed Edmondson, 8 February 1965; Ed Edmondson to Richard Boone, 5 February 1965 and Picher Community Action Program, folder 36, box 100, Ed Edmondson Papers, University Archives, John Vaughn Library, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma; Don Mathis to Greg Cornada, 4 May 1966, "Ottawa County" folder, box 35, Records of the Community Action Program, Records Relating to County Community Action Agencies, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives and Records Administration—Southwest Region, Ft. Worth, Texas. Although the total population of Oklahoma grew by 9.9% through the 1960s, the demographic shift from rural to urban continued. By the end of that decade over two-thirds of the population lived in urban areas. U.S. Census Bureau, *U.S. Census of Population: 1970*, vol. I, *Characteristics of the Population*, part 38, *Oklahoma* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1973), 4-5.

boomtown. After years of dwelling on a past that could never be relived, people had begun to think about the future again.<sup>4</sup>

When news surfaced of plans to consolidate local and area Community Action agencies into large multicounty consortia in the spring of 1967, the residents of Picher swiftly voiced their complaints. Foremost among the town's local institutions, the Lions Club had sponsored a Community Action agency since 1965. And it was with the Lions Club that the concerned people of Picher wanted it to stay.<sup>5</sup> As superintendent of the Picher-Cardin public school system, vice chairman of the Community Action agency's board of directors, and a leading figure in the Lions Club, Jess Fronterhouse harbored especially deep misgivings. From his perspective, all the talk of promoting efficiency emanating from the Office of Economic Opportunity's (OEO) Southwest Regional Office in Austin, Texas, failed to acknowledge one unassailable fact: Professionals located in faraway offices could not grasp the concerns, aspirations, and needs of a community in the same way that its residents could. "The Regional office is overlooking this basic issue," Fronterhouse explained in a letter to United States Senator Fred R. Harris (D-OK). But he thought the senator knew better. "In Okla[homa]," he quipped, "us Indians understand the basics."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jim Coble to Fred Harris, 5 July 1965, folder 50, box 7, Fred R. Harris Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Study, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>5</sup> This was not the first time they confronted the possibility of having their agency subsumed within a more expansive one. In early 1966, they successfully fought to prevent the Ottawa County Community Action Foundation from taking over their programs. William H. Crook to A.S. (Mike) Monroney, 18 January 1966; Ron Sparkman to Don Mathis, 16 February 1966; Ron Sparkman to Jim Galvin, 11 March 1966; and William H. Crook to Henry Bellmon, 15 April 1966, "Ottawa County" folder, box 35, CAA Records.

<sup>6</sup> Jess Fronterhouse to Fred Harris, 10 May 1967, folder 1, box 68, Harris Collection; "CAP" 3 Application for Community Action Program, 9 May 1967, "Ottawa County Application Multi-Service Day Care Center" folder, box 36, CAA Records.

With this succinct assertion, Jess Fronterhouse captured the essence of Community Action. Its guiding philosophy of maximum feasible participation did, indeed, hold that people who understood the basics of living in poverty should design, implement, and administer programs that affected their lives. His observation also lends insight into why tribal leaders, Indian and non-Indian advocates, and reformist bureaucrats considered Community Action to be a vehicle for advancing tribal self-determination. The War on Poverty's philosophy presented a powerful critique of the ideas governing federal-Indian affairs. Office of Economic Opportunity Director R. Sargent Shriver likened the antipoverty campaign to a struggle against colonialism in all its manifestations. Similarly, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr., considered it to be a catalyst for emerging Indian nations to reclaim the right of self-governance. For these reasons, the idea of giving those who understood the basics their due played a vital role in the politics of tribal sovereignty.<sup>7</sup>

But Jess Fronterhouse's phrase also hinted at the complexities embedded in the metamorphosis of the politics of poverty into the politics of self-determination. What exactly did he mean by "us Indians," anyway? At first glance, it might be read as a grammatical error—that Fronterhouse intended to say "we Indians" in reference to all of the tribal members involved in Picher's Community Action program. As a legacy of

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel M. Cobb, "Philosophy of an Indian War: Indian Community Action in the Johnson Administration's War on Indian Poverty, 1964-1968," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22, no. 2 (1998): 71-103; Daniel M. Cobb, "Intended But Unforeseen: Indian Community Action and the Foundations for Self-Determination and Modern Tribalism, 1963-1975," (paper presented at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual Southwestern Social Science Association Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, April 1999). An insightful collection of Indian voices is Kenneth R. Philp, ed. *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 191-227.

removal, northeastern Oklahoma certainly contained significant numbers of Ottawas, Peorias, Quapaws, Shawnees, Miamis, Delawares, Modocs, and Cherokees. On the other hand, Fronterhouse's position as a school superintendent made it at least somewhat unlikely that he would commit such an elementary grammatical mistake. Perhaps, then, he intended the reference to "us Indians" to be ironic, as a stab at condescending attitudes toward ordinary rural folk. To be sure, virtually any native of Oklahoma could appreciate that play on words.

Jess Fronterhouse's ambiguous heritage made both of these scenarios problematic. He did not indicate being Indian, much less having a specific tribal affiliation, in any of his formal correspondence with the race conscious Office of Economic Opportunity. Years later, his friends and family also seemed unsure of his ancestry, reporting that he was part-Choctaw, part-Cherokee, or that he never spoke of being Indian at all. And finally, many Oklahomans—at least one member of the Picher Community Action agency among them—mistook Fred R. Harris for an Indian, conflating the senator's racial and ethnic identity with that of his wife, LaDonna, an enrolled member of the Comanche Tribe. It could very well be, then, that a self-identifying Indian with no tribal membership and an uncertain lineage authored this grand metaphor for the meaning of Community Action—all in an attempt to curry favor with a man he mistakenly believed to be an Indian. Employing the phrase "us Indians," in other words, may have been Jess Fronterhouse's way of saying, "you and I understand the basics, Fred."

The difficulty of deconstructing the enigmatic expression "us Indians understand the basics" provides the lesson to be taken from it. Community Action mattered because

it extended limited social services to people that needed them. But it became freighted with even greater import because it broached questions regarding “which” Indians and “what” basics. In a state that contained the second largest Native American population in the United States but lacked the clearly drawn reservation boundaries so common to the West, these served as no mean points of contention. Indeed, Community Action exacerbated conflicts over the social and political constructions of identity, poverty, and community. In so doing, it became deeply implicated in an issue even more fundamental to Indian-white relations: power.

A case study focused on Oklahoma describes specific manifestations of a much larger process. Whether in ghettos, rural areas, or reservations, Community Action created a forum for dialogue between people who often held diametrically opposed definitions of the situation, people who did not share the same understanding of reality.<sup>8</sup> This included individuals of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, from rural and urban America, men and women, the young and the aged. Consequently, the War on Poverty contributed to a breaching effect in which many of the signs and symbols of the regnant social order became unfixed and set afloat. It included issues regarding poverty, social welfare, and race, no less than federal-Indian policy.<sup>9</sup> To understand how this complex process unfolded in Oklahoma during the latter half of the 1960s, however, it is necessary

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<sup>8</sup> A note of qualification is in order here. Most Community Action Programs were not fraught with conflict. Indeed, a careful study of the more typical programs has yet to be written. We know inordinately more about the few provocative programs that generated national media attention—such as those in Harlem, the state of Mississippi, Los Angeles, Newark, and Milwaukee—than the vast majority in other cities, small towns, and rural enclaves.

<sup>9</sup> Racial as well as gender politics emerged from the War on Poverty, and I am including those under the larger rubric of identity. Note, for instance, heightened recognition of the feminization of poverty.

first to move back to an earlier time. And so we return to November 1963 and a very unhappy man we last encountered contemplating a trip to San Francisco.

Earl Boyd Pierce (Cherokee), the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma's attorney and an ever present figure in the National Congress of American Indians, exerted considerable influence in Indian politics throughout the 1960s. He was a portly man whose lack of sartorial good sense led him to hike his pants high above the great girth of his mid-section. One observer later remembered that the unsavory result of seeing Pierce's black dress pants stretched tightly across the hemispheric contour of his stomach left him with his first true understanding of the term "potbelly."<sup>10</sup> This, as well as the lawyer's thick Oklahoma drawl and racial prejudices, imparted an equally vivid first impression on NCAI Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr. "Aw Jesus, southern sheriffs," he remembered thinking after his initial contact with Pierce and his compatriot, Dennis Bushyhead (Cherokee). "These guys should be down in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, lynching black people instead of here."<sup>11</sup>

Born and raised in Ft. Gibson, a small town in Muskogee County, Pierce literally embodied country singer Merle Haggard's "Okie from Muskogee"—a law-abiding, right-living, flag-waving champion of the American way of life. Accordingly, he took it upon himself to root out domestic subversion wherever it reared its ugly head. Pierce looked to Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Director J. Edgar Hoover for inspiration, steeling his resolve by rereading passages from an autographed copy of the zealous

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<sup>10</sup> Albert Wahrhaftig, interview by author, tape recording, Tahlequah, Okla., 8 September 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Col., 18 October 2001.

anticommunist's book, *Masters of Deception*. But Pierce so fervently believed in his patriotic mission that he became victimized by it. A combination of xenophobia and paranoia transformed things he did not understand into vile conspiracies. Challenges to the way he made sense of the world—from civil rights demonstrations to antiwar rallies—represented nothing less than sedition.<sup>12</sup>

Through an unusual turn of events, the War on Poverty proved to be no exception. It began in the summer of 1962, when University of Chicago anthropologist Sol Tax submitted an application to the Carnegie Corporation of New York to fund a four-year investigation into cross-cultural education among the Oklahoma Cherokees.<sup>13</sup> If the American Indian Chicago Conference left Earl Boyd Pierce with an abiding distaste for Tax, the news that an ethnographic research team from the University of Chicago would be operating in the Cherokee Nation only deepened his hostility. Arriving in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, in August, Carnegie Project Director Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee), met personally with Pierce to explain the reason for their presence. "I think I soothed his ruffled feathers," he wrote to Tax after the conversation, "but he sure thinks you are the devil in disguise."<sup>14</sup>

It must be remembered that Earl Boyd Pierce sincerely believed he had forestalled a communist plot in Chicago in 1961. In the years that followed, he arrayed his

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<sup>12</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce, 6 May 1967, volume 17, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. The copy of *Masters of Deception* is held by the Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>13</sup> Sol Tax to Philleo Nash, 23 April 1962 and Sol Tax to Philleo Nash, 8 June 1962, "Philleo Nash" folder, box 9, series III, Records of the American Indian Charter Convention, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

<sup>14</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax 25 August 1963, folder 6, box 119, series IV, Tax Papers.

enemies—from former NCAI leaders Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Lakota) and D’Arcy McNickle (Flathead) to National Indian Youth Council (NIYC) board member Clyde Warrior (Ponca)—into a vast network of anti-American saboteurs ominously labeled the “Tax forces.” With each new threat he detected, this nebulous group of shadowy figures grew more incestuous. The Carnegie Project therefore fit seamlessly into the world Pierce had constructed: The Tax forces, frustrated by the fact that he had foiled their mischievous designs in Chicago, decided to take the fight to the Cherokees—indeed, to him. But he just as quickly resolved not to let that happen. Wrapped in the mantle of liberty, democracy, law, and order, he quickly set about weaving an intricate web of surveillance.<sup>15</sup>

Internal tensions within the Cherokee Nation exacerbated suspicions regarding the Carnegie Project. The primary division involved tribal members whose social lives revolved around close-knit traditional communities and other Cherokees who accepted the dominant society as their own. Many in the former group resisted allotment at the turn of the century, arguing that the process violated their sovereignty. Whether or not

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<sup>15</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce to Robert Burnette, 25 September 1963, “NCAI Executive Committee—Correspondence, 1956-1965 [2 of 3]” folder, box 19 and Earl Boyd Pierce to Paul M. Niebell, 5 August 1964, “Sol Tax—Correspondence & Reports Concerning 1964” folder, box 27, Earl Boyd Pierce Collection, Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma. While my argument has been drawn primarily from Earl Boyd Pierce’s papers held by the Cherokee National Archives, it confirms the accuracy of what Rosalie Wax, Albert Wahrhaftig, and others later reported. See, for instance, Rosalie H. Wax, *Doing Fieldwork: Warnings & Advice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 281-83, 303, 307; Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “Looking Back to Tahlequah: Robert K. Thomas’ Role Among the Oklahoma Cherokee, 1963-1967,” in Steve Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee, A Good Anthropologist: Papers in Honor of Robert K. Thomas* (Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, 1998), 93-104. Given my access to Pierce’s own papers, however, I have been able to develop the specifics of his assault and to unearth just how extensive it proved to be. By the end of the decade, he had bound Sol Tax, Herbert Marcuse, the Students for a Democratic Society, Angela Davis, Marlon Brando, select members of the NCAI, among others, in a revolutionary communist-Zionist conspiracy that took its orders from the Kremlin.

they accepted or later lost their individual parcels of land, traditional Cherokees predominantly lived in small, isolated, and extremely impoverished enclaves scattered throughout the back reaches of northeastern Oklahoma. Though they lacked material wealth, they retained a strong sense of social cohesion and cultural integrity through the Cherokee language, involvement in the Baptist Church, or affiliation with one of several sacred societies.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, the other group of Cherokees accepted the dominant society as their own and often chose to live in white-dominated towns such as Muskogee, Bartlesville, and Tahlequah. Generally more affluent and well-educated, they identified strongly with their heritage but did not maintain social or cultural ties with traditional communities.<sup>17</sup> More important, they controlled what vestiges remained of the tribal government.

Appointed by the federal government as principal chief in 1949, W.W. Keeler earned a reputation as a decent man committed to the welfare of the tribe. Indeed, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations consistently sought his counsel, and the tribal complex today carries his name. Others, however, believed his primary loyalty rested

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<sup>16</sup> For the most recent account of the internal dynamics of the Cherokee Nation, see Circe Sturm's incisive ethnohistory *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Rather than dichotomizing between fullbloods and mixed-bloods, Sturm rightly notes that "Cherokee society can be visualized as a diverse body of multiply constituted individuals who coalesce in socially significant ways around one or more subjectivities, or different aspects of identity." Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 25. In making this point, Sturm follows the findings of the Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education Project and particularly the writings of Albert L. Wahrhaftig, who served as a research assistant. While I, too, have found the Carnegie Project's research compelling and of lasting import, I have sought to historicize its members. In other words, I treat them as actors in this story—as the products of a particular place, time, and milieu. Extensive citations to the publications that came out of their work can be found in the succeeding footnotes.

with the interests of Phillips Petroleum.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, a core group of Cherokees perceived Keeler to be a well-intentioned outsider. “I’ll just put it like this: The appointed chief of the Cherokees, Mr. Keeler, has good intentions for a Cherokee,” stated twenty-five-year-old Wesley Proctor. “But his techniques and tactics has never worked, never will. And just to put it plain as day, he just doesn’t know a Cherokee. He’s a white man.”<sup>19</sup> The members of Proctor’s cohort invariably identified with traditional groups such as the Keetoowahs or Four Mothers Society and consistently pressed for the popular election of the principal chief.

Although he considered himself to be a “marginal” member of the tribe, Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education Project Director Robert K. Thomas strongly identified with traditional Cherokees. And as Keeler knew from past experience, he shared their perception of him as an illegitimate leader—as, essentially, a white man.<sup>20</sup> Born to parents of Cherokee descent in eastern Kentucky, Thomas grew up in rural northeastern Oklahoma. His maternal grandparents raised him, and there Thomas immersed himself in Cherokee sacred knowledge. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Thomas went on to the University of Arizona, where he completed a bachelor’s degree in geography and a master’s in anthropology. Indicative of his strong ties to the Oklahoma Cherokee

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 5 October 2001; “New PAD Aide Also Big Chief of Cherokees,” *Washington Post* (5 March 1952), “Keeler, W.W. (Consultant, BIA)” folder, box 66, series III, National Congress of American Indians Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland Maryland.

<sup>19</sup> Wesley Proctor, interview by Faye Delph, 19 November 1968, volume 18, pp. 3-4, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>20</sup> Luke Carey (Cherokee), interview by Faye Delph, 1 July 1969, volume 11, p. 12, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma; Helen Peterson to Robert K. Thomas, 4 October 1957 and Office Manager of Helen Peterson to W.W. Keeler, 11 October 1967, “Keeler, W.W. (Consultant, BIA)” folder, box 66, series III, NCAI Papers.

community, Thomas's thesis examined the Red Bird Smith movement, a nativist response to the cataclysmic consequences of allotment.<sup>21</sup>

His continued interest in anthropology brought Thomas to the University of Chicago in 1953, where he enrolled in the doctoral program to study with Sol Tax. Although he never formally received a Ph.D., Thomas produced scholarship deserving of the degree.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, he internalized the principles of action anthropology and exemplified them in his involvement in the Workshop on American Indian Affairs, American Indian Chicago Conference, National Indian Youth Council, and a host of subsequent endeavors.<sup>23</sup> By the time he arrived in Tahlequah during the summer of 1963, Bob Thomas had developed an activist impulse equal to his theoretical acuity. He offered devastating critiques of assimilation and mainstream American culture in his defense of folk societies. Moreover, he had come to see the predicament of American Indians as analogous to that of emerging nations. The administration of federal-Indian affairs, he argued, represented an example of internal colonialism, and the Cherokee Nation

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<sup>21</sup> The biographical information on Thomas in this and the succeeding paragraph is drawn from James Treat, *Around the Sacred Fire: Native Religious Activism in the Red Power Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 40-59 and Steve Pavlik, "Introduction," in Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee*, xiii-xviii. A version of his thesis was later published as Robert K. Thomas, "The Redbird Smith Movement," in *Symposium of Cherokee and Iroquois Cultures*, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 180, ed. William N. Fenton and John Gulick (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1961).

<sup>22</sup> Murray L. Wax, "Old Many Coyote: The Anthropologist as Trickster, Buffoon, Wise Man," in Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee*, 17-26. For a list of Thomas's publications, see Stan Thomas, "Robert K. Thomas: A Bibliography," in *ibid.*, 367-71. He also authored numerous essays and chapters under the pseudonyms Anderson Dirthrower, Stand Middlestriker, and G.P. Horsefly. For citations to many of these, see Treat, *Around the Sacred Fire*, especially chapter two. To gain a sense of how profound an impact Thomas had on the lives and thinking of scholars, as well as members of tribal communities, see the essays contained in Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee*, 41-308.

<sup>23</sup> Sam Stanley, "Community, Action, and Continuity: A Narrative Vita of Sol Tax," *Current Anthropology* 37, Supplement (February 1996): S131-S137.

signified its quintessence.<sup>24</sup>

The Carnegie Project, like the American Indian Chicago Conference before it, represented a fusion of action anthropology, modernization theory, and anticolonialism.<sup>25</sup> Specifically, it addressed “structural isolation,” which it defined as “an insulation and alienation from the institutions of the general society in the region.” In so doing, the Carnegie Project considered its work to be influenced by, and a contribution to, the field of community development in both domestic and international contexts.<sup>26</sup> “The project is not attempting to assimilate or integrate Cherokees, either linguistically or socially,” Carnegie Project linguist Willard Walker explained. “Neither is it attempting to preserve Cherokee languages or any other aspect of Cherokee culture or society. Rather, it is attempting to increase the Cherokees’ competence and confidence in making whatever adjustments to the modern world they, as individuals or as a tribe, may feel desirable.”<sup>27</sup> Consistent with action anthropology’s theoretical revisions of Robert Redfield’s folk-urban continuum, the Carnegie Project endeavored to “present Cherokees to whites as modern, ‘for real,’ worthy people,” not as a vanishing minority.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On Thomas’s theories, see Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “Robert K. Thomas and the Monteith Theory,” in Pavlik, ed., *A Good Cherokee*, 9-16 and Otto Feinstein, “From Experience to Theory, From Theory to Experience: Robert K. Thomas and the Tradition of Book VII of Plato’s *Republic*,” in *ibid.*, 261-73.

<sup>25</sup> Untitled article, Robert K. Thomas, 7 June 1966/68, folder 5, box 121, series IV, Tax Papers.

<sup>26</sup> Sol Tax to Ted Risenhoover, editor, *The Pictorial Press* (Tahlequah, OK), 11 August 1966, “Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning ‘66” folder, box 28, Pierce Collection.

<sup>27</sup> Willard Walker, “An Experiment in Programmed Cross-Cultural Education: The Import of the Cherokee Primer for the Cherokee Community and for the Behavioral Sciences,” March 1965, p. 1, “Teaching Materials: Walker, Willard, ‘An Experiment in Programmed Cross-Cultural Education,’” folder, box 28, series 17, Helen L. Peterson Papers, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

<sup>28</sup> Sol Tax and Robert K. Thomas, “Education ‘for’ American Indians: Threat or Promise?” *The Florida Reporter* (spring/summer 1969): 17.

The Carnegie Project focused on community development, the Cherokee language, and new forms of communication in order facilitate the revitalization of traditional Cherokee communities. In keeping with the precepts of action anthropology, however, it sought primarily to offer new opportunities for indigenous initiatives. During its first two years of operation, Thomas and the rest of the research team formed close ties with community leaders and gained the confidence of the traditional Cherokees. A newsletter, adult education courses, a primer, and a radio program—all in Cherokee—soon emerged from their efforts. But more significantly, each of these innovations rested on the intensive involvement of people from tribal communities.<sup>29</sup>

All of these projects contributed to a potent challenge to conventional ideas about the place of Cherokees in Oklahoma society. Where most non-Indians saw fragmented conglomerations of “backwards fullbloods,” the Carnegie Project discerned structurally isolated but tenaciously persistent traditional communities.<sup>30</sup> The painstaking task of formally plotting them on a map fell to Albert Wahrhaftig, a doctoral candidate in anthropology at the University of Chicago who had been involved in the American Indian Chicago Conference in 1961 and had recently returned from a tour in Latin America with the Peace Corps. Beginning in October 1963, Wahrhaftig drove countless miles of rough back roads with Hiner Doublehead (Cherokee) and Finis Smith (Cherokee), the grandson

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<sup>29</sup> Publications included “Cherokee Stories,” “The Cherokee People Today,” and “Cherokee Primer.” See “Cherokee Native Literacy Materials” sent by Willard Walker, folder 11, box 29, series I, Steiner Papers.

<sup>30</sup> Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “Community and the Caretakers,” *New University Thought* 4, no. 4 (1966/1967): 56. Albert L. Wahrhaftig and Robert K. Thomas, “Renaissance and Repression: The Oklahoma Cherokee,” *Trans-action* 6 (February 1969): 42-48.

of Redbird Smith, and charted the location and population of tiny enclaves such as Bull Hollow, Cherry Tree, Briggs, Lyons Switch, and Fourteen Mile Creek. In the end, their map detailed the location of some seventy distinct and viable tribal Cherokee settlements with a total of approximately 10,000 inhabitants.<sup>31</sup>

For its involvement in tribal Cherokee communities, promotion of bilingual education, association with Sol Tax, and other purported crimes, Earl Boyd Pierce orchestrated an extensive campaign of espionage and subversion against the Carnegie Project. He long suspected Bob Thomas of being an ethnic fraud, and now considered him to be no more than a stooge sent by Sol Tax to rile up the peaceful, contented, and ignorant fullbloods. Accordingly, Pierce sent all of his correspondence with Tax and Thomas to Robert French, an FBI agent stationed in Muskogee.<sup>32</sup> With the full consent and knowledge of Principle Chief W.W. Keeler, he also spread rumors throughout tribal settlements and non-Indian communities about the research project's connections to communist organizations, employed Cherokees to spy on Thomas, Wahrhaftig, and others, lodged complaints with the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and made public speeches

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<sup>31</sup> Wahrhaftig interview, 7 September 2002; Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, received 10 January 1964, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers. For a detailed map of these Cherokee settlements, see Albert L. Wahrhaftig, "The Tribal Cherokee Population of Eastern Oklahoma," *Current Anthropology* 9 (December 1968) Part II: 510-18.

<sup>32</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Earl Boyd Pierce, 31 May 1963, Earl Boyd Pierce to Robert K. Thomas, 17 June 1963, Earl Boyd Pierce to Robert French, 9 May 1963, and Earl Boyd Pierce to Paul M. Niebell, 5 August 1964, "Sol Tax—Correspondence & Reports Concerning 1964" folder, box 27, Pierce Collection. He also tried to convince his old friend and then-NCAI Executive Director Robert Burnette to secure FBI files on Thomas. Earl Boyd Pierce to Robert Burnette, 25 September 1963 and Robert Burnette to Earl Boyd Pierce, 15 November 1963, "NCAI Executive Committee—Correspondence, 1956-1965 [2 of 3]" folder, box 19, Pierce Collection.

condemning Sol Tax.<sup>33</sup> By January, Pierce became convinced that the “Tax forces” also included Clyde Warrior, certain BIA and Interior Department personnel, and Marlon Brando, whom he had heard was a Jew. “In my position, I realize it is very easy for me to make two and two equal four,” he wrote to W.W. Keeler of his theory, “when in truth sometimes it may appear that I am trying to make two and three equal four.”<sup>34</sup>

With the advent of the War on Poverty, Earl Boyd Pierce escalated the campaign against the Carnegie Project. In August 1964, representatives from OEO’s Task Force on American Indian Poverty met with the Cherokee Executive Council to discuss the possibility of focusing on northeastern Oklahoma as a demonstration area.<sup>35</sup> The Economic Opportunity Act made no special provision for Indians, but by administrative fiat OEO removed the funding of reservation programs from state allocations and created a separate Indian Desk within the Community Action Program. “The reason for this approach,” OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver explained, “is that these federal reservations have historical and legal ties to the federal government and not to the state governments.” He continued, “The grants are awarded to the reservation as a unit of geography to serve all the poor people who live within the bounds of that community.”<sup>36</sup> Because of this

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<sup>33</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 2 April 1964, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers; Earl Boyd Pierce to Paul M. Niebell, 5 August 1964 and Earl Boyd Pierce to W.W. Keeler, 31 December 1964, “Sol Tax—Correspondence & Reports Concerning 1964” folder, box 27, Pierce Collection.

<sup>34</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce to W.W. Keeler, 25 January 1964, “NCAI Executive Committee—Correspondence, 1956-1965 [2 of 3]” folder, box 19 and Earl Boyd Pierce to W.G. Angel, 29 January 1964, “Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning ‘64” folder, box 27, Pierce Collection.

<sup>35</sup> Forrest Gerard, Trip Report Summary, 3-14 and 23 August 1964, attached to Carruth J. Wagner to Philleo Nash, 22 September 1964, “Community Action Task Force” folder, box 7, Records Relating to the Office of Economic Opportunity, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>36</sup> Sargent Shriver to Dewey F. Bartlett, 1 May 1967, folder 1f, box 121, Page Belcher Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma.

geographical definition of Indianness, non-reservation Indians did not fall under the aegis of the Indian Desk. Poverty in off- and non-reservation areas, the reasoning went, represented “not an Indian problem but really a problem of various communities.”<sup>37</sup>

Preliminary studies seemingly legitimated this assumption. As antipoverty planners scanned Oklahoma’s depressed regions, they perceived people beleaguered by common problems such as substandard educational facilities, antiquated or nonexistent infrastructures, inadequate shelter, isolation, and a paucity of economic opportunities. Surveys based on the government’s definition of poverty as an annual income below \$3,000 for a family of four provided further evidence of shared deprivation, while wrenching economic transitions driven by agricultural mechanization touched virtually all rural Oklahomans.<sup>38</sup> Within this framework, only the staggering depth of poverty in Indian communities distinguished them from their neighbors. In two northeastern Oklahoma counties, Indian families earned half the median annual incomes of \$1,293 and \$1,941, figures that were already far below the poverty line. The largest percentile of both Choctaw and Chickasaw families earned less than \$1,000 per year.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Statement of Richard Schifter, House Committee on Education and Labor, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program*, Part 2, 88<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., 15-17, 20-21 April 1964, 1064.

<sup>38</sup> Douglas Hale, “The People of Oklahoma: Economics and Social Change,” in *Oklahoma: New Views of the Forty-Sixth State*, ed. Anne Hodges Morgan and H. Wayne Morgan (Norman, 1982), 77-89; “Percent of Families with Under \$3,000 Annual Income By County,” attached to Dean E. Barrett to Senator Mike Monroney, 2 February 1965, folder 6, box 49, Mike Monroney Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>39</sup> Murray L. Wax, *Indian Americans: Unity and Diversity* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971), 95, 99; Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “In the Aftermath of Civilization: The Persistence of Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1975), 22; Hayden, “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity,” 421; “Oklahoma Industrial Development and Park Dept.,” n.d.; “A Study of the Indian Population Residing in Blaine County, Oklahoma,” April 1966; J.O. Smith to Jim Woolfork, 23 November 1965, “Blaine County” folder, box 9 and “Work Program,” attached to Cleveland County Community Action Foundation, “Office of Economic Opportunity Application for Community Action Program,” 2-1-68 to 1-31-69, “Cleveland County Community Action Foundation, Inc. Program Administration 7-4, Little Axe Multi-

Just as allotment complicated the internal dynamics of tribal affairs, so too did it usher in a period of troubled Indian-white relations. After the advent of statehood in 1907, Oklahoma gradually assumed civil and criminal jurisdiction over nearly all of the land within the confines of its boundaries. W.E. Schooler, a ninety year-old non-Indian, witnessed the allotment era and testified to the legacy of dispossession, intermarriage, preemption, and time. "[T]he white people have gotten to the point where they don't pay much attention to 'em," he stated in regard to the Choctaws. "So it's just kind of a hush-hush deal now."<sup>40</sup> Yet none of the allotment legislation explicitly abrogated tribes' federal trust status, and 200,000 people from sixty-seven tribes lived in the state. Despite all of this, the majority of Oklahomans accepted the fiction that all tribal authority had been subsumed by the state.<sup>41</sup> Within the realm of public and political consciousness, Indians existed as a vanishing minority.

From the perspective of the appointed leaders of the Cherokee Nation, War on Poverty funds promised to bolster the credibility of their government. Foremost in the minds of the Cherokee Nation was securing the right to administer programs exclusively for its members. The Office of Economic Opportunity quickly made it clear, however,

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Purpose Center 7-3," no folder, box 12, CAA Records.

<sup>40</sup> W.E. Schooler, interview by Ruth Hankowsky, 29 June 1967, p. 6, T-130, volume 45, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>41</sup> Strickland, *Indians of Oklahoma*, 35-54, 72-73; James L. McElrath, "A Multi-County Community Action Program," p. 4, "OEO (1968) CAP-Program Data" folder, box 72, Departmental Files, Carl Albert Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma. See especially John H. Moore, "The Enduring Reservations of Oklahoma," in *State and Reservation: New Perspectives on Federal Indian Policy* ed. Robert L. Bee and George Pierre Castile (Tucson, 1992), 92-107. The official 1960 census reported 64,689 Indians; some 140,000 probably were not counted. For more on Indian demography, see Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Norman, 1990), 159-224.

that it would not be feasible given that any program would have to include all members of a given area.<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, Community Action's pledge to effect maximum feasible participation intersected with the Carnegie Project's own efforts to revitalize tribal communities. No sooner had the legislation been passed in August 1964 than Bob Thomas inquired into the possibility of integrating its bilingual projects into county Community Action agencies through such initiatives as Head Start, adult literacy courses, and a bilingual driver's education program.<sup>43</sup> They also attempted to convince War on Poverty officials to recognize that the success of the antipoverty campaign would rest on a realistic definition of community, one predicated on sociological and anthropological principles rather than units of geography.

In January 1965, Carnegie Project research assistant Albert Wahrhaftig traveled to the National Conference on Poverty in the Southwest in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he engaged in a discussion with OEO Office of Special Field Programs Director Sidney Woolner. After their preliminary conversation, he sent Woolner a formal paper entitled "Indian Communities of Eastern Oklahoma and the War on Poverty."<sup>44</sup> In it, Wahrhaftig contended that it would not do to incorporate Cherokees as minorities in

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<sup>42</sup> William Finale to All Superintendent, Cherokee, Miccosukee, and Seminole Agencies, 4 March 1966, "Community Action Programs Information to the Field" folder, box 7, Records Relating to OEO, RG 75, NA; Memo from E.B.P., 19 June 1965, "Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning '65" folder, box 28, Pierce Collection.

<sup>43</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Neil Morton, 28 October 1964, folder 6, box 119, Tax Papers.

<sup>44</sup> Albert L. Wahrhaftig to Sol Tax, 22 February 1965, folder 1, box 155, series IV, Tax Papers; Albert L. Wahrhaftig to W.W. Keeler, 1 June 1965, "Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning '65" folder, box 28, Pierce Collection.

countywide agencies. By defining a community in these administratively convenient terms, he continued, they would preclude tribal Cherokee participation. He urged OEO to recognize that Cherokees lived in “non-geographical” communities defined in terms of kinship, shared language, and common places of worship.<sup>45</sup> Although many of them moved in and out of non-Indian spaces and evidenced accouterments that outsiders deemed indicative of “acculturation,” these shrewdly accommodationist tribal Cherokees defined both themselves and their communities as culturally and socially distinct.<sup>46</sup>

“Tribal Indians are not going to move until they have been approached *as Indians* and offered a clearly defined place *as Indians* in the Great Society,” Wahrhaftig concluded. “Since socially there are no local communities which embrace both Indians and whites, Indians are not going to join in planning mutual local programs with whites.”<sup>47</sup>

In the spring of 1965, federal and state OEO field representatives worked in close cooperation with the Carnegie Project to insure tribal Cherokee involvement. In the towns of Hulbert, Tahlequah, and Jay, they coordinated meetings between tribal Cherokees and OEO officials at local churches and public buildings that featured the use of bilingual interpreters. Hundreds of Cherokees attended and, taking heart in the fact

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<sup>45</sup> notes, folder 3, box 72, series II, Tax Papers.

<sup>46</sup> On identity, see his “We Who Act Right: The Persistent Identity of Cherokee Indians,” in *Currents in Anthropology: Essays in Honor of Sol Tax*, ed. Robert Hinshaw (New York, 1979), 255-69.

<sup>47</sup> Albert L. Wahrhaftig, *Indian Communities of Eastern Oklahoma and the War on Poverty* (Chicago: Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education Project, 1965), 4, 10, 26. Wahrhaftig’s italics. A later report is Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “Making Do With the Dark Meat: A Report on the Cherokee Indians of Oklahoma,” in *World Anthropology: American Indian Economic Development*, ed. Sol Tax and Sam Stanley (New York, 1978), 481. Circe Sturm provides the following useful definition: “As Cherokees use the term, *community* references their social geography, the actual interaction among various kinds of people as it occurs in particular locations.” Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 132. For a powerful discussion of how Cherokees define the meaning of “being Cherokee,” see *ibid.*, 108-41.

that OEO promised to provide money for them to design and administer programs for their own communities. Despite the initial demonstration of good intentions, OEO ruled in June that it could not fund exclusively Indian Community Action agencies without violating its own civil rights provisions. The exclusive involvement of any single part of a population, even if that group could claim legal separateness, was considered illegal, the agency reasoned.<sup>48</sup> Although OEO could not fund these non-geographical communities, its personnel resolved to do everything in their power to insure equitable representation for tribal Cherokees in the Community Action agencies that were established.

The formation of Cherokee County's Community Action agency tested the limits of their approach. Indians represented nearly 20 percent of the population in this so-called community and an even greater percentage of the poor. As the leading non-Indian residents swiftly mobilized to submit a Community Action proposal during the summer of 1965, OEO continued to work closely with the Carnegie Project in order to involve Cherokee communities. Carnegie linguist Willard Walker provided a letter in support of the application that resulted, and the proposed Cherokee County Community Development Foundation's board of trustees included Finis Smith and several other Cherokees. Nonetheless, in September 1965, the OEO Southwest Regional Office refused to fund the project because it did not provide for equitable representation of low-

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<sup>48</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce to W.W. Keeler, 22 May 1965, "Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning '65" folder and Robert K. Thomas to Jack Conway, 19 November 1965, pp. 2-3, "Conway, Jack—Letters 1965" folder, box 28, Pierce Collection; Wahrhaftig, "Aftermath," 61; and Wahrhaftig, "Making Do," 481.

income Cherokees on its advisory board.<sup>49</sup>

As the debate unfolded over the course of the next several months, conflicting conceptions of poverty, community, and identity entwined. Initially, several of the members of the Cherokee County Community Development Foundation board of directors refused to accept an amendment to add additional members from low income groups because they objected to having “the federal government tell us what to do. . . .”<sup>50</sup> In subsequent ripostes, they refused to add more Cherokee-speaking, low income representatives to its advisory board on the grounds that “many people on the Board had Cherokee blood.”<sup>51</sup> In their minds, the racial construction of Indianness based on blood rendered the differentiation of Indians from non-Indians virtually meaningless.

Turning once again to the Carnegie Project, OEO field representatives forced the issue. They countered that to achieve “true Indian representation” the county must include a bilingual assistant director selected and trusted by the indigenous Cherokee population.<sup>52</sup> A second mandate compelled the agency to insure that Indians would participate in numbers commensurate with their population. The embittered members of the Cherokee County Community Development Foundation ultimately conceded.<sup>53</sup> Yet the question of “true Indian representation” remained. Despite its earnest attempt to

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<sup>49</sup> Ernest C. Woods to Donald B. Mathis, 8 September 1965; memo Bruce Babbitt to Chris Aldrete, 14 December 1965; and Max Witzel to Bob Haught, 2 March 1966, “Cherokee County” folder, box 11, CAA Records; Cherokee (Oklahoma) County Development Foundation, Inc., Application for Program Development Grant, folder 51, box 7, Harris Collection.

<sup>50</sup> Memo Bruce Babbitt to Chris Aldrete, 14 December 1965, CAA Records.

<sup>51</sup> Bruce Babbitt to Chris Aldrete, et. al., 13 January 1966, CAA Records.

<sup>52</sup> Donald B. Mathis to Earl Squyres, n.d. and Max Witzel to Bob Haught, 2 March 1966, CAA Records; Sol Tax to Sidney Woolner, 19 August 1965, folder 3, box 152, series IV, Tax Papers.

<sup>53</sup> Fred Harris to Bill Carmack, 17 December 1965, folder 3, box 8, Harris Collection.

secure equitable Native involvement, OEO's own definition of Indians as a "minority group" limited its efficacy. Because it did not recognize Indians' separate and distinct legal status, much less non-geographical communities, OEO essentially reduced them to the status of an indistinct minority group.

In November 1965, Robert K. Thomas wrote to an OEO official to inform him that as soon as antipoverty officials left the area "the county committee meetings were conducted solely in English without interpreters, and the Indian participants were completely ignored." "To many Cherokees, this whole fiasco has become just another example of the white man's deceit: The Federal Government's failure to live up to its promises and the utter futility of the Cherokees to improve their lot and secure any justice at the hands of their white neighbors or the US government," he continued. "I don't know if either our project or the OEO will be listened to ever again or if the damage can be repaired." Thoroughly disillusioned by the experience in Cherokee County and elsewhere, traditional Cherokees withdrew. "Cherokees have had it with whites," Thomas lamented. "Their recent dealing with the OEO in Oklahoma may only compound the problem. Their enthusiasm could easily rebound into disillusionment and further withdrawal, and the cycle of poverty only be further entrenched as a result."<sup>54</sup>

The initial conflict over Cherokee participation in the War on Poverty affirmed the centrality of anthropologist Circe Sturm's apt term "blood politics." Community Action accentuated how "competing definitions of ethnic identity and social belonging" resulted in "personal, political, and social conflicts" that revolved around "the perplexing

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas to Conway, 19 November 1965, pp. 3, 4, 5, Pierce Collection.

question—who is really Indian, how do we know, and who gets to decide?”<sup>55</sup> Since they rejected sociological definitions of identity and community, OEO inevitably turned to blood quantum. Office of Economic Opportunity field representative Ele Chassy found that this engendered its own problems when she discovered that the teacher-supervisors at two Head Start centers in Delaware County identified themselves as “part-Cherokee.” Somewhat vexed, and no doubt mindful of OEO’s civil rights provisions, she asked her superiors, “does that count?”<sup>56</sup>

Blood politics also infused the established leaders of the Cherokee Nation’s opposition to the Carnegie Project and its attempt to secure exclusive funding for traditional communities. After attaining a copy of Wahrhaftig’s report to Sidney Woolner, Earl Boyd Pierce warned darkly of their intentions. “I do not think there is any doubt that the main effort to drive a wedge between the Executive Committee and the full bloods has been launched,” he surmised in a letter Principal Chief W.W. Keeler, “and that Tax and his associates are calling the shots.”<sup>57</sup> Just as the idea of viable tribal communities violated the way non-Indians understood the world in which they lived, the notion of political activism among tribal Cherokees independent of foreign intrigue struck Pierce as unimaginable.

The political and cultural lenses through which Community Action and blood politics were perceived imbued them with additional meanings. Anticommunism,

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<sup>55</sup> Sturm, *Blood Politics*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Ele Chassy, Inspection to Ed Terrones/Jack Gonzales, 3 February 1966, “HS Delaware County, Okla.” folder, box 118, Inspection Reports, 1964-1967, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Groups 381, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>57</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce to W.W. Keeler, 29 March 1965, “Sol Tax—Correspondence & Reports Concerning 1964” folder, box 27, Pierce Collection.

protestant fundamentalism, political conservatism, and a strong sense of localism pervaded the culture of northeastern Oklahoma. Indeed, the region served as a center of strength for the conservative evangelist Oral Roberts and the red-baiting Reverend Billy James Hargis. Under the banner of "For God—Against Communism," the latter's Christian Crusade endorsed the John Birch Society; so, too, did the Sooner Freedom Forum, a group of affluent citizens in Bartlesville who hung Lyndon Johnson in effigy after the 1964 election. These sentiments were not solely in the province of extremists. Throughout the sixties, the local newspapers regularly denounced civil rights groups as communist fronts, likened the War on Poverty to creeping socialism, and eviscerated Chief Justice Earl Warren for the liberal decisions of the Supreme Court.<sup>58</sup>

As Earl Boyd Pierce made sense out of the Carnegie Project's attempt to secure separate Community Action programs for traditional Cherokees, he drew from this deep-seated, autochthonous paranoid style. It did not take a great leap of the imagination for longtime residents of northeastern Oklahoma to see these outsiders as anti-American provocateurs. They considered federal power to be intrusive in its own right—the involvement of political activists, radical intellectuals, and Jews only deepened their suspicion. In what amounted to a kind of domino theory, Pierce surmised that Al Wahrhaftig aspired to be the director of the Community Action program in Cherokee

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<sup>58</sup> Joseph Alsop, "Communist Agents Infiltrating Negro Civil Rights Movement," *Daily Oklahoman*, 21 April 1963, folder 14, "Gospel According to Billy," *Newsweek* (24 August 1964), Louis Cassels, "The Rightist Crisis in Our Churches," *Look* (24 April 1962), "Seeds of Extremism Flourish," *The Oklahoma Journal* (28 November 1964), folder 20, and "Christian Crusade to Hold Tenth Anti-Communist Leadership School Feb. 22-26," *Christian Crusade Weekly* 11, no. 1 (25 January 1971), folder 21, box 12, Angie Debo Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, Oklahoma State University Libraries, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

County. But that only represented the first step of a more complicated design. “[T]hey evidently believed they could run rough-shod over you, and show up here with 3 or 4 thousand dollars of OEO money, or more, and with these funds literally take over the Cherokee people,” he wrote to Keeler. “From that point on, they were convinced that the other tribes in Oklahoma and elsewhere would fall in line, and get on their bandwagon.”<sup>59</sup>

Here was Earl Boyd Pierce’s worst nightmare seemingly come to life. Blood politics within the Cherokee Nation undoubtedly conjured some of the shadows he detected. But the Cold War political culture of northeastern Oklahoma, as well as his own anti-Semitism and anticommunist convictions, transformed these shadows into ghosts and the ghosts into monsters.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, Pierce introduced a resolution entitled “Against the Enemies of our Country” at the NCAI Convention in November 1965. It denounced any and all opponents of the government and called for their expulsion. This, he hoped, would provide him with grounds to remove the Carnegie Project from the Cherokee Nation once he ascertained his smoking gun.<sup>61</sup>

More than anyone else, the resolution targeted Sol Tax, whose guilt primarily rested with his being Jewish. “The main enigma is the breadth and reach of Sol Tax,” Pierce revealed in December 1965. “He seems to have fingers reaching into several levels of business and Government, and as of this date, I do not even know his correct

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<sup>59</sup> Earl Boyd Pierce to W.W. Keeler, 14 December 1965, “Sol Tax Correspondence & Reports Concerning ‘64” folder, box 27, Pierce Collection.

<sup>60</sup> For this analogy, I am indebted to Stanley Elkins’s brilliant analysis of the slavery debate in the antebellum period. See Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 217-22.

<sup>61</sup> “Report to the Tribes,” NCAI, 1 November 1965, “Report to the Tribes—Convention Proceedings” folder and “Against the Enemies of our Country,” NCAI Resolution 1965, “Convention Resolutions 1965” folder, box 14, series I, NCAI Papers.

name or whence he cometh.”<sup>62</sup> For his resistance to the designs of the “Tax forces,” Pierce anticipated “some kind of grotesque and bizarre action” on the part of the Carnegie Project in the months ahead. With his anticommunist resolution in place, he swiftly made ready for their next move.

Ultimately, Earl Boyd Pierce had little cause for alarm. As Community Action took hold across the state, OEO’s definition of cohesive, if not homogenous communities typically privileged non-Indians. Because they dominated the programs, their ideas shaped the methods of incorporating Native Americans into Community Action. Rather than empowering Indians to control programs that would affect their lives, this process simply reinforced long held, but rarely spoken presuppositions about Native peoples. In Ottawa County, members of the Head Start program in the Commerce Public Schools reported that “Indians are considered White by our people. . . .”<sup>63</sup> Conversely, Delaware County’s Community Action agency posited that “a majority” of its beneficiaries “were Cherokee Indian (full-blood or at least a part Indian, as is most everyone in Delaware County).”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Pierce to Keeler, 14 December 1965, p. 2, Pierce Collection.

<sup>63</sup> Ele Chassy to Peter Spruance, Ed Terrones, and Jack Gonzales, 4 March 1966, “HS Commerce, Ottawa County, Okla.” folder, box 118, Inspection Reports, 1964-1967, RG 381, NA II. She found the same opinion among non-Indians in the southcentral Oklahoma’s Stephen and Grady counties. Ele Chassy to Peter Spruance, Ed Terrones, and Jack Gonzales, 11 March 1966, “Inspection Reports” folder, Subject Files G-O, box 3, Office Files of the Oklahoma District Supervisor, Records of the Community Action Program, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity (RG 381), National Archives and Records Administration-Southwest Region, Ft. Worth, Texas.

<sup>64</sup> “Evaluation of Adult Driver’s Training Program of Delaware (OK) County Community Action Foundation, Inc.,” attached to James R. Pendergraft to Mike Monroney, 17 April 1967, folder 9, box 85, Monroney Collection. In another report, Delaware County made the implausible claim that 1,606 of the 2,537 participants in their programs were Indians. These were self-identifying Cherokees, to be sure. MIS Report, Quarter Ending December 31, 1967, Delaware County Community Action Foundation, Inc., “Delaware County MIS” folder, box 18, CAA Records.

These assertions led to the rather curious conclusion that, in Oklahoma, either all the Indians were white, or all the whites were Indian. However untenable, they explained why so many Community Action personnel failed to comprehend that Indians possessed vital cultures and viable communities of their own. Accordingly, an adult education instructor in Seminole County complained that many Creeks and Seminoles were “rather tribal” and needed “to learn to commune with the rest of us.”<sup>65</sup> Tribalism, it followed, did not serve as a source of strength, just as conglomerations of Native peoples represented something other than communities. Good intentions notwithstanding, such assumptions conflated isolation or non-participation with individual maladjustment and social disorganization.

The attitudes of many non-Indian members of Community Action agency boards of directors revealed a tendency to obscure the lines between poverty and culture, to reify the notion of a culture of poverty. If Indians withdrew from or failed to participate in Community Action, in other words, it was because they were backwards and resistant to change—their very Indianness caused destitution and perpetuated the cycle of poverty. Since tribalism inhibited Indians from entering the mainstream of American life, it symbolized a grave “problem” in dire need of remedy. Consequently, Community Action agencies frequently strove, as one proposal euphemized, “to more effectively assist in eliminating disadvantaged culture.”<sup>66</sup> In this context, maximum feasible participation

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<sup>65</sup> Mrs. C.O. Foley to Tom Steed, 3 August 1966, “EOP:OEO (1966) [2 of 2]” folder, box 32, Departmental Files, Tom Steed Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>66</sup> “Revision of Program,” n.d., “Delaware County Conduct and Administration Application” folder, box 18, CAA Records.

meant giving Indians the opportunity to quicken the inexorable process of their own assimilation.

Whether or not they chose to participate, Indians did not mindlessly internalize these imposed meanings. Abe Ned, a Chickasaw man who had spent most of his sixty-nine years in Oklahoma, discussed the manifold ways in which Indians made sense of Community Action. As Ned described it, his tenure with Coal County's Community Action agency began without his even knowing it. "[T]he first meeting," he recalled, "why, I didn't go. But I come to find out that I was one of the directors. So I had to work there."<sup>67</sup> Despite what amounted to its politically expedient selection of Abe Ned, Coal County's agency earnestly sought to include Indians in their programs. Although 60 percent of the population lived below the poverty line as late as 1969, Ned noted, "I was really proud of what. . .Community Action done for the Indians."<sup>68</sup>

Coal County Community Action's health clinic was its most innovative and popular initiative. It provided services to the entire community, but also integrated Department of Indian Health-funded services for Indian residents. Open two days per week, the Indian clinic offered diabetic screening, consultations with nurses, home visits, limited care for chronic conditions, x-rays, and immunizations.<sup>69</sup> Yet the Choctaws and

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<sup>67</sup> Abe Ned, interview by Faye Delph, November 1968, T-385, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>68</sup> Ned interview, Duke Collection. In December 1965, OEO deemed their representation of the poor inadequate and stipulated that the Community Action agency had to hire two additional members of minority groups to its board of directors within sixty days of receiving their grant. This most likely led to Abe Ned's surprise appointment. Statement of CAP Grant, 6 December 1965, "Coal County Highlight Memo" folder, box 13, CAA Records.

<sup>69</sup> M.K. Deloach to Mrs. Fred R. Harris, 28 July 1967, folder 3, box 68, Harris Collection; M.K. Deloach to Office of Economic Opportunity, 22 June 1967 and "Monthly Activity Report (July)" attached to Persons Calling in CAP Office July 5-July 31, "Coal County" folder and "40 Indians Given Health Services," 16 February 1967, attached as CAP 3 to Application for Community Action Program, "Coal

Chickasaws in the region still had to travel more than two hours to reach the nearest Public Health Service Indian hospital in Talihina, and many local facilities often refused to render services to tribal members. In January 1967, Ned was hired to contact Choctaws and Chickasaws in the region and encourage them to take advantage of the Indian clinic in Coalgate. In addition to contributing to the sixfold increase in the number of individuals utilizing the services, Ned also seized on the opportunity afforded by his frequent visits with Indian families to circulate a petition requesting another, more accessible Indian hospital.<sup>70</sup>

Ned's participation in Community Action served both manifest and latent functions. On a pragmatic level, the clinic and sanitation program addressed basic concerns regarding improved public health. But a less visible subtext can also be discerned from Ned's decision to circulate the petition. In mobilizing community support for the construction of a new hospital, he transformed his limited role with the sanitation program into a means of impelling the federal government to fulfill its legal obligations to Oklahoma's Native people. Regardless of the stated goals and job descriptions, Ned assigned his own meaning to Community Action's potential and acted accordingly.

During his trips through Indian communities, Abe Ned also served as a cultural broker. He attempted to use the confidence he had developed with tribal families to

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County Application for Public Health Center" folder, box 13, CAA Records. For a recent policy study on health services in Oklahoma during the 1960s, see Christopher K. Riggs, "The Irony of American Indian Health Care: The Pueblos, the Five Tribes, and Self-Determination, 1954-1968," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 23, no. 4 (1999): 1-22.

<sup>70</sup> Ned interview; Community Action Component Amendment, 1 January 1967, attached to Community Action Component Amendment, 13 March 1967, "Coal County CAP Form 43" folder and Coal County Administration Program Progress Report, 1 July to 30 September 1967 and 1 October to 31 December 1967, "Coal County MIS" folder, box 13, CAA Records.

encourage them to take advantage of health and sanitation services. Many residents avoided and did not “really understand the meaning of the sanitation program,” he related. “Everywhere I go that question comes up about how the white people have treated the Indians. Sometimes it’s hard to make Indian people—the fullbloods—understand the condition that we are in at the present time.” He continued, “There are some that gets [*sic*] mad, flies off the handle. Still I have to stay with them. . .to try to explain everything to them. . .so they won’t have any hard feelings toward the white people. Of course, I have a lot of difficulties making ‘em understand. But usually this. . .stems from me being an Indian and those making a profession being white.”<sup>71</sup>

Ned’s account provides an ethnomethodological window into Chickasaw and Choctaw families’ everyday responses to Community Action. Far from misunderstanding the program, he intimated, these families shrewdly evaluated Community Action based on their past experiences with and present estimations of the society around them. Rather than signifying ignorance, their avoidance represented a purposeful symbolic act laden with meaning for themselves and their neighbors. In their decision to withdraw, Ned read a bitter commentary that involved history, memory, and everyday forms of resistance. These Chickasaws and Choctaws seemed to resent the presence of paternalism in the wake of dispossession. From their perspective Ned was not a mediator, but a representative of non-Indian expropriators turned caretakers. His encounters thus revealed an alternative rendering of history—a silent protest conveyed through the hidden

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<sup>71</sup> Ned interview, 2-3.

transcripts of everyday life.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, in the Cherokee Nation, the Carnegie Project continued to do what it could to promote traditional Cherokee involvement in Community Action. They encouraged Head Start programs to include Cherokee-speaking teacher's aides, translated the state's driver's education manual into syllabary as part of Delaware County's bilingual driver's education program, and assisted in the establishment of adult education classes in traditional settlements. In return, Earl Boyd Pierce prolonged and expanded his campaign against them. Consequently, the Carnegie Project found itself shunned by members of the Cherokee and non-Indian community and were forced to expend considerable energy simply to repair the damage and maintain their credibility. After three years, the constant harassment took its toll on Bob Thomas. "I'm getting so annoyed with the Southern White mentality," he wrote to Sol Tax in July of 1966, "[it's] like I'm being nibbled to death by a herd of ducks."<sup>73</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Carnegie Project, OEO held fast to its conception of the geographical community. This definition carried far-reaching consequences, for it did nothing to reshape the dominant ideas of the cultural field in Oklahoma. In so doing, Community Action effectively reified the social and political construction of Indian people as a marginalized, administered minority group: tribal sovereignty and cultural pluralism largely remained what the ninety-year-old non-Indian W.E. Schooler called a

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<sup>72</sup> On the theoretical model behind this observation, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

<sup>73</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Sol Tax, 7 July 1966, folder 8, box 119, series IV, Tax Papers.

“hush-hush deal.” Therefore, as George Groundhog (Cherokee) explained, many Indians considered Community Action to be indistinguishable from the other “different types of welfare systems” that preceded it.<sup>74</sup> To be sure, some individuals fully embraced the programs, while others selectively took from them whatever they deemed valuable. But an even larger majority dissociated themselves, due in part to unfulfilled promises, discrimination, a lack of representation, or neglect.<sup>75</sup>

National Indian Youth Council leader Clyde Warrior had seen these developments coming. Born and raised in northcentral Oklahoma, he well understood the depth of racism in and around his hometown of Ponca City and did not believe the War on Poverty would be able to transcend it. Between 1965 and 1967, Warrior lived with his wife and children in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, while he worked with a University of Kansas research project directed by Murray and Rosalie Wax. Although he contributed marginally to their ethnographic study of Cherokee education in public schools, it was with Robert K. Thomas that he maintained his closest ties. Their relationship extended back to the American Indian Chicago Conference and Workshop on American Indian Affairs and deepened over the course of the succeeding years. By the mid-sixties, Thomas served as an advisor to the National Indian Youth Council, and they shared radical premonitions of

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<sup>74</sup> George Groundhog (Cherokee), interview by Faye Delph, 15 March 1969, p. 2, T-409-2, volume 14, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>75</sup> Proctor interview; Groundhog interview, pp. 1-3, 5; Statement of Clyde Warrior, National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, *Rural Poverty: Hearings Before the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Memphis, Tennessee*, 2-3 February 1967 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1967), 151-52; Alice Marriott to John Jarman, 2 November 1965, folder 34, box 53 and James L. McElrath, “A Multi-County Community Action Program Planning for Action,” August 1968, p. 8, “OEO (1968) CAP-Program Data” folder, box 72, Departmental Files, Albert Collection; Albert L. Wahrhaftig, “An Antipoverty Exploration Project: A Suggestion for Non-Reservation Indian Communities,” *Journal of American Indian Education* 5, no. 1 (October 1965): 4.

a coming nationalistic Indian rebellion.

In a *New University Thought* essay published in the summer of 1965, Warrior explained why he believed the War on Poverty would fail. Entitled “Poverty, Community, and Power,” it originated from a speech he was to present at the National Conference on Poverty in the Southwest in January of that year. The organizers, however, prevented him from delivering it because they considered it to be too controversial. The essay initially drew a parallel between the administration of Indian affairs and the “way that an imperialist government administers a colony,” then asserted that tribes represented “many small but independent nationalities with many distinct cultures.” But, Warrior added, Indians shared much in common with other poor Americans. “The indignity of Indian life, and I would presume the indignity of life among the poor generally in these United States, is the powerlessness of those who are ‘out of it,’ but who yet are coerced and manipulated by the very system that excludes them,” he explained.<sup>76</sup>

Warrior therefore embraced the War on Poverty’s commitment to empowering local communities but questioned whether it had the capacity to do it. “I do not doubt that all of you are men of good will and that you do intend to work with the local community,” the original text of the conference address read. “My only fear is what you think the local community is.” Warrior went on to illustrate, much as his colleague Albert Wahrhaftig had done in “Indian Communities in Eastern Oklahoma and the War

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<sup>76</sup> Clyde Warrior, “Poverty, Community, and Power,” *New University Thought* 4, no. 2 (summer 1965): 5, 6, 7.

on Poverty,” that the areas OEO considered a community based on legal definitions were hardly that in terms of social relationships.<sup>77</sup> This, too, united Indians with the nation’s poor. “There is no Kay County, Oklahoma, community in a social sense. We are not a part of it except in the most tangential legal sense. We only live there. There is no Ponca tribal government. It is only named that,” he reasoned. Indians could find solidarity with impoverished Americans given their shared struggle to overcome the definitions others imposed upon them. “We are among the poor, the powerless, the inexperienced and the inarticulate,” he concluded.<sup>78</sup>

The next three years bore out the accuracy of his prediction. Powerlessness and cultural hegemony, as he had speculated in 1965, circumscribed the War on Poverty’s attempt to affect change. Community Action breached deeply internalized assumptions about, and accentuated conflicting renderings of, the place of Indians in the political, social, and cultural life of Oklahoma, but it did little to empower or incorporate them in meaningful ways. This breaching moment, in other words, gave way to the reassertion of ideas and institutions that dominated Indians’ lives. Community Action in Eastern Oklahoma did not liberate Indians from colonialism, as OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver had intended. Instead, for those who shared Clyde Warrior’s alienation, it reaffirmed their powerlessness and confirmed their expectations that the system could not reform itself.

It is here that the politics of Community Action in eastern Oklahoma intersected

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<sup>77</sup> Warrior, “Poverty, Community, and Power,” 8.

<sup>78</sup> Warrior, “Poverty, Community, and Power,” 9.

with the larger trajectories of Indian and non-Indian histories. Just as race and class politics intersected and erupted in calls for Black Power and urban rage, the Indian movement became increasingly radicalized. “Partly, this is due to the expectations that OEO raised and (as Indians saw it) the subsequent betrayal of those expectations,” Robert K. Thomas observed in November 1967. “Probably in greater part it is due to watching militant Negroes (and even Viet Cong) on TV, bucking the system.” “Finally, there is an increasing number of ‘urban returnees’ in Indian communities who know on one hand that very little that they are taught in school has much to do with getting a job and living a satisfactory life in the ‘mainstream’ and on the other that the ‘mainstream’ isn’t where they want to be,” he asserted.<sup>79</sup>

The War on Poverty rested at the center of the growing divisions between the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indian Youth Council—and particularly the question of whether to continue to support it in an attempt to create leverage with the BIA and Congress or to condemn it as no less a product of white colonialism. Vine Deloria Jr., favored the former strategy and insured that Indians praised the War on Poverty during hearings conducted by the Senate and National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty (NACRP). Clyde Warrior and the NIYC adopted the opposite strategy. In February 1967, he traveled to Memphis, Tennessee, to testify before the NACRP. While drawing specifically from his experiences in Oklahoma, he spoke for many Indians across the nation who had invested hope in the

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<sup>79</sup> Robert K. Thomas to Dr. Miller, no date, attached to Robert K. Thomas to Vera, 27 November 1967, folder 9, box 119, Tax Papers.

War on Poverty and now considered it to be wasted.<sup>80</sup>

The following September, Warrior extended these specific disappointments into a bitter denunciation of the prevailing political, economic, and cultural system. In so doing, he bound Indian disaffection to the alienation of other minority groups and contended that they provided a model for the future. “Indian affairs is full of white colonialists, racists, fascists, uncle tomahawks, and bureaucrats who are concerned only with procedures, progress reports, and regulations,” Warrior railed shortly after being elected President of the NIYC. “Negroes, Mexican-Americans, and Puerto Ricans could only take colonialism, exploitation, and abuse for so long: then they did something about it. Will American Indians wait until their reservations and lands are eroded away and they are forced into urban ghettos before they start raising hell with their oppressors?”<sup>81</sup>

The politics of Community Action in eastern Oklahoma represented one dimension of a much larger struggle over conflicting definitions of poverty, community, and identity—over competing understandings of the basics. In this sense, it captured in microcosm how the War on Poverty incited a culture war by challenging conventional ideas about the poor, the communities in which they lived, and the reason they persisted as underdeveloped enclaves. Although the specific circumstances may have been particular to one region and group of people, the process was not. In Oklahoma, and elsewhere, Community Action altered the dynamics of who could speak, about what

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<sup>80</sup> Statement of Clyde Warrior, National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, *Rural Poverty: Hearings Before the National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty, Memphis, Tennessee*, 2-3 February 1967 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1967), 144-52. For a discussion of Warrior’s testimony, see chapter five.

<sup>81</sup> “Indian Youth Council Chooses New Officers,” NIYC Press Release, September 1967, folder 10, box 23, Steiner Papers.

topics, and through which discursive procedures. But the consequences, as anthropologist Eric Wolf contended, revealed a great deal about the nature of power.<sup>82</sup>

The contest over the means and meanings of Indian involvement in Community Action lent further insight into a complicated process that had been developing since the late 1950s. Indian politics involved much more than things Indian. In the realm of ideas, it witnessed the intersection of action anthropology, community development, modernization theory, anticolonialism, anticommunism, and Indian nationalism. The central actors, too, told of a similar culmination by bringing participants in the Workshop on American Indian Affairs, veterans of the American Indian Chicago Conference, leaders of the National Congress of American Indians, and founders of the National Indian Youth Council to this one region in the state of Oklahoma. As all of these events unfolded in the Cherokee Nation, still another process of convergence was underway. Originating in western Oklahoma, it would bring the experiences of ordinary people into the realm of national politics.

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<sup>82</sup> Eric R. Wolf, *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 57.

Chapter Seven  
To Oklahoma and Back Again:  
Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity and the National Politics of Poverty, 1963-1968

We don't live in two worlds. We live in one world and we have to live with what is surrounding us.

LaDonna Harris (Comanche)<sup>1</sup>

For an Indian to live in Oklahoma means that practically every phase of his life is controlled by white people: the school, State and local government, the police, the courts, the hospitals, the public welfare social worker, his boss where he works—always white. The fact that there are no reservations in Oklahoma simply means that Indian people control that much less, that they have little that they can call their own, and that there are fewer places to retreat from white insensitivity to whatever way of life they choose to live.

William G. Hayden<sup>2</sup>

Iola Hayden (Comanche) and LaDonna Harris (Comanche), the central figures of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO), represented a study in contrasts. “She’s just no bullshit. You know, just really no bullshit,” Harris said in regard to the uncompromising leadership style of her relative and colleague. When faced with a confrontation, “. . . she’d just go ‘Pow!’ [and] bulldoze right over you.”<sup>3</sup> Conversely, LaDonna Harris, who was married to United States Senator Fred R. Harris (D-OK), constantly searched for ways around her adversaries and opted for diplomatic strategies that included “intellectual discussion . . . , emotional appeal. . . , [and] even seduction to a certain point.”<sup>4</sup> Over time they blended and refined their techniques into an effective tool for advancing Indian interests. “I had a little prestige, Iola had the smarts,” Harris

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<sup>1</sup> Fred R. Harris and LaDonna Harris, interview by author, tape recording, Bernalillo, New Mex., 14 May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> William G. Hayden, “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, Incorporated and Economic Development for Non-Reservation Indian People,” in Joint Economic Committee, *Toward Economic Development for Native American Communities: A Compendium of Papers Submitted to the Subcommittee on Economy in Government*, vol. 2, 90<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 419.

<sup>3</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>4</sup> LaDonna Harris, *LaDonna Harris: A Comanche Life*, ed. Henrietta Stockel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 61.

explained, “and the combination put together a pretty good team.”<sup>5</sup>

Beginning with a group of ordinary people concerned about the racial integration of Lawton, Oklahoma, and ending in the wake of Lyndon Johnson’s message to Congress on Indian affairs, contests over poverty, community, identity, and power intertwined during a period of reform and impending fragmentation. In creating a new forum for these multifaceted debates to unfold, OIO intersected with this externalizing process as it churned at the local level, then projected it into the realm of state and national politics. Community Action brought the politics of poverty from Washington, D.C., to Oklahoma; Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity carried it back again.

The road to OIO ran through Lawton, Oklahoma. Iola Hayden, LaDonna Harris, then State Senator Fred R. Harris, and Father William Hayden joined a multiracial group of people who shared a concern for civil rights. They worked with the city’s officials and business owners in order to promote the integration of its parks, theaters, swimming pools, bars, restaurants, and hotels. While Senator Harris served on a mayoral committee, the others participated in an informal assemblage of eclectic people variously called “the Group,” “The Wednesday Night Group,” or the “Honcho Group.” Wealthy, middle class, and poor, urbane and provincial, men and women, white, black, and Indian—all took their turn hosting potluck dinners in their homes where they ate and drank together, talked about their feelings and experiences, forged friendships, and developed strategies to

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<sup>5</sup> LaDonna Harris and Iola Hayden, interview by author, tape recording, Bernalillo, New Mex., 27 May 2002.

promote desegregation.<sup>6</sup>

A second and somewhat overlapping cohort came to Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity through the Indian Education Project. Coordinated by the University of Oklahoma's Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, it began as a BIA-funded pilot project in Lawton in November 1962. Over the next two years, Indian people in Ponca City, Carnegie, Watonga, Anadarko, and Hobart founded additional centers.<sup>7</sup> Grounded in the active involvement of local people, the Indian Education Projects held weekly meetings on topics such as family budgeting, consumer education, etiquette, and Indian participation in local, state, and federal government affairs. Additionally, faculty from the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State volunteered to give lectures on a variety of topics, while officials from the state government, Public Health Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs also participated.<sup>8</sup>

The Southwest Center's approach reflected larger trends in the social and behavioral sciences. It based its activities on the assumption that solutions to social problems could be found in intensive studies of individual behavior and human relationships. Racism and poverty came to be understood in terms of a lack of

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<sup>6</sup> Maggie Gover, "We Called Ourselves The Group," unpublished manuscript in author's possession; Iola Hayden, interview by author, tape recording, Norman, Okla., 25 June 2001; Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001. For a list of the people involved in Lawton and other towns, see *Indian Education Newsletter* (March 1964), folder 3, box 3, American Indian Institute Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>8</sup> Leslie Towle, "Poverty and the Oklahoma Indian," *Sooner Magazine* 36, no. 10 (July-August 1964): 13; Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002; *Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, Annual Report, 1963*, p. 10, folder 51, box 2; Indian Education Faculty and Summary, Indian Education Meetings, 6 August 1964-7 June 1965, folder 20, box 1, Robert L. Miller Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma; *HRC Newsletter* (spring 1963): p. 2 and *HRC Newsletter* (November 1963), folder 3, box 3, AII Collection.

communication, cultural deprivation, isolation from opportunity structures, and alienation from the mainstream of American life. Consequently, understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation were perceived to be the keys to a more just and equitable society that would “move the Indian into the mainstream of community life, which, too frequently, he has viewed as a spectator. . . .”<sup>9</sup> “That’s the way it was,” Iola Hayden explained of the pervasiveness of this language. “That was how we were all going to get to Nirvana, through integration.”<sup>10</sup>

By 1964, inspired in part by the rising tide of civil rights activism, the Indian Education Projects began to address deep-seated community and human relations issues, such as police brutality, discrimination, and voter registration. Racism ran deep in western Oklahoma towns such as Ponca City, Geary, Canton, and Sieling. In some of these places, signs reading “No Indians Allowed” or “No Indians or Hogs Allowed in the City Limits After Sundown” could be found, while in others *de facto* segregation governed everyday interactions between Indians and whites. Iola Hayden recalled that in Lawton, Indians did not need signs to know where they did and did not belong. “You knew that,” she remembered, “because you weren’t socially acceptable there.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 103; *Indian Education Newsletter* (October-November 1964): pp. 1 and 3, folder 3, box 3, AII Collection; Indian Education Program, Human Relations Center, University of Oklahoma, no date, folder 20, box 1 and *Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, Annual Report, 1963*, p. 10 and *Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, Annual Report, 1964*, p. i, folder 51, box 2, Miller Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Hayden interview, 22 June 2001 and 25 June 2001; Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002; *Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies, Annual Report, 1964*, p. 5, Miller Collection; *Indian Education Newsletter* (April 1964): p. 3-4, folder 3, box 3, AII Collection; Notes taken during interview with Bob Stegall, 16 July 1968, volume 45, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma. In one particularly controversial instance, the Cheyenne-Arapaho Adult Education Center held a forum for Indians to present charges that a police officer in Watonga used

The Indian Education Project also turned its attention to the striking number of Indians that dropped out of the public high schools. In one of them, they reported, 25 percent of the 400-member student body consisted of Indians in 1964, but there had been only eleven graduates during the preceding forty years.<sup>12</sup> LaDonna Harris and Iola Hayden resolved to conduct an informal door-to-door survey in order to investigate what caused these staggering numbers. "One of the things that they discovered and said was that this covert racism was in many ways more damaging to kids because what we were all taught in Oklahoma is that 'we just loved Indians' and 'everybody's part Indian,'" Fred Harris related. "So then the kid really has to internalize it then: 'God, there must be something wrong with me personally because people love Indians. It's my fault all this is going bad.'"<sup>13</sup> By the seventh grade, many Indian youths gave up on the public schools because they could not continually subject themselves to institutions that made them feel inferior.<sup>14</sup>

The Bureau of Indian Affairs represented another such edifice of the dominant society. During the first years of the Indian Education Project, LaDonna Harris organized a tour of the Anadarko Area Office that served the tribes located in the western half of Oklahoma. Staff from the Southwest Center had an opportunity to experience treatment similar to that Indians often received. "They called and made an appointment with two or

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excessive force with Indians. Despite the mayor's intransigence, it culminated in an investigation by the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission. The Watonga incident led to a study of Indian conditions in Blaine County by the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission. "Indian Conditions Study Launched," *Indian Voices* (April 1964): 5. It also left bitter resentments toward the Harris. Fred R. Harris to Bill Carmack, 22 October 1965, folder 50, box 7, Harris Collection.

<sup>12</sup> Towle, "Poverty and the Oklahoma Indian," 12.

<sup>13</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001; Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

three division heads and only one showed up,” according to LaDonna. “So, I said to [the representatives from the Southwest Center], ‘If you’re my grandmother, a seventy-year-old woman who’s going down there to take care of business, this is what you run into.’”<sup>15</sup> Resentment toward the inefficacy of the BIA and the lassitude of the personnel pervaded Indian communities. People struggled to survive without running water or adequate wells, they argued in vain for protection of the rights they retained to leased land, and they found their attempts to get loans from the bank blocked by the Indian Bureau.<sup>16</sup>

These frustrations, as well as their heartening experiences in community development, fostered Fred and LaDonna Harris’s high expectations for the War on Poverty. The ideas of maximum feasible participation and local initiative embedded in the Office of Economic Opportunity’s (OEO) Community Action Program affirmed their belief in empowering ordinary people to affect change in the communities in which they resided. Meanwhile, the notion of bringing together all segments of a community in a common effort corresponded with their past human relations work. Community Action, then, promised to promote the kind of interaction that would lead to mutual understanding and offered an alternative to the much maligned paternalism of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>16</sup> Birdie May Tointigh (Kiowa-Apache), Irene Poolaw (Kiowa-Apache), and Roberta Tohay (Comanche), interview by Janet Jordan, 24 June 1970, volume 42 and Ethel Wheeler (Wichita), interview by William Bittle, 24 June 1968, volume 54, Doris Duke Indian Oral History Collection, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma.

<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Philleo Nash made a similar observation when he called OIO a “self-initiated and self-directed effort. . . entirely in keeping with the pattern of Indian-initiated community action which the Bureau hopes will increase rapidly.” Philleo Nash to LaDonna Harris, 16 July 1965, folder 28, box 12, Harris Collection.

No sooner had Fred Harris won an election to fill Robert Kerr's seat in the United States Senate in 1964, than he and LaDonna turned their attention to securing the active involvement of Oklahoma Indians in the antipoverty campaign.<sup>18</sup> To do so, they proposed a statewide organization. For help they turned to their friends and relatives from Lawton and throughout western Oklahoma, as well as the professors and staff involved in the University of Oklahoma's Southwest Center for Human Relations Studies.<sup>19</sup>

On June 14, 1965, the Harrises brought thirty-three representatives from nineteen eastern and western tribes to the University of Oklahoma so that they could etch the initial designs for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. The premises from which the organization worked reflected its members' past experiences in civil rights and human relations projects: isolation, exclusion, and non-participation seemed to be the greatest problems confronting American Indians.<sup>20</sup> As a solution, OIO proposed a cooperative interracial effort to construct the "total community." "We must continually remind ourselves that the basic problem we are dealing with is isolation of the Indian from the non-Indian economic, social, cultural and community life. We want to overcome this," Fred Harris wrote during one brainstorming session. "Everything we do then must if at all possible provide the opportunity for mixed effort, meaningful interaction. . . . [W]e

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<sup>18</sup> For an excellent study of Fred R. Harris's senatorial career, see Richard Lowitt, *Fred Harris: His Journey from Liberalism to Populism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001; *Indian Education Newsletter* (September 1965): p. 2, folder 3, box 3, AII Collection; John O'Hara to LaDonna Harris, 20 August 1965 and John O'Hara to LaDonna Harris, 16 September 1965, folder 15, box 11, OIRA Collection; Indian Opportunity Conference Program, 7 August 1965, "Minutes of Initial Meeting," Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity Corporation Books, June 1965-November 1968, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity Document Collection, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, Norman, Oklahoma.

<sup>20</sup> Press Release, 6 June 1965, "Minutes of Initial Meeting," OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection

must think of the total community, of involving the Indian in it and it with him.”<sup>21</sup>

The Harrises convened a second and much larger meeting the following August. More than 500 people attended, including representatives from the State Economic Opportunity Office (SEOO), principal chiefs and governors of Oklahoma tribes, BIA officials, county Community Action agency directors, church leaders, and university personnel.<sup>22</sup> Although the participants appeared to speak a shared language of integration, they did not agree on the implications this had for Indians’ place in the total community. Robert B. Jones, a representative from the State Economic Opportunity Office, for instance, invoked a perennially controversial phrase, when he assured OIO of Republican Governor Henry Bellmon’s interest “in involving the maximum number of people in the state in equal opportunity.”<sup>23</sup> BIA Anadarko Area Director Les Towle concurred. “The future of your people is with the community,” he told tribal leaders, “not with the BIA or with themselves. [Indians] need to become a part of and not stay away from.” Virgil Harrington, the BIA’s Muskogee Area Director, summarized these views when he stated flatly, “Our goals are to assimilate.”<sup>24</sup>

For Fred and LaDonna Harris, however, the talk of “fuller participation in the culture and economy of the state and nation” did not imply assimilation or the loss of

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<sup>21</sup> “OIO Ideas,” 13 July 1966, folder 9, box 283, Harris Collection. Similar ideas informed Fred Harris’s “American Indians—New Destiny” speech discussed below.

<sup>22</sup> Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 354; Minutes of Initial Meeting of Members of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 7 August 1965 and Fred R. Harris to Dear Friend, 19 July 1965, “Minutes of Initial Meeting,” OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>23</sup> “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, University of Oklahoma, 14 June 1965, folder 5, box 282, Harris Collection.

<sup>24</sup> “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity,” 14 June 1965, Harris Collection.

tribal sovereignty.<sup>25</sup> Arguing that Indian people had equal citizenship rights, they did contend that tribal members were entitled to the same governmental housing, employment, health, financing, and education programs as any other Americans.<sup>26</sup> But at the same time, Harris aligned a powerful block of Senators—including Robert F. Kennedy (D-NY), George McGovern (D-SD), Lee Metcalf (D-MT), and Walter Mondale (D-MN)—that consistently fought for the recognition of tribes' distinctive legal rights as sovereign nations.<sup>27</sup>

As the organizational meeting in August demonstrated, ideas regarding poverty and cultural persistence cross-articulated from OIO's inception. At a rhetorical level the stated goals of all interested cohorts seemed to meld together to form a unified effort to amalgamate Indians into the dominant society. Reflective of this, OIO enunciated a broad statement of purpose that encouraged Indians to enter the dominant economy and culture while preserving their own histories and pride of heritage.<sup>28</sup> Ambiguity surrounded the social, cultural, and legal consequences of what amounted to a delicate balance.

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<sup>25</sup> Minutes of Initial Meeting of Members of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 7 August 1965, "Minutes of Initial Meeting, OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>26</sup> They prepared and distributed a manual that listed all of the state and federal programs for which individuals and tribes were eligible. "Application for Training Grant Submitted by Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity Training Branch, Economic Opportunity Program, University of Utah," attached to LaDonna Harris to Kay Haas, 4 April 1966, folder 8-5, box 8, University of Utah Indian Community Action Project Collection, University Archives, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah; Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; Hayden interview, 25 June 2001; Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (Exhibit Four), n.d., "Minutes of Initial Meeting," OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>27</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; Harris, *LaDonna Harris*, 72. For examples, see Fred R. Harris to Carl Albert, 15 July 1965, folder 16, box 11, Fred R. Harris to E.L. Bartlett, 17 January 1967, Statement of Fred R. Harris, 2 February 1967, and S. Con. Res. 11, folder 12, box 81, Harris Collection. Harris also fought for the right of the Comanche Tribe to have a separate government. Fred R. Harris to Leslie Towle, 13 September 1965, folder 8, box 12, Harris Collection. Richard Lowitt discusses Harris' senatorial dealings with Indian affairs in *Fred Harris*, 193-209.

<sup>28</sup> "Constitution and By-Laws of OIO, Inc.," folder 5, box 282, Harris Collection.

Indicative of this, OIO took up the question of whether they were “dealing with an Indian problem or a socio-economic problem” at one of its early board meetings but failed to reach a consensus.<sup>29</sup>

Other questions lingered as well. As an integral part of its commitment to building the total community, OIO pledged to encourage Indians to participate in pre-existing county and city Community Action agencies. But it was not clear whether they would respond. Early indications suggested that they would not. In the southcentral counties of Stephen and Grady, for instance, a Community Action Program evaluation reported that Indians represented “three percent of the population. . . [and were]. . . called ‘White.’”<sup>30</sup> Another survey, conducted by OIO in preparation for its initial grant application to the Office of Economic Opportunity, revealed a similar problem in Lawton. The non-Indian community leaders of the community had not “identified the problems of Indians and. . . refused to organize a Community Action Committee in the community,” it reported, “on the basis that ‘we have no problems here.’”<sup>31</sup>

Fred and LaDonna Harris immediately recognized that OEO’s geographical definition of community would preclude tribal governments from sponsoring Community Action programs in Oklahoma. They, like the Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education

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<sup>29</sup> Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 29 January 1966, “Minutes,” OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>30</sup> Ele Chassy to Peter Spruance, Ed Terrones, and Jack Gonzales, 11 March 1966, “Inspection Reports” folder, Subject Files G-O, box 3, Office Files of the Oklahoma District Supervisor, Records of the Community Action Program, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives and Records Administration—Southwest Region, Fort Worth, Texas.

<sup>31</sup> Notes accompanying OIO Grant Proposal to the University of Utah, n.d., folder 11, box 283, Harris Collection; Iola Taylor to W.F. Staten, 1 September 1966, “Cleveland County” folder, box 12, CAA Records.

Project, argued that it would reduce Indians to marginal participants in the antipoverty campaign. The Harrises, however, enjoyed greater access to elite policymakers within the Office of Economic Opportunity. LaDonna Harris cultivated a close friendship with OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver and his wife Eunice. And, in a style becoming of a “small a” activist and “big M” manipulator, she used it to advance her political agenda.<sup>32</sup> “I told him that we still had communities that were being discriminated against and sending OEO funds through the states was inappropriate because some Oklahoma officials perceived Indian tribes as a threat,” she recalled of her conversations with Shriver.<sup>33</sup> In order to lend additional weight to the effort, her husband sent a bristling letter to the OEO Director that declared the War on Poverty “almost completely useless in Oklahoma.”<sup>34</sup>

Both of the Harrises deemed the antipoverty campaign to be an important lever in their larger attempt to secure tribes’ recognition as legitimate governing entities. Just as Community Action promised to circumvent established city bureaucracies, Senator Harris hoped it would get non-reservation Indians out from under the domination of state governments. “It’s sort of like Mayor Daley in Chicago. There wasn’t a dime of federal money coming into Chicago that didn’t, by God, come under his control, and he was

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<sup>32</sup> The Harrises both remembered the informal relationships they had with the Shrivvers, Stewart and Lee Udall, Robert and Ethel Kennedy, the Humphreys, the Mondales, the Gardners, and many others as being more important than any of the formal correspondence they exchanged. Manuscripts may not be able to recover these conversations and memories fade, but archival research and oral interviews suggest extensive social interaction. Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002; Norma Brawley to Robert G. Sanders, 9 September 1966, folder 18, box 282; Fred R. Harris to R. Sargent Shriver, 31 January 1967, folder 4, box 68; Mrs. Robert F. Kennedy to LaDonna Harris, 19 April 1967 and Jack Vaughn to LaDonna Harris, folder 9, box 285; Sargent Shriver to LaDonna Harris, 4 May 1967, folder 10, box 284, Harris Collection. See also Harris, *LaDonna Harris*, 73, 78, 81.

<sup>33</sup> Harris, *LaDonna Harris*, 81.

<sup>34</sup> Fred R. Harris to R. Sargent Shriver, 15 July 1965, folder 14a, box 8, Harris Collection.

successful,” he explained. “The basic problem with Indians, too, is control and power, but it’s also recognizing Indians are entitled to be treated differently and that their tribes are governments.”<sup>35</sup>

While National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr., forged a symbiotic relationship between the NCAI’s efforts at nation building and OEO’s need for public approval, Fred and LaDonna Harris sought out a mutually beneficial arrangement between Oklahoma Indians and the antipoverty campaign. In April 1966, due in no small part to the heavy lobbying of the Harrises, the Office of Economic Opportunity provided seed money for Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity through a “special condition” grant from the University of Utah’s Indian Community Action Project.<sup>36</sup> During the preceding winter months, OIO had assembled a forty-one-member board of directors that included thirty-six Indians, most of whom were established tribal leaders. Several task forces then explored issues such as health, education, welfare, housing, Indian-white relations, federal policy, and public images in anticipation of sending out various grant applications.

On May 2, 1966, OIO formally opened its offices on the south campus of the University of Oklahoma. The initial ten-week leadership training grant from OEO provided the funding necessary for LaDonna Harris, Iola Hayden, and others to canvass the state and create a foundation for the fledgling organization. Flying from town-to-

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<sup>35</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>36</sup> Fred Harris’s role was, indeed, central. During the first months of OIO’s existence, he actually wrote the press releases that included quotes from LaDonna. See, for instance, Fred R. Harris to Jim Monroe, n.d., folder 15, box 4, Jim Monroe Papers, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

town in a chartered plane, they renewed contacts with people involved in the Indian Education Projects throughout western Oklahoma and sought out new allies in the eastern part of the state. Rather than focusing on elites, they drew in community leaders who had the confidence of their neighbors and prepared them to be involved in a leadership training seminar in August. "The opportunities, the possibilities of establishing national policies on trends, thoughts, direction could become a possible reality. The field or world is yours," wrote one OIO member to LaDonna Harris. Capturing the excitement of these early months, he added, "I can only say, OIO is limited only to its imagination and drive."<sup>37</sup>

Fred Harris shared this sense of unlimited possibilities and looked upon the launching of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity as nothing less than a chance to redefine federal-Indian affairs at the national level. In an well-publicized address delivered on April 21, 1966, entitled "American Indians—New Destiny," Harris called for a clearly defined policy that did not look at Indian affairs as "an Indian problem" but as "a human problem, an American problem." As his model, he upheld OIO and its vision of the total community. "[I]t is not a matter of Indian affairs; it is a matter of human relations, a matter of attitudes," he contended. To this analysis, he added strong support for increased tribal control of resource use, industrial development, and expanded social programming.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ex [Joe Exendine] to LaDonna Harris, 18 March 1966, folder 31, box 12, Harris Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Fred R. Harris, "American Indians—New Destiny," 8310, 8313, "Indians" folder, box 481, Records of the Indian Division Relating to Public Relations, 1965-1970, Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

National Congress of American Indians Executive Director Vine Deloria Jr., praised Harris for indicating a movement within tribal communities to make “an Indian adaptation to the modern world.” Likening the modernization of tribal communities to that of developing nations, he contended that Indians might accept the technological advances made by the dominant society but refused to accept its depersonalizing social values or sacrifice their sovereignty.<sup>39</sup> Harris’s speech mattered to Deloria because it provided additional leverage for the NCAI’s recent criticisms of the past policies and practices of the BIA during the emergency meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico, the same month. Moreover, coming only two weeks after the Senate subcommittee issued its special report advocating a renewed emphasis on termination, it signaled that other members of Congress would not allow the disastrous policy to be revitalized without a fight.<sup>40</sup>

Over the course of the next several months, Indian affairs moved further into the public sphere. As that happened, developments in Oklahoma became inextricably bound to the dynamics of national Indian politics. In the wake of his “American Indians—New Destiny” speech, according to Senator Harris, he and LaDonna “decided to ‘hot box’ Stewart Udall.” “We got Udall over to my house one night and we were going to tell him what needed to be done. . . . We practiced, we rehearsed, we were really gonna put the squeeze on him,” he remembered. “We just told him as bluntly as we could what a piss

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<sup>39</sup> *NCAI Sentinel* 11, no. 2 (spring 1966), NCAI Misc. [3 of 5] folder, box 27, W.W. Keeler Collection, Cherokee National Archives, Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Clarkin, *Federal Indian Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, 1961-1969* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 197.

poor deal the Bureau of Indian Affairs was and Indian policy and what they ought to do.” To their surprise, the Interior Secretary did not try to defend the status quo. Instead, he promised to move the Indian Bureau in the direction the Harrises had charted.<sup>41</sup>

Several months later, Fred Harris and Senator George McGovern of South Dakota joined forces to introduce Senate Concurrent Resolution 114, a policy statement aimed at banishing the vestiges of congressional support for termination. Written by McGovern staffer and OEO Task Force on American Indian Poverty veteran Forrest Gerard (Blackfeet), the resolution called for a policy of tribal self-determination based explicitly on the philosophy of local control advanced by the War on Poverty. “Because the Office of Economic Opportunity was willing to offer Indian people new and innovative approaches in the planning, implementation, and administration of its varied programs,” it read, “that agency has enjoyed unusual success in its work on reservations. It is my belief that OEO has set new program standards for other agencies to follow in working with Indian people.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; *Indian Education Newsletter* 3, no. 4 (May-June 1966): 6, folder 3, box 3, AII Collection; George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart*: (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 45. William Carmack, who had been at OU’s Southwest Center and helped to orchestrate the Indian Education Projects, joined Fred Harris’s senatorial staff in 1964. In 1966, after the conversation noted above, Stewart Udall hired him to develop the BIA’s community development programs. In one public address shortly after taking his post in the BIA, Carmack told an audience that if “OEO can not make a significant and measurable change on reservations within the next five years, we will be in for another century of administration.” Consortium Notes, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 9 November 1966, folder 10-4 and Minutes of the Consortium, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 23-31 August 1967, folder 10-5, box 10, UU ICAP Papers.

<sup>42</sup> Text of SCR 114, attached to George McGovern to Fred R. Harris, 2 February 1967, p. 3, folder 12, box 81, Harris Collection; Alvin M. Josephy Jr., *Now That the Buffalo’s Gone: A Study of Today’s American Indians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 225-26. At its annual convention in Oklahoma City, the National Congress of American Indians formally endorsed the resolution and adopted language reminiscent of Community Action by calling for “[m]aximum participation of tribal governing units” in all programs involving their communities.

George McGovern, just as the Harrises and Vine Deloria Jr., drew direct parallels between tribes and “some of the most severely underdeveloped countries of the globe.”<sup>43</sup> It followed that the resolution bound the ideas of tribal self-determination not only to the War on Poverty, but to modernization ideology as well. “I believe the foremost characteristic of our Indian policy should be self-determination for the people it serves. . . ,” McGovern asserted. “Many of our foreign aid endeavors are predicated on the principle that disadvantaged people will respond more readily to constructive programs when they participate in planning objectives and goals. Certainly we can afford to do no less for the first citizens of this Nation.”<sup>44</sup>

No less than in the past, the Cold War imperative provided a critical backdrop to the contest over Indian politics. In “American Indians—New Destiny,” Fred Harris returned to the notion that Indian policy might point the way toward modernization abroad. “I think it is the destiny of the American Indian, himself a product of two cultures, to show America, and perhaps the world, the way to better human understanding and brotherhood,” he argued. The success of modernization in Native America would not only win the hearts and minds of developing nations, Harris surmised, it would forestall the spread of communism as well.<sup>45</sup>

While McGovern’s Senate Concurrent Resolution 114 ultimately failed to win congressional approval in 1966, other developments carried its central ideas further into high policymaking circles. Two days before its introduction, University of Chicago

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<sup>43</sup> SCR 114, McGovern to Harris, 2 February 1967, p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> SCR 114, McGovern to Harris, 2 February 1967, p. 2.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, “American Indians—New Destiny,” 8313.

anthropologist Sol Tax traveled to Washington, D.C., to take part in the Johnson administration's Outside Task Force on American Indians. When the veteran action anthropologist read the resolution, he immediately recognized its import. Tax copied the pages of the *Congressional Record* that contained it as well as the comments of senators Harris and Robert F. Kennedy and sent them to task force chairman Walsh McDermott. He appended a note that revealed the culmination of a complicated process of convergence that had begun nearly a decade before. "Since our task force is headed toward conclusions very similar to McGovern's," Tax advised, "we should try to avoid contradictory language when we mean the same thing."<sup>46</sup>

Back in Oklahoma, the problem of language and meanings played a pivotal role in the future direction of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. In July of 1966, OIO received a \$240,733 grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity. Subcontracted through the University of Oklahoma's Multi-Purpose Training Center, it provided funds for leadership training, youth, urban, and community development programs.<sup>47</sup> With inclusion as its foremost guiding principle, OIO hired field workers to encourage their neighbors to participate in local Community Action agencies. Work orientation programs prepared Indians to enter the labor force, while community development efforts promoted cooperation and mutual understanding across racial and cultural divides. Dozens of

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<sup>46</sup> Sol Tax to Walsh McDermott, 26 October 1966, folder 7, box 152, series IV, Sol Tax Papers, University of Chicago Archives, Department of Special Collections, Joseph Regenstein Library, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.

<sup>47</sup> LaDonna Harris to Clayton Feaver, 4 April 1966, folder 11 and Kay M. Haws to LaDonna Harris, 12 April 1966, folder 12, box 283, folder 5, box 282, Harris Collection; OEO Public Affairs Release, 19 July 1966, microfilm, roll 31, FG 11-15, Federal Records, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

Indian youth councils were also established in high schools and a statewide Indian youth conference brought participants to the University of Oklahoma to receive scholarships and hear speakers such as Robert F. Kennedy and George McGovern. During annual Indian Achievement Week celebrations, OIO donated books on Indians to school libraries, recognized towns that reached out to Indian communities, and sponsored keynote addresses by Health, Education, and Welfare Secretary John Gardner and OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver.<sup>48</sup>

As Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity emerged as a visible presence in state and local politics, divisions within the organization peaked. The contest principally revolved around Iola Hayden and Harold Cameron, a non-Indian who served as OIO's first executive director. Part of their troubles derived from personal differences, but a still greater source of conflict grew out of their contrasting definitions of poverty and Indianness. Predicated on a study Cameron had done among the Cheyenne-Arapahoes, the original University of Utah grant proposal suggested that OIO should encourage the white community "to understand the Indian and his cultural bondage" in order to counteract racist attitudes toward Native Americans.<sup>49</sup> Specifically targeting Indian culture as a cause of poverty, it continued, "The problems faced by Indians are perhaps

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<sup>48</sup> "New Training Center is Set at OU," *Evening News* (Ada, Oklahoma), 7 July 1966, "Cleveland County News Clippings" folder, box 12, CAA Records; Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 15 July 1966, "Minutes," OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection; "Nominations Due for Award for Oklahoma Indians," *Tonkawa* (Oklahoma) *News* (22 September 1966), "Wewoka to Get Special Award," *Tulsa World* (13 October 1966), and "No Kidding," *Anadarko Daily News* (13 October 1966), Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity Newspaper Clippings, September-December 1966, OIO Document Collection; Harold Cameron to Stewart Udall, 24 August 1966, folder 30, box 282, Harris Collection.

<sup>49</sup> "Attitudes of Non-Indians," n.d., folder 1, box 283, Harris Collection; Harold Cameron, "Problems of Oklahoma Youth from Traditional Homes," pp. 1-3, 7, n.d., folder 20, box 2, Miller Collection.

peculiar to them because of their heritage. Though their culture is anachronistic to the twentieth and approaching twenty-first centuries, [Indians] have not been able to divest themselves of it.”<sup>50</sup> Although this particular philosophy purportedly spurned racism, it advanced a curiously ethnocentric “culture of poverty” analysis.

Iola Hayden took issue with Harold Cameron’s well-intentioned rhetoric and tersely labeled it “that ‘Lo’, the Poor Indian’ crap.” “I disagreed with his concept because I didn’t see any sense in making us feel any worse than we already felt about ourselves,” she recalled. “We had a big argument about portraying drunken Indians, portraying poor, pathetic children in a park, on our brochures as opposed to trying to put together something that was more prideful.”<sup>51</sup> In taking this position, Hayden won the support of both Fred and LaDonna Harris. Through the fall and winter of 1966, they ushered Cameron out of the organization and, with his resignation, she became OIO’s executive director.<sup>52</sup>

With a nearly palpable degree of intensity, Hayden argued that Indians could not realize maximum feasible involvement as minority participants in the antipoverty campaign. “He didn’t move, and we were in a situation where we had to move,” she recollected. “And he had no credibility in the community.”<sup>53</sup> Not only did his being non-Indian render him ineffective in establishing rapport with Indian people, but Hayden and LaDonna Harris questioned whether he ever understood their perspective.<sup>54</sup> “OIO has

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<sup>50</sup> “General Information and Data,” pp. 10-1, folder 1, box 283, Harris Collection.

<sup>51</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001. For citations to Cameron’s work, see Harris, “American Indians—New Destiny,” 8312.

<sup>53</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001; Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001.

<sup>54</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001.

always believed that being Indian should be a source of pride,” Hayden contended. “The difference we see is that an Indian should be an Indian in the way he wants to be.”<sup>55</sup>

This philosophy took precedence as the War on Poverty ground on. At community development meetings throughout the state, LaDonna Harris and her colleagues raised consciousness of cultural diversity, urged public schools to adopt bilingual education, challenged discrimination and racial stereotyping, and promoted the idea that integration and assimilation need not be synonymous.<sup>56</sup> In her praise for the clinic Abe Ned helped to establish in Coal County, LaDonna Harris attested to her conviction that Indians should not have to sacrifice their distinctive legal status to be full members of the total community.<sup>57</sup> Like Iola Hayden, her life experiences had revealed the intellectual bankruptcy of the idea that Indians had to choose to be either Indian or modern. “That whole ‘you live in two worlds mentality’ is another form of victimization,” she posited, because it implied that “that your values can’t be lived every day.”<sup>58</sup>

As Iola Hayden and LaDonna Harris more vocally questioned the advisability of integrating Indians into Community Action programs, a congressional impasse in 1967 threw the future of the War on Poverty into question.<sup>59</sup> When the Economic Opportunity

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<sup>55</sup> Donald F. Sullivan to LaDonna Harris, 10 August 1966, folder 7; LaDonna Harris to Iola Taylor, 22 September 1966 and Harold Cameron to LaDonna Harris, folder 2, box 283. For quote, see Iola Taylor Hayden, Senate Committee on Government Operations, *Human Resources Development: Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Government Research*, 90<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., Part 1, 8, 10, & 18 April 1968 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1968), 8.

<sup>56</sup> Harris speech, Duke Collection.

<sup>57</sup> LaDonna Harris to MK DeLoach, 3 August 1967, folder 3, box 68, Harris Collection.

<sup>58</sup> Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002.

<sup>59</sup> Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002.

Act finally passed in November, it included an amendment mandating that all rural Community Action agencies serve no fewer than 50,000 persons.<sup>60</sup> The amendment guaranteed that the antipoverty campaign would continue, but it also raised the stakes of Indian inclusion in Oklahoma. In order to retain their current funding levels in this new environment, Community Action directors needed to present themselves to OEO as vital, inclusive representatives of the poor. Accordingly, they urged the maintenance of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity's circumscribed role of facilitating Indian participation in their programs.

Under Iola Hayden's direction, however, OIO moved in quite the opposite direction. In late March and early April 1967, a task force that included Senator and LaDonna Harris, Iola Hayden, members of Oklahoma's congressional delegation, and OEO personnel toured poverty-stricken areas in five northeastern Oklahoma counties. Fred Harris hoped that the media coverage it generated, as well as public hearings, would focus attention on eastern Oklahoma as no less mired in poverty than Appalachia. Shortly after the investigation, OEO announced its intentions of awarding Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity a multi-county Research and Demonstration Project to promote economic development in Haskell, LeFlore, Adair, Cherokee, and Sequoyah counties. Iola Hayden's assurance that the experimental program in locally-directed, community-based economic development would "be a poverty program and not just for Indian

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Abrams Beck, "The Limits of Presidential Activism: Lyndon Johnson and the Implementation of the Community Action Program" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1985), 108-14; McElrath, "A Multi-County Community Action Program," 10-11.

people” did little to assuage non-Indian Community Action directors’ fears.<sup>61</sup>

During the summer, just as the poverty war exhausted its finances and began operating on a continuing resolution, tensions climaxed. Prompted by charges that Iola Hayden refused to cooperate with local Community Action agencies, some members of OIO’s board of directors called for her dismissal. On July 15, 1967, an investigative committee drawn from the board elicited testimonies from twenty-four current or former OIO employees revealing charges that she alienated tribal leaders and arbitrarily fired personnel who disagreed with her philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

But more significant was the claim that Hayden, and by implication the organization, strayed from its obligation to integrate Indians into existing agencies. To substantiate this point, board member Neal McCaleb (Chickasaw) presented as “Exhibit B” a program proposal submitted by the Blaine County Community Action Agency that Hayden failed to reject or even acknowledge.<sup>63</sup> The proposal detailed an education and recreation program aimed particularly at Cheyenne and Arapaho youths. In it the author

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<sup>61</sup> Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 6 May 1967, “Reports of Executive Committee,” OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection; “Memo to Executive Board Members of OIO from Iola Taylor,” 9 May 1967, folder 5 and “Five Counties Tapped in Poverty Project,” attached to Carl Albert to Fred R. Harris, 13 May 1967, folder 1, box 68, Harris Collection; Mike Monroney to Miss Sue Naugle, 11 April 1967, folder 14 and Sargent Shriver to Mike Monroney, 18 May 1967, folder 5, box 85, Monroney Collection; Ed Edmondson to Clark McWhorter, 14 April 1967, C.E. Cummins to Dick Morrison, 3 April 1967, Ed Edmondson to Sargent Shriver, 14 April 1967, Sargent Shriver to Ed Edmondson April 1967, folder 7, box 78, Ed Edmondson Papers, University Archives, John Vaughan Library, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

<sup>62</sup> Neal McCaleb to LaDonna Harris, 24 July 1967 and Lois Gatchell to LaDonna Harris, 10 July 1967, folder 16, box 284; Thelma Moton to Fred R. Harris, 21 July 1967, folder 5, box 68, Harris Collection; Helen Chupco to Page Belcher, 18 June 1968, folder 1f, box 121, Belcher Collection; Principal Chief Harry J.W. Belvin to William Bozman, 21 November 1969, “INT-BIA-OIO” folder, box 91, Department Files, Albert Collection; Minutes, Board of Directors Meeting, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, 8 July 1967, “Minutes,” OIO Corporation Books, 1965-1968, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>63</sup> “General Information and Data,” n.d., p. 10, folder 1, box 283, Harris Collection.

suggested that Indian children needed to “break from the Indian culture” because only in the mainstream could they find “personal happiness, esteem, belonging, safety, and survival. . . .”<sup>64</sup>

With its condescending tone, the proposed “WIN Youth Center (WIN stands for White, Indian, Negro)” signified the agency’s ethnocentrism. Youthful Indian participants would not learn the value of their heritage at this center; their experiences would not reinforce Indianness as a source of strength for both the present and future. Although the proposal’s authors confidently added that OIO’s “objective is our objective,” Hayden’s silence suggested otherwise.<sup>65</sup> “[F]or some reason, in our particular State, in our society,” she argued a year later, “we insist everybody should be the same. And it gets to young kids. They think of themselves as inferior because they are not white.”<sup>66</sup> Blaine County, like so many other Community Action agencies, promulgated a monoethnic vision of the total community. “They just hated Indians,” Hayden later remembered of the people from Blaine County with whom she clashed. “You know, they were just incredibly racist.”<sup>67</sup>

Although the coup against Hayden ultimately failed, it yielded insights into the extent to which the politics of poverty had intersected with the politics of being Indian. Indeed, it manifested much more than Community Action directors’ interests in self-preservation.<sup>68</sup> The final report from the testimonies, submitted by Choctaw Principal

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<sup>64</sup> Edward G. Starr, Jr. to Iola Taylor, 22 November 1966, attached as “Exhibit B” to Neal A. McCaleb to LaDonna Harris, 24 July 1967, folder 16, box 284, Harris Collection.

<sup>65</sup> Starr to Taylor, 22 November 1966, Harris Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Hayden, Senate Committee, *Human Resources Development*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> Hayden interview, 25 June 2001.

<sup>68</sup> LaDonna Harris to Bob Miller, 7 August 1967.

Chief Harry J.W. Belvin, listed a surfeit of contradictory and imponderable charges.

“Accusations were made that the Director was anti-pow-wow, anti-church, anti-Indian, [and] anti-BIA,” Belvin reported.<sup>69</sup> In other words, Iola Hayden—who married a former Catholic priest five months later—maintained views antithetical to virtually all conceptions of Indianness, no matter what form they took.

Other members of OIO viewed the conflict through the lense of power rather than identity. Maynard Ungerman, a Tulsa attorney and political ally of Fred and LaDonna Harris, accepted the concerns raised in regard to Hayden—while efficient and competent, perhaps she did act too arbitrarily. As he watched the hearings unfold, however, Ungerman detected alternative motivations that he believed went to the heart of the matter. “What now worries myself. . .and others. . .is that we may well have hit the level that we anticipated of somewhat of a conflict between OIO and the tribal organizations,” he confided to Fred and LaDonna Harris. “I think you may recall. . .that we did discuss the possibility that OIO sooner or later would through it’s [*sic*] projects threaten the status quo relationship that the Tribal Chiefs have with the various tribes. Just as the mayors of cities feel threatened by activities of VISTA and other governmental workers in the poverty area.” In his view, entrenched tribal leaders, just as city mayors, lashed out at projects that might upset the status quo relationship between those in and out of power.<sup>70</sup>

Peggy F. Southern, Secretary Treasurer of the Sac and Fox, added additional insight. “You know as well as I do that many of our so called ‘Indian Leaders’ are not

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<sup>69</sup> “Special Personnel Committee Report,” 25 July 1967, folder 16, box 284, Harris Collection.

<sup>70</sup> Maynard I. Ungerman to Fred and LaDonna Harris, 18 July 1967, folder 16, box 284, Harris Collection.

leaders at all. They represent their tribes when the Commissioner of Indian Affairs visits us, they are present at task force meetings, they put war bonnets and blankets around dignitaries, and they meet the press,” she wrote to LaDonna Harris. “[B]ut I don’t see them at these public health meetings, and I don’t see them helping to carry water to destitute families or helping these same families apply for various programs that would benefit them, or even encouraging their people to use their privilege of voting, in fact some tribal leaders do not know who their officials are.”

Southern carried the argument further, suggesting that sexism lay at the root of tribal leaders’ dissatisfaction. “Being a woman and a mother gives [Hayden] the insight needed to tackle her many problems, and her problems are Indian problems,” Southern opined. “[B]ut her initiative and experience, as well as being very well qualified also makes her vulnerable [*sic*] to people who refuse to believe women can do a good job heading an organization.” Southern discerned an urgency in Hayden’s leadership that struck a responsive chord. “She is a woman in a hurry because the needs of our people are immediate. Perhaps at times she seems impatient, but don’t you agree it is time to be impatient? Where has our last 100 years of patience taken us?”<sup>71</sup>

Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity’s move into eastern Oklahoma, and particularly its emphasis on community-based organization, intersected with the perceived irrelevance or illegitimacy of the Cherokee tribal establishment. This, in turn, fueled the crisis W.W. Keeler and Earl Boyd Pierce already detected as a consequence of the presence of the Carnegie Cross-Cultural Education Project and University of Kansas

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<sup>71</sup> Peggy F. Southern to LaDonna Harris, 10 July 1967, Harris Collection.

research team headed by Murray and Rosalie Wax. Indeed, Pierce attended the organizational meeting of OIO in June 1965, and there made a point of not only praising the BIA for its competent management of their affairs, but to impress upon the conference goers his belief that "the Bureau should be free to operate this program."<sup>72</sup>

Soon, they suspected that OIO intended to hire Robert K. Thomas as the project director for their rural development program.<sup>73</sup> Hayden had already openly criticized the relationship between the tribal governments and local communities in eastern Oklahoma, and Robert K. Thomas's and OIO's paths had crossed at least once by the summer of 1967.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, the Carnegie Project certainly advocated the empowerment of tribal communities through the Cherokee language newspaper, promotion of bilingual education, and radio program broadcast in Cherokee. Their support for the founding of the Original Cherokee Community Organization (OCCO), a small political entity that openly challenged the legitimacy of the Cherokee Nation's appointed leaders, made it appear even more menacing to the Cherokee elite. If OIO's economic development projects were located in tribal communities, the Cherokee Nation confronted the possibility of their having a degree of independence from the tribal government.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> "Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity," 14 June 1965, Harris Collection. For a case study of the War on Poverty in southeastern Oklahoma, see Jennifer Jennings Collins, "The War on Poverty in Little Dixie: A Case Study of the Antipoverty Program in Rural Oklahoma, 1965-1974 (master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, 2001).

<sup>73</sup> Hayden Interview, 6 June 2001.

<sup>74</sup> Thelma Moton to Fred R. Harris, 21 July 1967, folder 5, box 68, Harris Collection; "Ethnic Pluralism Subject of Coming Tulsa Seminar," *Tulsa World* (16 December 1966), OIO Newspaper Clippings, January-December 1967, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>75</sup> Wax, *Indian Americans*, 129-30; Wahrhaftig, "In the Aftermath," iii-iv, 152; Albert L. Wahrhaftig and Jane Lukens-Wahrhaftig, "New Militants or Resurrected State? The Five County Northeastern Oklahoma Cherokee Organization," in *The Cherokee Indian Nation: A Troubled History*, ed. Duane H. King (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 223-46.

Although the extent of the connection between OIO and the Carnegie Project remains obscure, they clearly knew of one another's activities. Iola Hayden later remembered that they offered qualitatively different programs, but they did define the situation in like terms. Both groups sought to attack structural isolation and envisioned a society that tolerated cultural distinctiveness as well as tribal sovereignty. This alone was enough to cause conflict.<sup>76</sup> Perhaps because the Cherokee establishment had its attention focused intensively on the Carnegie Project, the responsibility for attacking OIO fell primarily to Choctaw Principal Chief Harry J.W. Belvin. Disaffected by the failed effort to remove Hayden, he resigned from the board and promptly attacked the organization vehemently, alleging that it had fallen into the hands of "young militants" who used it as a "political tool."<sup>77</sup>

In truth, Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity functioned as a rather conventional organization informed by liberal ideals. Firmly bound to the political mainstream, it championed values such as pluralism, opportunity, and individual autonomy. To be sure, subtle criticisms of racism, discrimination, assimilation, and economic powerlessness resided within these principles. When maximum feasible participation translated into grassroots political organization or voter registration drives, for instance, it exacerbated longstanding legitimacy crises. But no matter how strenuously Hayden avoided becoming

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<sup>76</sup> Harris and Hayden interview, 27 May 2002; Harris and Harris interview, 14 May 2001; note attached to Fred Harris to Mary C. Boudinot, 16 May 1967, folder 10, box 73, Harris Collection; Continental-Allied, Co., "'Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity' and Economic Development," Feasibility Study Under OEO Contract No. B89-4285, 18 October 1967, pp. 5, 7-9, 13-18, OIO Document Collection.

<sup>77</sup> Principal Chief Harry J.W. Belvin to William Bozman, 21 November 1969, "INT-BIA-OIO" folder, box 91, Departmental Files, Albert Collection; Leon Ginsberg to Fred and LaDonna Harris, 25 July 1967, folder 16, box 284, Harris Collection

entangled in tribal politics, OIO appeared belligerent. This derived less from its purported radicalism than from the profoundly conservative political and cultural milieu in which it operated.<sup>78</sup>

Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity had, however, distinguished itself from other pre-existing Community Action agencies, the BIA, and the tribal governments in eastern Oklahoma. From OIO's perspective, personnel within these groups too often perceived the loss of cultural and social distinctiveness as the price of progress, and their caretaker mentalities stifled autonomy. "We do not want you to come in and inflict charity upon people," Iola Hayden later elaborated. "[W]e want you to come in and give people a chance to help themselves."<sup>79</sup>

Hayden's critique raised questions regarding what it would take for Indians to be accepted in Oklahoma society even if the so-called communication problems could be transcended. Indeed, OIO revealed that at the heart of the human relations troubles that seemed so eminently resolvable during the early 1960s rested deep-seated dilemmas involving race and class. This, in turn, led to a confrontation with the vagaries of power and the realities of powerlessness. Although he withdrew from the organization after the dismissal hearings, OIO member Robert L. Miller captured the shift in sentiments when he wrote, "I'm becoming more convinced that the solution of so-called Indian problems rests more with the non-Indian community than with the Indian. . . . [U]ntil the white

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<sup>78</sup> In this respect, the conflict surrounding OIO was not unlike that which plagued the War on Poverty in Mississippi. In Mississippi, a statewide Head Start program for blacks was treated similarly by the defenders of white supremacy. See John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1995), 363-388.

<sup>79</sup> Hayden, Senate Committee, *Human Resources Development*, 16.

community sees local Indians as people of equal worth, misunderstandings among both races will continue.”<sup>80</sup>

Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity did not embrace economic development out of a firm ideological commitment, but the organization did find that power resided in the formation of independent institutions. Since non-Indians would not allow Indians to attain equality through participation in pre-existing programs, the latter needed to have control over the economic forces that shaped their lives, including stores, businesses, and financial institutions.<sup>81</sup> The organization prepared the ground for an expansive rural economic development program in the eastern part of the state during the latter half of 1967 to further this end. It would begin by providing start-up loans for indigenously-owned cooperative buying clubs, feeder pig farms, agricultural industries, and brick manufacturing companies.<sup>82</sup>

While the BIA continued to facilitate relocation and integration due to “the limited range of opportunities in some outlying areas,” Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity proposed the revitalization of rural Indian communities.<sup>83</sup> Not unlike the arguments put forward by other minority groups during the late 1960s, OIO contended that only through economic independence could Indians define their place in Oklahoma

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<sup>80</sup> Robert L. Miller to Miss Alice Maloney, 6 February 1967, folder 47, box 1, Miller Collection.

<sup>81</sup> Hayden, “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity,” 419.

<sup>82</sup> “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity, Incorporated, Rural Development Program Proposal for Refunding Grant, Dec. 1-November 20, 1970,” p. 4, attached to clw to Mr. A, n/d, “OEO-Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity” folder, box 78, Albert Collection; Hayden, “Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity,” 422-25. For a critique of tribal business development programs, see Peter Collier, “The Theft of a Nation: Apologies to the Cherokees,” *Ramparts* 9 (September 1970): 40-42.

<sup>83</sup> “U.S. Department of the Interior New Release,” 12 January 1967, folder 17a, box 116, Belcher Collection.

society on terms of their own making. It also meant, potentially, that they might choose to maintain their social, cultural, and economic separateness.

As Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity challenged the economic structures that peripheralized, isolated, and perpetuated the underdevelopment of Native communities, the conflation of race and class politics brought American Indians to the forefront of national affairs. White backlash against Black Power, urban violence, and the perceived excesses of liberalism intensified; popular and congressional support for the War on Poverty plummeted. In this context, American Indians emerged as a safe minority—one of the few groups policymakers could champion without reprisal from middle America. Because they continued to be defined as hapless victims who endured tremendous hardship in quiet dignity, Indians fit the image of the “deserving poor.” By the late 1960s, this stood in sharp contradistinction to the image of impoverished blacks who, the reasoning went, held hardworking taxpayers hostage with threats of violence.<sup>84</sup>

By late 1967 and early 1968, President Lyndon Johnson and aspiring presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy vied to be the preeminent champion of Indian rights, while OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver seized on its positive reputation in Indian Country to stave off criticisms of the War on Poverty. From his post within the Office of Economic Opportunity, Indian Division Director Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota) could see these developments unfolding. “We in OEO often felt that as far as Indians were concerned, we were safe,” he observed. “We were safer than anybody because we had the safest

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<sup>84</sup> Jill Quandagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), v-vi, 3-4, 8-15.

pocket within the enclave of OEO. Indians were the safest, most beloved sacred people in the agency—poorest of the poor, smallest of the small.” American Indians found themselves with allies by the end of the decade, he argued, “because it costs you nothing to do good things for Indians.” “Who do you offend?” he asked rhetorically. “Nobody.”<sup>85</sup>

Fred and LaDonna Harris found this situation advantageous to their own interest in advancing tribal self-determination. The explosion of urban riots across the United States during the summer of 1967 catapulted the former to national prominence as a leading member of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission). In July 1967, LaDonna Harris spoke in the House of Representatives and drew on Indian experiences with Community Action to promote the expansion of the antipoverty campaign. Soon thereafter, OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver asked her to serve as the chairperson of the National Committee on Women in the War on Poverty.

The intersection of Indian and African American politics continued into the spring of 1968. The formal release of the Kerner Commission’s report occurred simultaneously with the reintroduction of Senator George McGovern’s resolution in support of tribal self-determination. On March 5, 1968, Fred Harris lent his newfound prestige to the newly titled Senate Concurrent Resolution 11.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, Senator Robert F. Kennedy worked in concert with the Harrises on a series of hearings on Indian education conducted

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<sup>85</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 5 October 2001.

<sup>86</sup> Testimony of Senator Robert F. Kennedy Before the Senate Subcommittee on Indian Affairs Pertaining to Senate Concurrent Resolution Which Recommends a ‘New National Indian Policy,’ 5 March 1968, folder 15, box 36, S. Lyman Tyler Collection, Department of Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

by the Labor and Public Welfare Committee. In February 1968, the highly publicized event carried him to Twin Oaks, Oklahoma, where witnesses revealed the deplorable state of Indian education and criticized the Cherokee Nation as a tribal government un beholden to the people it claimed to represent.<sup>87</sup> From there, Kennedy conducted hearings across the West as he campaigned for the Democratic nomination in the upcoming presidential election.

Not to be outdone by these advances in the legislative branch, President Lyndon Baines Johnson made plans to deliver a special message to Congress on American Indians on March 6, 1968. Entitled "The Forgotten American," it would be the first time in the twentieth century that a president delivered a speech devoted solely to Indian affairs. The Interior Department originally drafted a speech in late 1966 to accompany the introduction of its landmark Indian Resources Development Act (IRDA) in January 1967. Indian opposition spearheaded by the NCAI, however, essentially killed the legislation before it reached Congress. Johnson, in turn, chose not to deliver the address and allowed the IRDA to expire in committee.

The National Congress of American Indians looked upon the resurrection of Johnson's special address as another opportunity to gain leverage for their drive toward tribal self-determination. In an attempt to curry the president's favor, the NCAI seized on public dissatisfaction with the Johnson administration's civil rights policy and the criticism it endured in the wake of the Tet Offensive. If they were given an audience,

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<sup>87</sup> LaDonna Harris to Robert F. Kennedy, 22 September 1967, folder 12, box 77, Harris Collection; Senate Committee, *Indian Education*, 537-988.

NCAI Executive Director John Belindo (Kiowa/Navajo) assured Johnson's domestic advisors, they would "include quotes like 'The Johnson Administration has done more for Indians than any other president'" and would also "support the President's Viet Nam stand."<sup>88</sup>

Lyndon Johnson's advisors understood the latent meanings residing within this pledge. By the spring of 1968, a majority of Americans believed that the rate of change in black-white relations was proceeding too rapidly. Moreover, the antiwar movement had gained momentum and cut deeply into his support. "It would demonstrate concern by the administration for minorities once again," one advisor noted in a memo urging Johnson to accept. "Having an Indian praise a program as an aid to minorities would seem, at this period of certain backlash, to be preferable to having other minorities say the same." "There is renewed interest in Indian affairs, generally," he continued, adding an allusion to Robert F. Kennedy, "and they are being wooed already by other figures in the political arena."<sup>89</sup>

"The Forgotten American" won tremendous accolades despite the fact that it struck some Washington insiders as "pretty middle of the road."<sup>90</sup> The address did not include an outright renunciation of termination, but it did commit the federal government to a policy of "self-help and self-determination." And although Johnson ultimately declined to meet personally with the NCAI delegation, he arranged for them to meet with

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<sup>88</sup> Joseph H. Carter to James R. Jones, 28 February 1968, "EX IN Indian 3/1/68-9/30/68" folder, box 1, EX IN Indian Affairs, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>89</sup> Carter to Jones, 28 February 1968, LBJL. For more on the tumult of the spring of 1968, see Joseph A. Califano Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 260-65.

<sup>90</sup> Forrest Gerard, interview by author, tape recording, Albuquerque, New Mex., 31 May 2002.

Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall. Moreover, he followed the address by signing an executive order that established the National Council on Indian Opportunity (NCIO). The NCIO coupled prominent tribal leaders with members of the president's cabinet to study various facets of federal-Indian relations and to explore means for the various agencies to extend their programs to tribal governments. In this sense, it carried on the purpose for which Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity had been founded in 1965: it would be a vehicle for tribes to become a part of the total community without sacrificing their distinct legal relationship to the United States government.

LaDonna Harris joined the NCIO as a representative of off- and non-reservation Indians. Under her direction, it engaged in a major study of Native peoples who did not reside on federal reservations yet still maintained their tribal identities. The hearings and final report attracted the attention of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, proved central to subsequent congressional investigating committees, and informed initiatives launched through the Office of Economic Opportunity under Lyndon Johnson's successor, Republican Richard M. Nixon. Several months before accepting her position in the NCIO, Harris resigned as president of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity. Two years later she founded Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO), an organization that continued OIO's mission on a national scale.

Both of these developments were important in their own right, but they also symbolized the interconnectedness of ordinary people's experiences and national policymaking, the personal and the political. In this way, the local politics of Oklahoma

Indian involvement in Community Action and the national politics of tribal self-determination represented at once distinct and shared stories—they were contrapuntal entries in a single historical fugue. At the center of this complicated process rested the War on Poverty and the rupture it caused in the cultural field. The various individuals who became bound up in it—from residents of Lawton, Oklahoma, and leaders of Indian advocacy organizations to United States senators and federal bureaucrats—contributed to a profound externalizing moment, one that ultimately metamorphosed the politics of poverty into the politics of tribal self-determination.

But nettlesome questions regarding poverty, community, identity, and power remained. And just as activists working within the system achieved unprecedented advances, the tenor of Indian politics changed. Organizations such as Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity carried on their efforts to build the total community, but they were quickly being surpassed by another cohort that did not believe the system could reform itself. This younger generation, unlike their predecessors, defined federal-Indian affairs in terms of a colonial system that perpetuated underdevelopment and dependency. In the spring of 1968, they carried these ideas to Washington, D.C., as participants in the controversial Poor People's Campaign. In so doing, they foreshadowed the advent of yet another transformation, one that recast the politics of self-determination into the language of tribal sovereignty.

## Coda

### Sound and Fury Signifying Nothing

There are some things we can't control, like white attitudes. . . . The white world has not changed because we have not had a chance to deal directly with them about what we would expect their behavior to be. Whereas, on the other hand, we've dealt with the Indians in terms of what we expect their behavior to be vis-à-vis the programs we fund and sponsor.

Dr. Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota)<sup>1</sup>

The gap between the two societies is abysmal. And into the abyss many a politically ambidextrous and intellectually surefooted man has tumbled with ludicrous ease and regularity. He has fallen into the cultural trap of forgetting not the existence of a gap, but how differently it looks from either side of the abyss. Thus, he may be knowledgeable enough about Indians, and respectful of Indian philosophy, religion, culture, and society, yet in judging their ways by his own, he may unconsciously begin from a criteria, however valid for himself, that has no basis in reality. And too often the result has been a sophisticated slapstick of non sequiturs. Rather than a dialogue there will be an intellectualized vaudeville routine ala Abbot and Costello.

Robert K. Thomas (Cherokee)<sup>2</sup>

Mel Thom (Walker River Paiute) stared at Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) Interim Director Bertrand Harding from across a table. Crowded around him were dozens of other delegates from the Committee of 100, a diverse group of individuals elected to represent their communities at the Poor People's Campaign. They had come to Washington, D.C., on April 29, 1968, to meet face-to-face with representatives from President Lyndon Johnson's cabinet. In presenting a series of demands to these officials, they prepared the way for thousands of impoverished people who would soon establish Resurrection City, a fifteen-acre expanse of shacks sprawled across West Potomac Park that, along with the Hawthorne School, would serve as headquarters to the massive six-week demonstration of class solidarity. "You know, Indian people have been pretty peaceful for the last 100 years, since they've been subdued to sometimes a very lowly human deprivation," Mel Thom began. "I think that day is coming to an end. It's coming

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 5 October 2001.

<sup>2</sup> *The New Indians*: Notes, folder 12, box 15, series III, Stan Steiner Papers, Department of Special Collections, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California.

to an end.”<sup>3</sup>

He drew these words from experience. As a participant in the American Indian Chicago Conference (AICC) in 1961, a founding member of the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), a Community Action director, and the chairman of his tribe, Thom had devoted nearly a decade of his life to the promise of purposeful change. The effort had left him deeply disillusioned. “I’m a young person,” he continued, “I perhaps relate best to the old people, the people who don’t have a chance to speak because tribal politics is dominated by the federal government, controlled by white interest groups that tell Indians what to think, how to be, how to act, and many of the young people are tired of that. They’ve had it.”<sup>4</sup> He then directed his attention specifically to the War on Poverty. “You’ve heard a lot of stories about successful OEO programs on Indian reservations. This is built up, played up!” Thom exclaimed. From his perspective, OEO’s failure to have a representative from the Indian Division present at the meeting testified to how little they cared about what was actually happening on reservations.

As the anger welled up inside him, Thom methodically rapped his clenched fist against the table. “The ‘successful’ programs are the kinds that are controlled, monitored, masterminded out of an office like this or a regional office or many of the universities which are set up to mastermind or control,” Thom raged. “The kind of people they like to have is the kind that look like and act like the powerful whites. That’s the kind of people

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<sup>3</sup> Poor People’s Campaign, tape 381.238, Motion Picture, Sound, and Video Research Room, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland. On the Poor People’s Campaign, see Robert T. Chase, “Class Resurrection: The Poor People’s Campaign of 1968 and Resurrection City,” *Essays in History* 40 (1998), p. 8, 10, 14-16, 20, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/EH/EH40/chase40.html>, [11 February 2003].

<sup>4</sup> Poor People’s Campaign, tape 381.238, NA II.

they like to have!” This mentality, in turn, effectively excluded the involvement of local community leaders like his own father. “My father could no more stand a chance to get a job in OEO, although he represents and is part of a community more than anybody else is, because they pass down these guidelines and requirements that he can’t even read,” he explained. “He’s a competent and a very efficient man, but according to those kind of standards, he isn’t. As a result, like many other people, he’s lost his will. I don’t like to see this! A lot of us young people don’t like to see this. But it goes on.” He concluded with a premonition: “I’m very pleased to see the Indian turnout at this Poor People’s Campaign. I really am. . . . The day is coming when we’re gonna move. And when we move, like I said, watch out.”<sup>5</sup>

Mel Thom’s embittered testimony, and the chorus of applause it elicited from his comrades, captured the unity felt by those who gathered together as part of the Poor People’s Campaign. This sense of solidarity transcended racial and regional lines and derived from what historian Robert Chase aptly termed the “convergence of racial and economic concerns.”<sup>6</sup> Some 200 American Indians—political activists such as Mel Thom, Hank Adams (Assiniboine), and Shirley Hill Witt (Mohawk), reformers like Tillie Walker (Mandan), Victor Charlo (Flathead), and Leo La Clair (Muckleshoot), and community leaders such as Martha Grass (Ponca), Andrew Dreadfulwater (Cherokee),

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<sup>5</sup> Poor People’s Campaign, tape 381.238, NA II.

<sup>6</sup> This process was readily apparent to participants and observers as well. The minutes for an April 1968 meeting of the Council on Indian Affairs, a body that brought together representatives from Indian and non-Indian advocacy organizations, noted “that some Indian people are coming to realize that Indian interests are in some respects converging with those of other groups and making a common cause with those groups on those issues.” Minutes, Meeting of Council on Indian Affairs, 15 April 1968, p. 2, “Council on Indian Affairs [2 of 2]” folder, box 158, National Congress of American Indians Papers, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

and Mattie Grinell (Mandan)—joined the campaign because they had grown tired of seeing too many of their people exploited, malnourished, deprived of proper medical care, and denied educational opportunities. And yet they also knew that Indians did not endure these indignities alone.

The confrontation between representatives from the Committee of 100 and the federal government evidenced not only the convergence of domestic issues of race and class, but also the ongoing transnationalization of discourse on poverty. Just as the philosophical underpinnings of Community Action and the notion of a culture of poverty had roots in the ideology of modernization, radical critiques of them drew on the language of national liberation. The idea of internal colonialism held that impoverished communities—be they in cities, small towns, temporary migrant camps, or reservations—were ensnared in an exploitative core-periphery structure that perpetuated their underdevelopment.<sup>7</sup> Mel Thom succinctly articulated this perspective as spokesperson for the Committee of 100 in their meeting with Interior Secretary Stewart Udall and Commissioner of Indian Affairs Robert L. Bennett (Oneida) on May 1, 1968:

We have joined the Poor People's Campaign because most of our families, tribes, and communities number among those suffering most in this country. We are not begging. We are demanding what is rightfully ours. This is no more than the right to have a decent life in our own communities. We need guaranteed jobs, guaranteed income, housing, schools, economic development, but most important—we want them on our own terms.

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<sup>7</sup> The essential statement on internal colonialism as applied to Native America remains Robert K. Thomas's "Colonialism: Classic and Internal," *New University Thought* 4, no. 4 (1966/1967): 37-44. Note, however, how dispassionately Thomas describes the system. His reckoning does not imply the kind of intentional exploitation and bald oppression found in many later statements. On internal or domestic colonialism generally, see Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 58-65.

Our chief spokesman in the federal government, the Department of Interior, has failed us. In fact it began failing us from its very beginning. The Interior Department began failing us because it was built upon and operates under a racist, immoral, paternalistic, and colonialistic system. There is no way to improve upon racism, immorality and colonialism; it can only be done away with. The system and power structure serving Indian peoples is a sickness which has grown to epidemic proportions. The Indian system is sick. Paternalism is the virus, and the Secretary of the Interior is the carrier.

Foremost, we demand to be recognized for what we are. Most of us are groups of tribal families. We are not white middle-class aspiring groups of people in need of direction. . . . American Indians have political units, land bases, and are competent but we cannot use these resources because we are not allowed to control anything or to make any basic choices except to get out. The political structure is systematically controlled by the government and special interest groups who exploit us. This must end. . . .

We demand an end to racism in the schools, public as well as federal. . . . Indian children are systematically told that they should relate to an Indian who is successful in the eyes of the white man rather than to his own family or tribe. Our Indian children are discouraged from understanding their families and communities as they really are. . . . Let it be understood that we do not want our children being told by white or white-oriented Indian education experts what we were, what we are, and what we should be. . . .

In conclusion, we make it unequivocally and crystal clear that Indian people have the right to separate and equal communities within the American system—our own communities, that are institutionally and politically separate, socially equal and secure within the American system.

We ask to be heard—not just listened to and tolerated. In World War I, World War II, and the Korean Conflict, American Indians had the highest volunteer turnout per capita than any other ethnic group in the country. Now some American Indians are becoming dissatisfied with rather than proud of their country and are going to jails rather than serving this country in battle.

The inequality and dissatisfaction that is evidencing itself cannot be taken lightly. The oppressed can only be oppressed for so long. . . .<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Statements of Demands for Rights of the Poor Presented to Agencies of the U.S. Government by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Its Committee of 100, 29-30 April and 1 May 1968" attached to Ralph Abernathy to Congressman Harris, n.d., folder 30 [1 of 3], box 48, Carl Albert General Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

In appropriating a shared language to draw analogies between Indians and others, Mel Thom followed in the tradition of his predecessors. However, unlike D'Arcy McNickle (Flathead), Helen Peterson (Northern Cheyenne/Lakota), Sol Tax, Oliver LaFarge, and others, he wove concepts such as community, poverty, identity, and power into a demand not for self-determination but national liberation.

As Mel Thom's final premonition attested—and as the National Indian Youth Council had warned since at least 1966—this particular ideational convergence carried with it portents of fragmentation within the Indian reform movement. Two incidents during the Poor People's Campaign particularly exacerbated tensions between the NIYC and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). First, on May 29, Hank Adams led a 150-person march to protest a Supreme Court decision handed down two days prior that curtailed Indian fishing rights. Below the marble edifice that read "Equal Justice Under Law," emotions flared. Some demonstrators began to pound on the doors of the Supreme Court building, while others threw rocks that smashed its windows. The second incident took place on June 21, as the Poor People's Campaign neared its end. Led once again by Indians from the Committee of 100, protesters descended on the Bureau of Indian Affairs, entered the building, and conducted a daylong sit-in.<sup>9</sup>

The NCAI responded with denunciations of both acts. While it endorsed "its ultimate goals and aims" and argued that "present political, economic, and social

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<sup>9</sup> Chase, "Class Resurrection," 16; Kenneth R. Philp, ed., *Indian Self-Rule: First-Hand Accounts of Indian-White Relations from Roosevelt to Reagan* (Salt Lake City: Howe Brothers, 1988; Logan: Utah State University Press, 1995), 188; Melvin Thom, 6 August 1970, interviewed by Floyd A. O'Neil and Gregory Thompson, interview number 624, p. 14, American Indian Oral History: The Doris Duke Collection, Department of Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah.

conditions precipitated the March,” the organization refused to place its imprimatur on American Indian involvement in the campaign.<sup>10</sup> Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux), who had stepped down as executive director in 1967 but stayed on as a consultant, later recalled that the NCAI took its position out of concern for tactics rather than aims. “If you’re going to go out and be radical in terms of observable behavior, these people would just lose their minds and you’d be isolated,” he posited. “So, you had to keep enough of a foot in that power structure. . . .”<sup>11</sup> Not only did the demonstrations too closely associate Indians with other minorities, but they unintentionally undermined the authority of tribal spokespersons and weakened the prospects for pan-Indian unity.<sup>12</sup>

But even more than this, Deloria and others argued, the battle for tribal sovereignty would be won and lost in the Congress and the courts, not in a bureaucrat’s office. “What I objected to very strongly on the Poor People’s March was that they went in and hassled government officials,” he remembered. “You go into those higher level federal officials, all they can possibly do is blow smoke up your ass for an hour and send

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<sup>10</sup> “NCAI Commended,” *NCAI Sentinel* 13, no. 2 (summer 1968): 7; “Where Were You When We Needed You,” *ibid.*, 9; Resolution, No. 1, 1968 Policy Statement of the National Congress of American Indians, “NCAI Fund (Miscellaneous), 1965-1968” folder, box 2S454, Field Foundation Archives, Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

<sup>11</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., interview by author, tape recording, Golden, Col., 19 October 2001.

<sup>12</sup> “Representation,” *NCAI Sentinel* 13, no. 2 (fall 1968); NCAI Releases Statement on Poor Marchers, 1 July 1968, folder 4, box 41; General Document on Poor People’s Campaign, “General Document of Poor Peoples Campaign, Southern Christian Leadership Conference” folder, box 166 and The National Congress of American Indians Annual Report 1968, “1968 Reports” folder, box 16, NCAI Papers. For more on the dilemma between civil and tribal rights, see Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: MacMillan, 1969; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), chapter 8; D’Arcy McNickle, *Native American Tribalism: Indian Survivals and Renewals* (1973; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122; Stephen Cornell, *Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 172; and Ernest L. Schusky, *The Right to Be Indian* (San Francisco: Indian Historian Press, 1970), 5-7.

you on your way.”<sup>13</sup> Conversely, the NCAI continued its strategy of “stealing horses” by setting legislative precedents, working with congresspersons to secure specific programs and increased appropriations, and laying the foundation for legal claims. “And so I thought, ‘Jesus, after we worked, I mean, finally after three years we’d gotten to the point where we could make suggestions. . .these guys come in with all this ill will,” Deloria added. “I didn’t have anything against working with blacks and Chicanos and Asians or whatever. But after we’d done all this work? And these guys would resent it personally—the people in Congress and the people in the Bureau.”<sup>14</sup>

The NCAI did not reject militancy as a potentially useful political tool. But in order for it to be effective, it would have to allow for a definite resolution. The Poor People’s Campaign, Deloria and others warned, had failed to do so. Consequently, rather than strategically using direct action to build on the leverage NCAI had gained over the course of the past decade, it allowed it to slip away. As they predicted, the Poor People’s Campaign ended in disarray. On June 22, 1968, one day after the march on the BIA, rioting erupted in the nation’s capitol. No sooner had the permit for Resurrection City expired on June 24, than armed police forcibly evicted those who remained on the muddy grounds of West Potomac Park.

The failed campaign brought into clear focus not only fractures within the civil rights, Indian reform, and liberal coalitions, but also the onset of a period of conservative retrenchment. By the end of the 1960s, the emerging Silent Majority made strident calls

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<sup>13</sup> Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

<sup>14</sup> Deloria interview, 19 October 2001.

for a halt to civil rights legislation, victory in Vietnam, greater fiscal responsibility, a commitment to law and order, and an end to the expansion of the welfare state.<sup>15</sup> The War on Poverty became bound up in this conflation of race and class politics. In the same way that the civil rights movement began to embrace the language of class solidarity, the antipoverty campaign became inextricably bound to the white backlash against the African American freedom struggle. The average disgruntled American, in other words, did not distinguish between his or her antipathy toward rioters, looters, and welfare cheats—they were all of a piece.<sup>16</sup>

If the collapse of support for the War on Poverty among the white middle and working classes did not prove devastating enough, OEO also lost many of its former allies on the left. As critiques of structural racism and inequality came to the fore, support for the opportunity liberalism of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society withered. For the activists at the forefront of the nascent Red Power movement, the antipoverty campaign symbolized a profound irony. They roundly denounced what OEO Director R. Sargent Shriver likened to "a war for self-determination" and "a war for the liberation of all men from all forms of colonialism" as a dependency-perpetuating manifestation of

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<sup>15</sup> Robert M. Collins, "Growth Liberalism in the Sixties," in *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, ed. David Farber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 11-44; Gareth Davies, *From Opportunity to Entitlement: The Transformation and Decline of Great Society Liberalism* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> On this point, see Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). For a representative example of this phenomenon, see the correspondence of Oklahoma constituents in response to the Poor People's Campaign in folder 30, box 48, General Files, Carl Albert Collection; folders 1, 2, and 8-9, box 101, Fred R. Harris Collection; and folders 3 and 7a-7e, box 118, Page Belcher Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Studies, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma. The title given to correspondence regarding the Poor People's Campaign in the Belcher Collection is particularly instructive. Although they addressed a non-violent direct action campaign, folders 7a-7e were given the heading "Riots & Crime."

white colonialism.

Even as the War on Poverty went into a steady eclipse in the wake of the Poor People's Campaign, OEO-Indian Division Director Dr. Jim Wilson (Oglala Lakota) sought out innovative techniques for promoting tribal self-determination through Community Action, contributed financial support for budding Indian law programs, and co-sponsored economic development conferences. Nonetheless, an internal evaluation in 1969 revealed that budget cuts and over-bureaucratization had stripped Community Action of its innovative commitment to "community self-determination." It became readily apparent that if it had a future, it would be as a conventional social welfare service provider.

In the summer of 1971, Congress placed additional restrictions on the War on Poverty and continued to cut its budget. Fearing the worst, Jim Wilson resigned. Three years later, OEO had been completely dismantled, and the Indian Desk was transferred to Health, Education, and Welfare and renamed the Office of Native American Programs.<sup>17</sup> From Wilson's perspective, the "congressional stranglehold on OEO" served as the greatest disappointment of the latter part of his career. He also bemoaned his successor's insistence on imposing too much order over the Indian Division in the form of trip reports, travel requests, and stringent budgetary guidelines. "I had seen it as a vehicle for

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<sup>17</sup> American Indian Press Association, n.d. and Bradley Patterson to Gladys Buffalo Benson, 11 January 1974, "Office of Native American Programs, Health, Education, and Welfare" folders I and II, box 56, Bradley H. Patterson Jr., Staff Member of Office Files, White House Central Files, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives and Records Administration II, College Park, Maryland. ONAP later became the present-day Administration for Native Americans. Jim Wilson contends that the head of that office is primarily a "maintenance man" and that it represents little more than "a competitive application process." Dr. Jim Wilson, interview by author, tape recording, Rapid City, South Dak., 7 October 2001.

manipulation and twisting and turning and bending of the system,” he noted, once again returning to the theme of “small a” activism. “Without structure, I think it was successful. But as he brought structure to it, then its failure to be unique was its own cause of demise. . . .”<sup>18</sup>

Many of the people who had been involved in the War on Poverty from its inception looked back on their work with a sense of accomplishment, nonetheless. “I think that the greatest legacy of the specific programs that I was involved in was it was the first time in history we funded tribal organizations directly, and we didn’t give it to white people to tell them what to do,” Office of Special Field Programs Director Noel Klores reminisced. “I think we started it, we built it, and you never can go back. We will never go back to where we were.”<sup>19</sup> Community Action architect Richard Boone concurred. “One of the things that I felt best about was helping to force the break with the BIA,” he stated. “I really believe that the nucleus for what came later was in those latter days—and frankly, the break.”<sup>20</sup> In 1968, the National Congress of American Indians echoed his sentiments. “We have believed that the philosophy of the OEO, to provide funds for people to help themselves, was the most helpful thing we could do to support tribal rights and sovereignty,” the organization contended in its annual report. “Now other Governmental Agencies are offering programs which will have lasting effect

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<sup>18</sup> Wilson interview, 7 October 2001.

<sup>19</sup> Noel Klores, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 10 November 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Richard W. Boone, interview by author, tape recording, telephone interview, 8 November 2002. The experience of Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs James Officer suggested that this was, indeed, an accurate assessment when he argued that OEO pushed the BIA toward tribal self-determination “maybe even against its own will. . . .” Quoted in George Pierre Castile, *To Show Heart: Native American Self-Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1960-1975* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998), 31.

for years to come.”<sup>21</sup>

Jim Wilson offered a more guarded assessment. Community Action provided an opportunity to develop young Indian professionals in the fields of tribal governance, education, health, welfare, and law; it also set precedents for contracting and compacting federal programs and yielded a generation of reformers within the Bureau of Indian Affairs. But the antipoverty campaign did not change the structure of the BIA, resolve internal conflicts within tribes, wrest control of tribal finances from Congress, or end poverty. Indeed, Wilson contended that despite the rhetoric of abolishing poverty, it “was never our attempt to be an employment center or fight poverty. Rather, from the beginning, he sought means of creating a cadre of Indian professionals who could champion tribal self-governance—he endeavored to build the Indian pyramid and nothing more.”<sup>22</sup>

LaDonna Harris (Comanche) and Iola Hayden (Comanche) came to similar conclusions. Although Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO) struggled to survive budget cuts, attacks from the principle chiefs of the Choctaws and Cherokees, and attempts by the state of Oklahoma to usurp control of OEO programs through the late 1960s and early 1970s, LaDonna Harris still considered it “the greatest success that ever came down the pike.” “It changed our attitude about ourselves in a way that we can never go back to again,” she said of the leadership that developed out of the War on Poverty.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The National Congress of American Indians Annual Report 1968, “1968 Reports” folder, box 16, NCAI Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson interview, 7 October 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Fred R. Harris and LaDonna Harris, interview by author, tape recording, Bernalillo, New Mex., 14 May 2001. For the politics of the War on Poverty in Oklahoma during the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Daniel M. Cobb, “‘Us Indians Understand the Basics: Oklahoma Indians and the Politics of Community

These observations suggest the need to look beyond traditional means of discerning whether the War on Poverty failed or succeeded. Those on the right typically marshal statistics on the poverty rate, social welfare expenditures, and the numbers of families receiving long-term relief to argue that it actually exacerbated welfare dependency. Others on the left seek out statistics of their own in order to demonstrate that the poverty rate declined significantly during the sixties, and that the expansion of the welfare system had a significant role to play in that process. Even if scholars agree that the War on Poverty ultimately failed, they tend to disagree on causation, variously pointing to the Vietnam War, inflation, racism, conceptual flaws, and the paucity of funds as contributing factors in its demise.<sup>24</sup>

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of these debates and the foundations on which they rest. And yet it is also true that the overarching reliance on quantitative data tends to discount the equally significant line of argumentation explored most recently by Alice O'Connor, Herbert J. Gans, and Michael Katz.<sup>25</sup> They have

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Action, 1964-1970," *Western Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (spring 2002): 41-66.

<sup>24</sup> The scholarship on this debate is legion. For representative samples of the contest over the War on Poverty, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (1971; New York: Vintage Books, 1993); John E. Schwartz, *America's Hidden Success: A Reassessment of Public Policy from Kennedy to Reagan* (1983; New York: Norton, 1988); Charles Murray, *Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk, "The Poverty of *Losing Ground*," *Challenge: Magazine of Economic Affairs* 28, no. 2 (May/June 1985): 32-8; Robert Greenstein, "Losing Faith in *Losing Ground*," *The New Republic* (25 March 1985): 12-17. More tightly focused on Community Action are Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1986), 217-71; James L. Sundquist, ed., *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives from Experience*, Perspectives on Poverty, vol. 2 (New York: Basic Books, 1969); and Quadagno, *Color of Welfare*.

<sup>25</sup> Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Herbert J. Gans, *The War Against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1995); Katz, *Undeserving Poor*.

persuasively demonstrated that the campaign against poverty represented nothing less than a culture war in which the construction of knowledge placed boundaries on permissible discourse. This, in turn, prevented the War on Poverty from doing anything other than confirming what the dominant society already believed about poor people, the communities in which they lived, and the nature of poverty.<sup>26</sup> The War on Poverty may have been full of sound and fury insofar as poor people's ideas made their way into the public sphere, but because these voices and ideas were either not heard or not understood, they quite literally signified nothing. That is to say, the definitions marginalized people assigned to poverty, community, and identity entered popular discourse only to be treated as though they had no meaning—and so they were quickly dismissed.

The same can be said of the politics of tribal self-determination. Despite a War on Poverty, a series of secret task forces and presidential commissions, Robert F. Kennedy's investigation into Indian education, Lyndon Johnson's "Forgotten American" address to Congress, and the eventual passage of George McGovern's senate concurrent resolution on self-determination, poverty and the power relations that exacerbated it remained.<sup>27</sup> The public sphere may have been breached, but it could not be reconstructed. Instead deeply internalized misconceptions about Indians, poverty, and tribes' legal relationships with the states and nation persisted. "The voices of Indian communities and Indian leaders were not being heard. They might have been heard, but they weren't listened to,"

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<sup>26</sup> O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Senate Concurrent Resolution 11 was adopted on September 11, 1968. S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, 1973), 200-01.

Mel Thom could therefore remark to two interviewers in 1970. “You and I would say we hope these things change, and there are more Indians going to be around to take control of these things. But I’m still waiting. I don’t know how long I’ll wait.”<sup>28</sup>

The stories told in “Community, Poverty, Power” underscore the need for scholars to transcend conventional definitions of Indian history, combine micro and macro scales of analysis, blend social and political perspectives, and forge agency-structure syntheses. In addition to expanding the interpretive ground upon which the War on Poverty is assessed and suggesting a different way of thinking about the emergence of tribal self-determination, it provides a context for understanding the eruption of the Red Power movement in the years that followed.<sup>29</sup> But at the same time, it also suggests that historians need to re-envision the meaning of activism, to include people who worked within the system in order to affect change—the “small a” activists, “big M” manipulators, and horse-stealing leverage seekers among them. To the extent that the idea of tribal self-determination entered national political discourse between 1960 and 1968, it did so because of these continuing encounters between natives and newcomers. These points of intersection, set against the shared yet distinctive trajectories of domestic and international politics, explain not only how gains were made, but why the struggle continues.

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<sup>28</sup> Melvin Thom, interview 624, pp. 8, 26.

<sup>29</sup> On Red Power, see Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Indian Self-Determination & the Rise of Indian Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne, eds., *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: New Press, 1996).

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