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“Ethnic” Assimilates “Indigenous”: A Study in Intellectual Neocolonialism

Winona Stevenson

In 1994 various faculty members at the University of British Columbia considered establishing an Ethnic Studies department. As part of their study they invited academics representing four “ethnic” minority groups to make public addresses on the pros and cons of this prospect. As a current faculty member of a Native Studies department and a recent Ph.D. student in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of California at Berkeley, I was invited to present a paper on the relations between Ethnic Studies and Native Studies on university campuses.¹

In accepting the invitation I let the organizer, Professor Margery Fee, know that I was not a proponent of Ethnic Studies–Native American Studies collaboration and that she might want to rethink the invitation. The invitation held, and this essay is the result.

As the title suggests, experience convinces me that Native Studies does not belong under the rubric of Ethnic Studies, that when Native Studies is housed under Ethnic Studies, there is always the potential for unbalanced power relations to develop between the dominant ethnic majority and Native People. These unbalanced power relations result in the marginalization, silencing, and exploitation of issues unique to Indigenous peoples.

The marginalization of Native American Studies in Ethnic Studies departments was never intended when these departments were first established—it evolved, over time, out of a combination of political

and fiscal expediency, self-interest, and the scholarly drive toward comparative studies at the expense of deeper analytical understandings of difference. The intent of this essay, then, is to demonstrate the process by which "ethnicity" assimilates "Indigenous" and how that process and its impact constitute a prime example of contemporary intellectual neocolonialism.

THE EMERGENCE OF ETHNIC STUDIES

Ethnic Studies departments on university campuses grew out of the North American civil rights and Third World movements of the 1960s. The broader civil rights movement sought to rectify political, social, and economic inequalities prevalent in North American societies. However, people of color, the racially oppressed in North America, adopted the metaphorical term *Third World movement* to stress the causes and degree of their exclusion from the American Dream.

The term *Third World movement* emphasizes that racially oppressed peoples in North America share "essential conditions with third world nations abroad," namely, "economic underdevelopment, a heritage of colonialism, and neocolonialism, and a lack of real political power and autonomy."² The conceptualization of North American Third World realities evolved from the emerging social science discourses on neocolonialism. According to Robert Blauner, a renowned race-relations theorist, one of the main features of international colonialism is the coercive means by which the colonized were forced to enter newly established colonies or nation-states. Those peoples whose entry into North American societies was forced and whose subsequent histories best fit this colonial model are African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans. These are the peoples who, in Blauner's words, "became ethnic minorities en bloc, collectively, through conquest, slavery, annexation, or a racial labor policy. [While] European immigrant peoples became ethnic groups and minorities . . . by the essential voluntary movements of families."³

Blauner explains that America's "third world within" fits into the framework of international colonialism because it shares fundamental conditions with the "third world abroad," where "patterns of racial domination and exploitation are stressed and a common political fate is implied."⁴

According to Blauner, the pattern of international colonialism was never entirely abolished; rather, it was adjusted over time to fit changing conditions, and eventually it evolved into internal neocolonialism. The manifestations of internal neocolonialism are painfully evident everywhere in North America. Visible minorities in the United States and Canada sit at the bottom of their respective socioeconomic

ladders; are disproportionately represented in jails, unemployment lines, and welfare offices; and have the highest mortality rates, especially due to suicides, violent deaths, and infant mortality.

The Third World movement of the 1960s demanded that North American universities establish departments or centers for Third World Studies where internal race relations could be studied and racial minority and cultural pride enhanced. Racial minority students at the University of California and other campuses were in the forefront of this movement. Throughout the late 1960s, campus life was rife with protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, and takeovers until university regents were finally convinced. The academic concession to these political demands was the establishment of a handful of Ethnic Studies departments. The four minority groups targeted for representation through programs in these departments were African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans.

The shift from Third World Studies to Ethnic Studies was clearly a political compromise—Ethnic Studies is more ambiguous and far less politically charged than Third World Studies. Even though the label is now well established, from many perspectives it is still not an acceptable representation. First, it is a far too inclusive rubric: according to conventional definitions, *ethnic* encompasses all ethnic minorities rather than those that are racial or visible. The inclusiveness of the term suggests that African Americans and Irish Americans, for example, have more in common than not, which at the very least downplays or minimizes difference. Second, the term *ethnic studies* hides the fundamental basis of the Third World movement—racism and racial discrimination.

Despite this compromise, the original intent of Third World Studies centers is still evident in the manner in which Ethnic Studies departments define their mandates. The mandate of the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of California at Berkeley (1992), for example, states:

The group major in ethnic studies provides a core curriculum designed to develop a comparative and multidisciplinary understanding of the experiences and communities of Afro-Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, and Native Americans. Students . . . study the history, culture, politics, and sociology of Third World communities in the United States within the general context of American society and institutions. Thus, they pursue knowledge vital for a critical understanding of contemporary society and for social changes to improve the lives and communities of racial minorities.⁵

While cloaked under the less politically charged "Ethnic Studies," it is clear that the original Third World Studies mandate still predominates and that visible racial minority studies form the core of Ethnic Studies at Berkeley.

Many Native American peoples question the alliance with other racial minorities and the agreement to house our studies under the rubric of Ethnic Studies. From the outset it must be stressed that the apparent collaboration was an Indigenous concession on many levels. First and foremost, it was the means by which Aboriginal peoples could get their feet into ivory tower doors.

Vine Deloria Jr. has written often on the relationships between Native Americans and other visible minorities, especially on the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples and issues within the civil rights movement. He acknowledges that African Americans were at the forefront of the movement because they were, and still are, numerically stronger and more visible. That relatively high profile gave them the power to voice their causes more forcefully than other, less numerous and visible racial minorities. Deloria also asserts that the civil rights and Third World movements of the 1960s were preoccupied with race and race relations between U.S. Whites and Blacks:

This preoccupation with race obscured the real issues that were developing and meant that programs devised to explore the area of race always had a black orientation. . . . By defining the problem as one of race and making race refer solely to black, Indians were systematically excluded from consideration.⁶

Deloria states further that

Since the most numerous group has been the blacks, programs designed for blacks were thought adequate for all needs of all groups. When one asks a liberal about minority groups, he unconsciously seems to categorize them all together for purposes of problem solving. Hence, dark-skinned and minority group as categorical concepts have brought about the same results—the Indian is defined as a subcategory of black.⁷

This overinclusiveness allows policymakers to rationalize and mask their ignorance about American Indians. Taking validation from that strategy, institutional and program policymakers place "all people with darker skin in the same category of basic goals, then develop their programs to fit these preconceived ideas."⁸ The results "were

generally black-orientated programs which had been adapted to include Indians."⁹

Because of their relatively weaker position, Indigenous peoples were forced to align themselves with the more numerous, vocal, and aggressively visible minorities in order to access the platform. At the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, Indigenous peoples had no hope of getting a department of their own, so they accepted the invitation to join Ethnic Studies as a program—an opportunity to at least get a foot in the door.

DECONSTRUCTION OF "ETHNIC"

As a child in the late 1960s, I heard much talk about Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders. I remember how excited my mom got when she explained who these people were, what they stood for, and how they were going to change the world as we knew it. She told me that Martin Luther King was a fearless leader because he promoted understanding, peace, and equality and that he was killed because ignorant people feared change. Her excited voice was tempered, however, when she pointedly stressed that even though we had lots in common with colored peoples, and that the work of their leaders would help us out too, we were different. I remember her words clearly because over the past thirty years her position has not altered. She said, "You are not an ethnic, my girl. Ethnic people come from somewhere else. You are of this land, you are Indigenous, and that's what makes you different from everybody else." Our people's experiences, problems, and goals are different from those of other Canadians and U.S. Americans because we are of this land.

Social scientists have generally exhibited little sensitivity to this reality. Since most racially oppressed peoples in North America share essential qualities—namely, a history of oppression, socioeconomic underdevelopment, and political powerlessness—it is generally assumed that their similar situations infer a potential political unity.¹⁰ Robert Blauner explains that the "third world ideology attempts to promote the consciousness of such common circumstances by emphasizing that the similarities in situation among America's people of color are the essential matter, the differences less relevant."¹¹

Blauner challenges this pervasive assumption by pointing out a number of historical and contemporary differences among racial minorities. All third-world peoples have experienced different forms of colonization: "Each people is strikingly heterogeneous, and the variables of time, place, and manner have affected the forms of colonialism, the character of racial domination, and the responses of the group."¹² He points out further that in very real terms cooperation and

collaboration among racial minorities today are obstructed by "ethnic antagonisms": competition for jobs and economic differentiation; variations in population sizes resulting in disparate degrees of visibility, social resources, and political power; inter-ethnic racism; and differences in cultures and political styles.¹³ The result "is a complex structure of racial and ethnic division" such that "black, red, yellow, and brown Americans" cannot be lumped "in the same bag."¹⁴

While Blauner reaches an acceptable conclusion, the "evidence" that he uses in support of it demonstrates his own superficial understanding of our past and current realities, which, in turn, supports my previous point that social scientists generally lack a thorough understanding of the depth of Indigenous differences. Blauner claims, for example, that Native Americans were conquered and virtually eliminated, and that they "alone lack an independent nation, a center of power in the world community to which they might look for political aid and psychic identification."¹⁵ Since each of these erroneous assumptions will be considered later in this essay, suffice it to state at this juncture that they are based on incomplete and shallow knowledge.

Why do Indigenous peoples reject being represented as "ethnic minorities"? Because it is a categorical term imposed on us by others who have little appreciation or understanding of the degree and depth of our difference. According to all available definitions, Indigenous peoples do not even fit into the category of "ethnic" or of "ethnic minority."

Ashley Montagu, writing in 1962, claimed that the term *ethnic group* is intentionally vague and noncommittal.¹⁶ He wrote,

For all general purposes, an "ethnic group" may be defined as one of a number of breeding populations, which populations together comprise the species *Homo sapiens*, and which individually maintain their differences, physical or genetic and cultural, by means of isolating mechanisms such as geography and social barriers.¹⁷

There are far more barriers than geographical and social ones at work in Indigenous communities that maintain our differences. Federal laws, the reserve system, and our treaties define us as peoples distinct from other Canadians and U.S. Americans, and our current struggles to regain self-governing jurisdictions and authorities to control our own institutions and futures emphasize our determination to remain "citizens plus."¹⁸

Marvin Harris, a preeminent textbook anthropologist, offers a useful discussion on minorities that further supports this point. He claims that while there are overlaps between and among racial, ethnic, and cultural minorities, each are distinct categories. According to Har-

ris, group membership in each is determined by the following criteria: *Racial minority* membership is primarily determined by physical appearance. *Cultural minority* membership derives from possession of a distinctive lifestyle. *Ethnic minority* membership derives from a common origin in another country or region.¹⁹ Harris stresses that in reality “all three criteria occur in a bewildering number of different combinations,” but while Indigenous peoples can clearly be classified as racial and cultural minorities, they cannot be classified as ethnic minorities—they do not come from another “country.”

To take this concept deeper—into Indigenous realms—it is necessary to recognize that Indigenous North Americans, while fully cognizant of contemporary nation-state boundaries, perceive country or territory differently. For example, when a Cayuga person moves into Cree territory—moves outside his country or territory—he is considered an outsider by his hosts and is generally acknowledged as such according to traditional local protocol. But unless the two nations are at war, he is not a foreigner like an immigrant Canadian or U.S. American would be because his cultural understandings, relations, and experiences are potentially similar.

In the old days there were very formal local protocols in place for welcoming or repelling outsiders that were based on international diplomatic relations. The general rule was that outsiders were enemies unless they were allies, and allies were created through ceremonial diplomacy and marriage. Even today vestiges of that diplomacy are still in place. For example, when a Cree moves into Salish or Kootenay territory, she undergoes an informal yet rigorous testing, according to local protocol, during which she establishes her formal or informal ties to the host community. It happens almost unconsciously and usually begins with a question like, “Where you from?” Once place of origin is established, the hosts attempt to ascertain some kind of human connection with prompting like, “I knew a guy from Mistawasis once, we met in Vancouver.” If the Cree does not know this Mistawasis person, more direct prompts follow, like, “Well, do you know so and so from Fort Qu’Appelle?” The prompting goes on until the Cree finally knows someone in common with her host, and then they share this common experience in story telling. If the experiences both people had with the person in common were positive or funny, the visitor can expect a hospitable welcome. If the experiences were not so good, the prompting goes on until a positive connection is found. In some cases the two people find a common relative through marriage—the best of all passports.

Everywhere Indigenous people travel in North America, they undergo this kind of relationship-finding protocol. Our communities, our friends, and our immediate family ties are the networks that either guarantee or preclude our acceptance into host communities and homes. So even when Indigenous peoples are outside their own countries or terri-

tories, there are always traditional mechanisms in place that establish international connections in ways that most non-Indigenous peoples can never achieve—everyone else is always Other.

**THE DANGERS OF OVERINCLUSIVENESS
AND THE COLONIALIST NATURE
OF "ETHNIC"**

Don Monet and Ardyth Wilson in *Colonialism on Trial* write with noted exasperation that "to compartmentalize the original inhabitants of this country as just one of many 'ethnic groups' or 'visible minorities'" is a lot easier than recognizing the depths of our differences.²⁰ This avoidance and negation strategy, conscious or subconscious, does great harm. Indigenous North American peoples have been telling the rest of Canada and the United States that we are not ethnic minorities for a very long time. We have been stressing that when others classify us as just another ethnic minority, it is colonialist because it totally disregards and undermines our legal and political uniqueness, our histories, our relationship to the land, and our goals.

In 1977 an editorial in *Akwesasne Notes* warned against the mainstream tendency of overinclusiveness when it criticized the popular trend of hyphenating various kinds of Americans:

The term Native American, in and of itself, is a seemingly harmless term, but it is used in a way that infers, however innocent its author, that native people are somehow exactly the same as other hyphenated Americans (Chinese-Americans, Polish-Americans, etc.). That would not be objectionable, except that native peoples are in fact members of their own respective nations, and the denial of their rights as distinct and separate nations with their own territories, sovereignty, cultures and power over their own lives has been the basis of much racist policy in the Western hemisphere.²¹

The editorial points to a major fundamental difference between Indigenous and other minorities. First and foremost we are members of our own First Nations. A nation is widely understood as a historically developed community of people possessing their own self-governing system, a territorial land base, a distinct language, and common cultural characteristics.

When Europeans arrived on our shores, Indigenous peoples were organized into autonomous self-governing political entities—nations—and the kinds of relationships we entered into with the foreigners

were based on that fact. Indigenous peoples are the only sector of North American society that entered into nation-to-nation treaties and maintained the right to self-government even in the face of colonialist policies bent on our political conquest. Despite centuries of detribalization strategies, Indigenous peoples throughout North America still retain vestiges of their self-governing systems and are striving to reassert their jurisdictional authorities. Unlike immigrant minorities we have discrete political units—tribal governments and First Nations—that are recognizably autonomous. Because of our treaties and special legislation, we have a unique set of political and legal relationships within our own communities and with the nation-states encircling us. For example, we can enter into unique legal relationships with federal, state, and provincial governments for the comanagement of natural resources, and we have the right to determine our own citizenship, which comes with more rights and obligations than basic Canadian or U.S. citizenship.

Historically, at different times and for various reasons, immigrant minorities and Indigenous North Americans were subject to strategic assimilationist policies. However, Indigenous peoples are the only sector of society whose “Americanization” and “Canadianization” experiences were, and still are, coercive. The assimilationist processes we experienced had the weight of federal legislation and church authority. No other segment of North American society has felt the full brunt of church-state collaborative power. No other segment of North American society has an *Indian Act* or had regulations imposed outlawing their religion.²² In fact, many immigrant minorities, like the Hutterites and Doukabours, for example, were and still are permitted to remain separate from the rest of Canada. Also, unlike immigrant minorities in the United States and Canada, Indigenous peoples did not seek citizenship in the nation-states surrounding us; rather, it was imposed in 1924 and 1960, respectively. Despite forced citizenship, secessionists, like the Haudonashonnee or Six Nations Confederacy, remain among us. Indigenous peoples recognize that the continued use of the term *ethnic minority* “undermines the legitimate claims of indigenous peoples to local autonomy.”²³

Our historical ties and relationships to the land are another distinguishing characteristic. We are the only minority peoples in North America who still claim, reside on, and access our traditional territorial land bases. In the face of aggressive dispossession, most of the Indian Reserves in Canada, for example, are located on or near our traditional lands. While initially intended as social laboratories to effect our cultural transformation and eventual assimilation, our reserves are our homelands—safe keeping places where our traditional laws, ceremonies, and stories are protectively held and where our identities are

confirmed. Furthermore, by virtue of our treaties and Aboriginal Rights, we also retain the right to harvest and hunt on those portions of our traditional territories we no longer directly possess.

Our unique relationship to the land goes beyond geopolitics. We are spiritually attached to this place. Many First Nations can walk to the location where the first human being set foot and can trace the footsteps of their entire nations across the landscape. Unlike immigrant North Americans, we never left the bones of our ancestors behind. Every hill, mountain, river, coulee, and forest has ancient stories that tell us how we are related to it and each other. We never abandoned our obligations to the land in search of greener pastures.

The very fact of our relationship to the land has engendered an animosity against us that no other minority group has experienced. The racism and oppression we have experienced are unique because they come from a much deeper level of the dominant subconscious. Members of the dominant society can dodge or reject any personal responsibility for the wrongs committed against any minority group by avoiding personal contact. They can truthfully claim that they did not participate or promote black slavery and did not import indentured Asian labor. They can state with remorse that the actions of their ancestors against immigrant minorities were horrendous and unconscionable. They can even go so far as to join anti-racism groups, to support affirmative action, and to lobby for compensation for the Japanese internment camp victims.

But not a single non-Indigenous North American can deny or escape from the benefits every one of them still draws from the racist actions of their ancestors against us. Not only were our resources appropriated and exploited for their long-term benefit, but every North American occupies our land—they walk on it, sleep on it, sit on it, admire it, and buy it from one another. Thus, contemporary Canadians and U.S. Americans, the heirs of colonialism, are confronted daily with the fact of our existence. They cannot escape our imprints on the land, nor can they deny the benefits they derive from our dispossession and their own unwillingness to settle our outstanding land claims. The kind of discrimination Aboriginal peoples experience in their own lands is unique because it comes from a very deep place—in the subterranean recesses of non-Indigenous North American minds there is a very real fear that facing the facts, taking responsibility for past and present actions, and taking concrete measures to rectify injustices against Aboriginal people might result in some degree of self-disempowerment. Any changes to the status quo may shake prevailing power relations.

Given the above, it is clear that Robert Blauner's position that Indigenous peoples have no independent nation, are conquered, and were virtually eliminated is erroneous. Indigenous North American nations were never truly or completely conquered; we still maintain our

sovereignty, possess vestiges of our nationhood status, and continue to wrestle with the nation-states encircling us for those authorities and jurisdictions they plundered. Furthermore, a peek at the most recent national surveys demonstrates that not only have our populations survived aggressive onslaughts, but our numbers are presently increasing at a pace well beyond the national norms.²⁴ Social scientists who maintain that we can be fit into the "ethnic melting pot" base their misconceptions on a very superficial understanding of our historical and contemporary realities.

One of the least understood differences between Indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities is evident when their long-term goals are compared. According to J. Milton Yinger, in order to "understand a society, it is very important to know the goals of its minorities, the causes of these goals, and the changes that are taking place in them."²⁵

Citing Louis Wirth, Yinger categorically describes the four long-term goals of minority populations as assimilation, pluralism, secession, and domination. Those who intend to assimilate ask the dominant society to let them disappear as a group and to judge them only as individuals. Those who profess pluralism ask to maintain their group identity, based perhaps on language, religion, or culture, and they promise, in return, to give full allegiance to society. Those who strive for secession demand their freedom, that they be allowed to establish, or reestablish, their own society where they can practice their way of life without hindrance. Those who fight for domination profess that they are weary of being dominated and intend to do everything in their power "to reverse the present status arrangement, by militant means if necessary."²⁶ Yinger concludes that "American minorities have almost always been assimilationist or pluralistic. There has been some secession among the Indians."²⁷

The model Wirth and Yinger offer is useful. History does demonstrate that the short- and long-term goals of immigrant ethnic minorities have been integration, be it through assimilation or pluralism, and that this has also been the goal and method for some individual Indigenous people. However, the great majority of First Nations and tribal governments in North America have pursued a different kind of coexistence strategy that protects and enhances their autonomy, which is more in line with secession.

Patricia Monture-Angus explains why an understanding of long-term goals is fundamental to understanding the differences between Indigenous peoples and immigrant minorities:

Many of the so-called racial and cultural minorities who have come to Canada, fled here or have been brought here . . . are satisfied with the existing structures of Canadian society. . . . Their dissatisfaction stems from the fact

that they are not represented in the positions of power, status and influence. Their goals focus around equitable access to the existing structures and positions. For Aboriginal Peoples, this is not seen as a full or final solution. At most it is seen as a step along the way. We do not want into the existing system in greater numbers, we want out! . . . *Aboriginal* aspirations isolate us from the "mainstream" of anti-racism collectives.²⁸

Clearly social scientists who believe that all internal third-world peoples have a "common political fate" and that the "shared experiences of all racial minorities infer a potential unity" are misinformed. These assertions only highlight Deloria's criticism that many non-Aboriginal peoples strive to "mask their ignorance about Indians" by lumping all dark-skinned peoples "in the same category, then develop their programs to fit these preconceived ideas."²⁹ Clearly, those who classify us in terms of just another ethnic minority assume "that all individuals who experience 'otherness' share the same understandings."³⁰ Lumping Aboriginal peoples together in the "ethnic melting pot" has had the very real effect of denying or minimizing our unique realities and contemporary goals. Given the current political climate surrounding Aboriginal self-government and land rights, the continued act of "naming" us "ethnic" can only be understood as colonialist.

When this concern is brought up, some people respond quite naively that "ethnic" is only a name. Some argue, for example, that if we are secure about who we are, then what others call us should not matter. The reality is that there is a lot in a name. What many people do not realize is that the "ability to bestow meanings—to 'name' things, acts, and ideas—is a source of power."³¹ Seamus Deane in *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature* concurs when he writes that the "naming, or renaming, of a place, the naming or renaming of a race, a region, a person, is, like all acts of primordial domination, an act of possession."³² Whoever possesses the power to name controls communication, and, according to Eric Wolf, control over "communication allows the managers of ideology to lay down the categories through which reality is to be perceived."³³

It is not difficult to reach the conclusion that the name, the category, remains because it serves one or more functions. Who benefits from our classification as just another ethnic minority? Concurrently, we can ask who benefits from our continued marginalization? The first to come to mind are social scientists—the ones who imposed that categorical term on us in the first place. Academics invest heavily in their classification schemes, theoretical frameworks, and words. They are also notoriously stubborn and resist challenges for reevaluations of their work. Ashley Montagu claims that social scientists "are inclined

to treat [their languages and words] as property, and even become enslaved by them, prisoners of their own vocabularies."³⁴

One mechanism used by social scientists to protect their investments is to revise the definitions and meanings of their words to accommodate changing conditions and criticisms. In 1962 Montagu wrote that this "is a hopeless task" because social scientists have a tendency to follow "a sort of Gresham's Law for words; redefine them as we will, their worst or most extreme meaning is almost certain to remain current and to tend to drive out the meaning we prefer."³⁵ Montagu argued that academics should stop this self-defeating and wasteful trend. Experience has demonstrated that no matter how many attempts are made to reconstruct the category *ethnicity* to accommodate Indigenous peoples, the word *ethnic* will continue to refer primarily to racial immigrant minorities.

Our classification as "ethnics" also serves the state. Here we need to remind ourselves about the historical and contemporary relationship between academics and the state. We need to remember that the work of anthropologists provided the federal governments of Canada and the United States with the data and rationale they required to develop and impose their notorious turn-of-the-century Indian policies. In many ways academics armed the state with the ammunition it needed to clear the land, exact cultural genocide, and enforce assimilationist programs.

With this in mind, we realize that the state has considerable investment in representing Indigenous peoples as simply another ethnic group. Liberal democratic nation-states refuse to accommodate distinct societies or special-case populations. In fact, the state takes "great pains to minimize the perceived social and political differences between indigenous and non-indigenous sectors of the population."³⁶ They make little or no provision for the exercise of rights beyond those provided by legislatures in the form of citizenship. According to Noel Dyck, "Aboriginal peoples claims for special rights fly in the face of this charter premise of the Nation State."³⁷ To protect and promote our special rights and interests and resist assimilation, Indigenous peoples should oppose categorization as "just another ethnic group" by government officials. This opposition forces us to constantly stress and demonstrate our differences.

The continued use of the term *ethnic minority* undermines the legitimate claims of Indigenous peoples to local autonomy and land rights. Other "ethnic groups" have no such claims and have demonstrated a willingness to integrate on terms set by the nation-states, so the rationale goes. Indians, on the other hand, are always complaining. When we are classified as just another ethnic group, our voices fall on deaf ears. Canada can accommodate assimilation and pluralism but refuses to consider any alternative that even alludes to secession.

As long as the state is permitted to view us as just another ethnic group, our marginalization will remain intact. Clearly assimilationist programming has not worked; in fact, externally imposed programs are primarily responsible for our current conditions. Over and over again we have stressed that outside remedies have not worked and will not work, that we are the only ones who can heal ourselves and build our communities. The movement to gain the inherent and Aboriginal right to self-government is much about recovering the autonomy we need to do the work our communities need to regain balance.

In this context, who most likely benefits from our continued socioeconomic marginalization? Social welfare programs concurrently appease collective guilt and provide employment for thousands of people in the social-service industry. Through the process of our colonization, Indigenous people have been transformed into a renewable resource. First it was our furs, timber, lands, and minerals, now it is our very lives—the undereducated, the chronically unemployed, the incarcerated, the suicidal, the abuse victims, the substance-abusers, the welfare recipients, the landless, the dysfunctional families, the disempowered in need of healing. Thousands of Canadians and U.S. Americans make a living off the generational sicknesses culminating from our colonization.

To a large degree our propulsion into the ethnic melting pot also leaves our intellectual and cultural property up for grabs. Our heritage, our oral traditions, and our artistic expressions are considered by many as our contribution to "New World identities." Almost all aspects of Indigenous heritages have been appropriated and exploited by non-Indigenous peoples for profit and fame, often with far more contempt and disrespect than immigrant minorities experience. We need only consider that the American sports industry continues to deride us with team names like the "Indians," the "Redskins," and the "Eskimos" and that derogatory place-names like "Squaw Valley" are allowed to persist. Consider also how the history of our dispossession and suffering has built the careers of large numbers of non-Indigenous academics—that many non-Indigenous scholars have become Indian *experts* and experts on aspects of the history of Indian-White relations.

Ethnic Studies departments in North American universities also benefit from overinclusiveness. No one denies that there is power in numbers and unity—the more racial minorities the better, and the stronger the cause. But whose cause is articulated? By absorbing or incorporating us into the ethnic framework, Ethnic Studies unilaterally appropriates the right to represent our experiences and speak on our behalf. As Deloria says, the effect of overinclusiveness in programs is that "the Indian is defined as a subcategory of black."³⁸ The result is that Ethnic Studies departments do not adequately represent the realities of Native American peoples.

An alliance with Aboriginal peoples is much sought after by various minorities and oppressed bodies. We are, after all, the doubly oppressed, the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. We are also perceived as having the strongest moral claim—we are the original peoples of this land and have experienced the full brunt of old and new forms of colonialism. We can be used, and we have been used, as a moral club to beat the heads of other North Americans. Our historical and current condition elicits a collective North American guilt more potent than any other, and our perceived collaboration is often taken as somehow validating for other causes and movements. In many instances, however, we merely occupy a token position in these other movements. We get used. The result? An even more insidious and dangerous form of marginalization, exploitation, and silencing. It is assumed that cross-movement alliances benefit Indigenous peoples, but the sad reality is that many of our causes become secondary, especially if at odds in any way with the predominant cause. We are the most invisible of racial minorities and as such have the least amount of power and voice in cross-movements. They are not collaborative, they are colonialist. Deloria wrote in 1969 that any “cooperative movement must come to terms with tribalism in the Indian context before it will gain Indian support.”³⁹ Cooperation can only occur when others understand Indian nationalism.⁴⁰

THE STATE OF ETHNIC STUDIES

A brief look at the condition of the Native American Studies (NAS) program in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of California at Berkeley demonstrates many of the points I have made. I entered the Ph.D. program in Ethnic Studies in 1991 because at that time there was no university in North America that offered a Ph.D. in Native American Studies. In other interdisciplinary fields in North American universities—International Studies, Canadian or American Studies, Women’s Studies, Ethnic Studies—Ph.D. programs were available.

The first thing I noticed was that the NAS program had the least number of faculty members of all four programs. The largest faculty was in African American Studies, which was so powerful that it had its own autonomous department; it only collaborated with Ethnic Studies for the graduate program. NAS also had the tiniest library facility—no more than five students could use it at one time, and over half its printed resources were in storage. The other three programs, in contrast, had large library reading rooms that could accommodate upwards of thirty students, and one even had electronic bookshelves. Another indication of the marginalization of NAS was the fact that fewer Indigenous students were admitted into the graduate program. In 1991

there were two of us, out of a total of twelve, admitted. In 1994 there was only one.

During the introductions on my first day of classes, I pointed out that I was not an "ethnic minority," rather, that I was Indigenous and that many of our experiences and goals were different. The in-class furor of my cohorts that followed bordered on violent. To my face I was told I was elitist; then our professor stepped in and stated that we would address the issue later on in the course. It did not get addressed until I elected to do it in our last seminar. While most of the required courses and electives allowed me the freedom to explore my own studies in a comparative context, no opportunities were available in class to explore in depth the unique differences between Indigenous peoples and immigrant ethnic minorities.

In my last year at Berkeley, NAS students and faculty rebelled against our marginalized position by trying to pull out of Ethnic Studies. The department fought to keep us in—they won, we lost, and in the fall of 1995, there was only one faculty member left in the NAS program. Ethnic Studies authorized the hiring of two additional faculty, but successful candidates were required to be fully competent in two "ethnic" fields: NAS and another "ethnic" area.

Gerald Vizenor wrote about this trying experience in an unpublished essay titled "Transethnic Anthropologism: Comparative Ethnic Studies at Berkeley." He states that "the treacheries and dominance of *anthropologism*, the obsessive studies of natives by social scientists, have not been overturned in comparative ethnic studies."⁴¹ He continues,

Comparative practices are never certain, as ethnic narratives, subjects, objects, theories and methodologies are seldom comparable; the discrepancies coalesce as ethnic similarities, or *transethnic* redactions, rather than closer studies of dissimilarities. Comparative and transethnic theories, in this sense, transcend the significance and diversities of native cultures. . . . Whatever were the academic burdens of departments founded on the politics of racial resistance are now banal virtues of multiculturalism.⁴²

Evelyn Hu-DeKart in *The State of Native America* provides further evidence of the marginal condition of Native Studies in Ethnic Studies departments:

Afroamerican and Chicano Studies have twenty or more years of history behind them. During the past decade, Asian American Studies has received critical support from the demographically booming and economically signifi-

cant Asian American Communities on both coasts. American Indian Studies lingers far behind, with a few established programs, hampered by an extreme shortage of Native American scholars able to find a place in academe. In short, the state of American Indian Studies reflects the state of Native North America, its poverty, marginalization, and continuously colonized condition.⁴³

CONCLUSION

Indigenous peoples do share minority status with immigrant racial or ethnic groups, and in many instances we share similar socioeconomic conditions. But we are not an ethnic minority for all the reasons I have outlined, and more. We are Indigenous—of this land—with centuries-old relations, obligations, and responsibilities that dictate that we follow our own political paths toward the future. Others may choose to walk the trail beside us—to learn, as we are relearning, our ways and to support our goals—but in no way can we continue to allow others to lead us, to define our problems, and to impose their strategies and programs on us.

Self-determination requires us to take back control over our lives and reclaim our identities. We are not an ethnic minority, we are not even "Indians." We are Métis, Déné and Nehiyow, Lakota, Nakota, Pexoche, Nuu chah nulth. . . .

Thirty-three years ago, Montagu stressed that

taxonomies and terms should be designed to fit the fact, and not the facts forced into the procrustean rack of predetermined categories. If we are to have references, whether terminological or taxonomical, to existing or extinct populations of man, let the conditions as we find them determine the character of our terms or taxonomies, and not the other way around.⁴⁴

If Indigenous peoples are to fit into any comparative study framework, on an equal plane with our integrity intact, it will be with other Indigenous peoples around the world. Every time I visit with Aboriginal peoples in Australia, for example, I am overwhelmed by the cultural, historical, and contemporary similarities that we share. What is plainly clear is that I, a Cree woman, have more in common with a Koori man from Australia than I do with non-Indigenous women in Canada or the United States, regardless of their ethnic background. If comparative studies is the direction we continue to follow, then our critical masses need to share more similarities than differences. Fourth World Studies is the next logical step.

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- 1 The discipline is designated Native Studies, First Nations Studies, Aboriginal Studies, or Indigenous Studies in Canadian universities, and Native American Studies, American Indian Studies, or Indigenous Studies in U.S. universities.
- 2 Robert Blauner, "Colonized and Immigrant Rights," in *From the Farthest Shore: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Ronald Takaki (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 159.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 151.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 149.
- 5 University of California at Berkeley, *1991-1992 General Catalogue* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 205.
- 6 Vine Deloria Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 169.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 171.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 196-70.
- 10 Blauner, "Colonized and Immigrant Rights," 149, 150.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *Ibid.*, 158.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 150, 159.
- 16 Ashley Montagu, "The Concept of Race," reprinted in David E. K. Hunter and Phillip Whitten, eds., *Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1982), 59, 61.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 62.
- 18 The term *citizens plus* has been adopted by many First Nations leaders in Canada to emphasize that we are more than citizens of Canada, that we are also citizens of our respective First Nations with all the rights and relationships that that citizenship implies. The term was made popular by the Indian Association of Alberta in its reaction paper to the federal government's 1969 White Paper Policy proposal. Indian Association of Alberta, *Citizens Plus (The Red Paper)* (Edmonton: Indian Association of Alberta, 1970).
- 19 Marvin Harris, *Culture, People, Nature: An Introduction to General Anthropology*, 3d ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), 334.
- 20 Don Monet and Ardyth Wilson, *Colonialism on Trial: Indigenous Land Rights and the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en Sovereignty Case* (Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1992), 3.
- 21 Editorial, *Akwesasne Notes*, spring 1977.
- 22 *An Act to Amend and Consolidate the Laws Respecting Indians, Revised Statutes of Canada* (39 Victoria, chapter 18, 1876); and *The Indian Act* (Ottawa: Office Consolidation, 1989).
- 23 John H. Bodley, *Victims of Progress*, 2d ed. (Palo Alto, Calif.: Mayfield, 1990), 58.
- 24 For example, see Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *People to People, Nation to Nation: Highlights from the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

- 25 J. Milton Yinger, *A Minority Group in American Society* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 31.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Patricia Monture-Angus, "The Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women: Reclaiming Justice," in *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1995), 226.
- 29 Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 168.
- 30 Monture-Angus, "The Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women," 225.
- 31 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 388.
- 32 Seamus Deane, introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, ed. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, and Edward Said (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 18.
- 33 Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*, 388.
- 34 Montagu, "The Concept of Race," 77.
- 35 G. G. Simpson, *The Major Features of Evolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953), 31; as cited in Montagu, "The Concept of Race," 75.
- 36 Noel Dyck, "Representation and the 'Fourth World': A Concluding Statement," in *Indigenous Peoples and the Nation State: Fourth World Politics in Canada, Australia, and Norway* (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1985), 237.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins*, 171.
- 39 Ibid., 195.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Gerald Vizenor, "Transethnic Anthropologism: Comparative Ethnic Studies at Berkeley," unpublished paper in possession of the author, 1996.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Evelyn Hu-DeKart, preface to *The State of Native America: Genocide, Colonization, and Resistance*, ed. M. Annette Jaimes (Boston: South End Press, 1992), ix.
- 44 Montagu, "The Concept of Race," 61.