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American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

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Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6vr0q60z

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 26(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

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Publication Date

2002-09-01

DOI

10.17953

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AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURE AND RESEARCH JOURNAL 26:4 (2002) 97–112

Language, Violence, and Indian Mis-education

CASKEY RUSSELL

The act of creation in the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, as in the Judeo-Christian Bible, begins with language. Words are spoken and the world is created. So intricately is language tied in with spirituality in the *Popol Vuh* that the gods created humankind so that humans could, through language, pray to the gods and "keep their days."[1] A culture's religious practices evolve along with its language, and the language absorbs the nuances of that particular religion. A culture's language is filled with the inextricable subtleties of its particular worldview. In a sense, it is hard to discern where religion begins and language ends. In regard to Tlingit culture of southeast Alaska, Nora and Richard Dauenhauer have noted in their introduction to *Haa Kusteeyi (Our Culture): Tlingit Life Stories* a type of "spiritual malaise" within Tlingit communities.[2] Perhaps this spiritual malaise is directly related to the impending death of the Tlingit language and the worldview sustained by the language.

One of the most destructive and long-lasting effects of colonization is the purposeful devaluation and destruction of Indian languages and, by extension, of traditional Indian beliefs. By focusing specifically on the situation of the Tlingit language and examining past attitudes toward the language, it can be demonstrated how the now nearly moribund Tlingit language fell to such a state. Since language is the carrier of culture, the implications of impending language death on Tlingit culture and the prospect of English filling the resulting void, are matters of grave concern.

Language sustains a culture's religion, its ethics, and its particular worldview. Even a worldwide religion such as Christianity evolves as it embraces a new language; for example, the Christianity of first-century Aramaic Palestine or of fourth-century Roman Italy, differs greatly from the Christianity of English-speaking America in the twentieth century. Though modern-day American Christians may not want to admit that their beliefs differ greatly, or

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at all, from the initial beliefs of Christianity's founders, the truth is that a contemporary American Christian ceremony would be as foreign to a first-century Christian as modern English would be to his or her ancient Aramaic, Greek, or Latin counterparts. Because of the unique relationship that religion and language have within a culture, religion adapts to time and place in a similar fashion to language.

The Tlingit language was one in a long line of languages persecuted by the proponents of Christianity, who, at the time of contact, happened to speak Russian and English. Had the situation been different, it could have been English and Russian that were persecuted. It is important to understand that languages, in and of themselves, have very little to do with this type of "linguistic" persecution. Almost any European language can be substituted for any other and placed in the role of oppressor, as can most any indigenous language be placed in the role of the *oppressed*; what is important here is not the language itself, but the racist ideology behind the notion that one language is superior to another. Indians, like their languages, meant little to the colonizing Europeans. They were to be converted, used as slaves, expulsed from their land, or exterminated. The fact that over five hundred widely distinct cultures could fall under one simple catch-all term, *Indian,* denotes a supremacist ideology in and of itself. In other words, the term says more about the ideology of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europeans than any particular commonality of tribal cultures in the Americas.

The motives of colonization are clearly economic, and the lengths to which the colonizing powers will go to justify their usurpation of another people's property, culture, and ability to live, are extensive. Vast justification systems have been set up to keep colonizers from feeling guilty and to keep the colonized quietly obedient, willing to give up rights and resources and even willing to die in defense of a system of exploitation and oppression. Without these justification systems, exploitation would be unattainable. Rationalizations exist across the entire American culture to create the belief that what happened to Indians was inevitable and necessary to open the avenues of American progress.

These systems of justification are necessary for any colonizing power in order to avoid the cognitive dissonance that comes with the brutality of enslaving, expulsing, or exterminating a people for economic gain. Cognitive dissonance is created when actions are not ethically on a par with ideals.

> It is always useful to think badly about people one has exploited or plans to exploit. Modifying one's opinions to bring them into line with one's actions or planned actions is the most common outcome of the process known as "cognitive dissonance" … To treat badly another person whom we consider a reasonable human being creates a tension between act and attitude that demands resolution. We cannot erase what we have done, and to alter our future behavior may not be in our interest. To change our attitude is easier.[3]

Purposefully whitewashing past actions is how cognitive dissonance is dealt with. For example, American institutions continue to reduce Indians to

stereotypes, and any mention of the genocide perpetrated against them is met with public denial. Apologist arguments that what happened to Indians was inevitable given the course of European history, or that the systematic oppression of certain cultural groups is an inevitable by-product of progress, are attempts to overcome cognitive dissonance.

Religion and education were utilized against American Indians in the larger processes of justifying colonial oppression and exploitation, and underlying both of these systems was and still is a tacit threat of violence for those who do not obey. Indeed, any system that seeks to justify colonization has to foster an overarching fear of violent reprisal against those who disobey the laws of the colonizer. Oppression in whatever form is ineffective without an implied threat that physical violence is imminent. What oppressed groups in America have understood for centuries may be unimaginable to Americans who come from groups traditionally in power: violence will be the result should the oppressed group demand its rights and freedom from oppression. Moreover, after the threat of violence becomes reality, American institutions (legal, political, educational) often justify and legitimate that violent oppression.

After the purchase of Alaska in 1867, the US "pacified" Alaska via the navy. Whenever Tlingits appeared to be threatening the colonial enterprises of the United States, the navy would be sent to the offending village, with its guns aimed at the Indians as a physical representation of the implied violence without which economic exploitation would be impossible. The bombing of the Tlingit village of Angoon in 1882 is a case in point. And if those warships were not oppressive enough, the US legal system declared that Tlingits, because they were not citizens, could not make property claims or mine claims, which was a point of contention at the time of the Alaskan Gold Rush.

As mentioned earlier, in justifying and legitimating oppression, American institutions contained within themselves an implied threat of violence. Even the seemingly benign systems of religion and education contained the threat of possible violence in their attempts to eradicate Tlingit language, culture, and traditional beliefs. This implied threat of violence cultivated an environment of fear within the educational system, which, along with internalized guilt, became a part of the symbolic violence that affected Indian students. In his book, *Bilingualism or Not: The Education of Minorities*, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas delineates the processes by which minority children are "educated" out of their native tongues and cultures. The book, however, delves into the deeper motives of exploitation and violence that have historically driven the education of minorities. Educational systems are "the most important instruments in the process of change from the use of physical force as a means of ordering society to the use of symbolic violence (and in encouraging the acceptance of structural violence)."[4] That is not to say that physical violence is not part of minority education. However, as minority students advance through the educational system physical violence is replaced by symbolic and structural violence.

Physical violence toward minority students included the deliberate separation of children from their parents and punishment for speaking Native languages. These two steps are central to any colonizing process wherein edu-

cation is used to keep the colonized in a system of oppression, and both practices were mainstays of Indian education in North America. The Indian boarding school system in the United States began with the founding of Carlisle Indian Industrial School in the 1870s by General Richard Pratt. When the government deemed that mission schools were not adequately *relieving* Indian children of their language and culture, it stressed the removal of Indian children from their homes and the strict prohibition of Indian language and culture. "The general intent of Carlisle and other eastern [and western] boarding schools was to turn young Natives against the traditions of their communities by any means necessary, including beatings and forced separation from family."[5]

For Tlingits in Alaska the situation was no different. A teacher in the Sitka boarding school proclaimed in 1908 that "by dropping their dialect and acquiring the English [*sic*], they would the more rapidly get away from the heathen customs and advance in civilization. Those who know no English are great sticklers for old customs."[6] The teacher was apparently confused as to what constituted a dialect and what constituted a language. A Quaker missionary in Douglas, Alaska, had a unique way of dealing with Tlingit students overheard speaking their language. When the missionary "heard an Indian student speaking Tlingit, he would soak a sponge with hot peppers and bitter-tasting resin and then rinse the verboten vocabulary from the offender's mouth."[7]

After overt physical violence, the next process in educating minorities involves symbolic force. "With the spread of literacy comes an increasing tendency to replace direct physical force by symbolic force: it is easier for those in power to let the people punish themselves than to visit upon every offence direct physical violence."[8] The way people punish themselves is through a deep sense of shame. In transgressing the laws of those in power, the offender has brought shame to him or herself, and by extension his or her family. Moreover, the shame is made public by an overt and ritualized display. Skutnabb-Kangas lists the pillory and the seat in the corner of the schoolroom as two public places for ritualized shame. The punishment of Indian children through physical beatings and verbal threats could also be viewed as a combination of both physical and symbolic violence. Even the use of solitary confinement and jail cells, common to most Indian boarding schools, can be construed as both physical and symbolic violence in that children were physically put into these cells, but fear of the cells promoted the internalizing of guilt and shame.

Besides public and ritualized shame, an internalized guilt is indicative of the symbolic violence promoted in education:

> During the process of internalizing the norms of the rulers, the transgressor begins to punish herself before anyone has discovered she has broken the rules, instead of waiting for physical punishment from the outside or the shame of public exposure: the transgressor develops a bad conscience. The culture of guilt is thus even more efficient than the culture of [public] shame, because there is the self-inflicted pun-

> ishment of guilt for having offended against the proper order of things, whether or not anyone else knows about it.[9]

Skutnabb-Kangas states that schools *confirm* and *inculcate* the norms and ideology of those in power. However, in the shift from physical to symbolic violence, rules are internalized to the point that the minority student is not aware exactly whose rules she has transgressed (her own or someone else's), or even how she came to accept such rules in the first place. Native Americans of the post-boarding school era, still laboring within a culture of guilt, in which failure is the general expectation, are numerous. Having seen and heard about their elders and other relatives failing in an educational system intended to make them fail, Indian children have internalized failure to the point that, in some instances, success is equated with being non-Indian.

The draconian punishments for speaking Native languages, and separation from parents and culture, are no longer necessary. English is the first language of nearly every Tlingit born after World War II, and modern technology has bombarded Indian communities with western ideologies while silencing all aspects of Indian life but racist stereotypes. Internalized guilt, however, is made manifest through statistics about Indian education, and poor retention of Indians in high schools and universities.

Skutnabb-Kangas explores the final phase of structural violence in regard to education, though his findings are applicable to many institutions:

> If everything that is judged to be of value at school, everything rewarded with praise and good marks, everything that leads to high status positions (at school and outside) is associated with the majority language [and culture], and if all this is accepted as self-evidently the right thing, and if at the same time the minority language [and culture] is not even accepted at school, then the same goal is achieved that was earlier achieved by the use of physical violence, by separation and punishment: the child is alienated from her own group and begins to feel ashamed of it.[10]

It is this type of structural violence that has plagued Native American educational experiences from the days of mission day-schools, throughout the boarding school era, and up to the present day. The truly insidious aspect of structural violence is that the promise of Indian education was itself a lie. Schools paraded white ideals in front of Indian children, the implication being that if Indians could emulate those ideals they too would inherit the earth, while ignoring the fact that the world for which they were training Indians was blatantly racist.

This structural violence, through the constant denigration of indigenous languages and cultures within a boarding school system, set Indians up to fail, and created a deep-seated sense of guilt and shame that has been handed down from generation to generation. This experience in turn leaves today's Indian children with a strong distrust of the American education system:

> Because the parents of an Indian child play a crucial role in determining what that student does or becomes and exert a profound influence on the views of their child, their position on education must be understood and evaluated. Views that have existed and have been inherited through the years must be examined, for they have, in many ways, decided the status of Indian education today.[11]

It would appear that the alarming state of Indian education today, at both the high school and university level, is the direct result of previous methods of Indian education. For example, Indians are still haunted by the boarding school legacy; moreover, it is not apparent that methods of Indian education have changed much:

> There are educators in Iowa who are overtly racists. By their own admission they would rather not teach Indian students, who are "dumb" and "lazy" at the very least. The students are condemned as poor students before ever having an opportunity to prove that they are not. As a result, Indian students give up; they feel that they simply cannot win. The negative attitude of some teachers is more than obvious to the Indian students and equally obvious to the non-Indian students, who are quick to pick it up and incorporate it into their own way of thinking.[12]

Here, Owana McLester-Greenfield is speaking directly of the situation in the state of Iowa; however, from my experience I believe that the statement is true of other states, especially states that contain large Indian communities and populations. What McLester-Greenfield says about late twentieth-century Indian education could apply to nearly any era of Indian education. Examples of such statements by educators abound; however I have selected two from a man in charge of educating Tlingits in the early 1930s.

Oliver Salisbury, the school principal for the village of Klawock in the 1930s, recorded these statements at that time. They relate directly to his thoughts on the Tlingit language, but his underlying meaning is not hard to divine:

> It is already very clear to us that their language is wholly inadequate to express much in the way of abstract thought, or to communicate fine distinctions or shades of meaning; and probably it is both cause and effect that their very limited thought has made an elaborate language unnecessary.[13]

It should be noted that Salisbury had only stayed in the village for a period of several years, and that he had no interest in learning the Tlingit language, so his comments are directed toward a language about which he had no conception, nor did he know any of the vocabulary. Yet, as principal of the village school, his feelings toward the language affected every Tlingit-speaking student.

Salisbury further laments that the students are still speaking Tlingit at home:

> We are making no effort to learn the Indian language—we are here to teach them ours—but it makes it difficult to get proper results when the native tongue is always talked at home. I have urged with the people, whenever I had the chance to talk to them in public, that they should help their children to learn the American language by making them talk it at home, and I make this argument with them; that the Thlingets [Tlingits] are few and the whites many; that they cannot expect the whites to learn the Thlinget language, so the native should learn the language of the whites if they wish to sell their fish to them, buy their gasboats from them, and associate with them … their language is very simple and restricted.[14]

Non-English-speaking Tlingits had traded with whites for years, and language was no barrier for the free exchange of materials and ideas. Because they would not learn English better, however, it was harder for teachers and missionaries to convince Indians to accept the theft of their land and resources, to instill a sense of shame and internalized guilt, and ultimately to accept United States law as the supreme law.

It is also worth noting that Salisbury's book, *Quoth the Raven: A Little Journey into the Primitive,* has recently been banned from the school library at Klawock, because of his failure to understand Tlingit culture.[15] If Salisbury had not been in a position of power at Klawock, he could simply be dismissed as an ethnocentric American who had a passing interest in Indians. Unfortunately, as has been the case since the beginnings of Indian education, ignorance, incompetence, and notions of European supremacy have gone hand in hand with positions of power to affect actual lives.

The point of this discussion is that until very recently, little had changed in Indian education, and that Salisbury's counterparts were and are in charge of today's educational systems, from elementary schools to universities. One example can be found in a program that has only recently ended. In 1995, the US Office for Civil Rights put a halt to a certain speech-therapy program in Juneau, Alaska. Tlingit children were put in speech-therapy classes, not to correct an impediment, but to eliminate their regional "Indian" accent in English. Regarding this practice, the Dauenhauers have asked why "persons such as Bill Clinton, Ted Kennedy, and Henry Kissenger are not recommended for speech therapy classes on the basis of their regional accent."[16] What was it about the regional accent that was believed to be deficient? In plainest terms, the accent was perceived as low class and, socially and financially limiting, while the speakers were perceived as being unintelligent. Instead of reevaluating non-Indian beliefs of Euro-American cultural supremacy, and adopting programs to combat racist attitudes, administrators wanted to mold Indians into what they saw as ideal English speakers.

As with the question of bilingualism in other parts of the United States, the issue is not merely language-related; it is also an issue of power relations, of class, and of sociocultural beliefs and stereotypes. Instead of attacking minority groups who desire to see their native languages represented in American education, we should attack the social structures that promote

English-only programs and implicitly devalue Native languages. As for the Tlingit, it is up to tribal members themselves to learn the language, but their efforts should be supported.

To consider these language issues without considering institutionalized power structures is to miss an important point, because language survival is directly related to such structures. Though American universities are considered to be bastions of free thought, the fact that most universities do not teach Native languages is proof of a Eurocentric policy. These Eurocentric biases affect not only Indians, but those working in other disciplines, especially in minority, gay and lesbian, and gender studies. Furthermore, the relationship between American Indian studies and other ethnic and gender studies is highlighted in these struggles for accurate representation and fair treatment within the American educational system.

After decades of suppressing Native languages, often violently, the US government has done little to acknowledge or provide compensation for the practices of past Indian educators and missionaries, except for a piece of legislation entitled the Native American Languages Act. Passed in 1990, the Act is intended to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American Languages."[17] Of the eight main goals listed in the Native American Languages Act, all appear to have come one hundred years too late. Except for the handful of Indian languages not threatened with impending extinction within the next twenty years, the Act seems to do little except help alleviate the government's cognitive dissonance.[18]

Article 8 states that the Act is intended to "encourage all institutions of elementary, secondary, and higher education, where appropriate, to include Native American languages in the curriculum in the same manner as foreign languages."[19] The "where appropriate" is most interesting, because it begs the question of who decides where it is appropriate to have a Native language course offering? I have attended universities in and near Indian communities, including Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, where the Lummi Reservation is located, with the Nooksack and Swinomish reservations nearby, and I have yet to notice Native language courses "encouraged." For the most part, Native languages simply are not offered at public high schools and universities. At the University of Oregon, where I earned my Ph.D., there were no Native language course offerings. Far from encouraging Native languages, I would surmise that most universities, if they even pay attention to Indians, discourage incorporating Native languages into their curricula. Rather, they require graduate students to learn European languages in order to fulfill core requirements regardless of the students' area of study.

The apologists for such requirements claim that such learning will make a student a well-rounded scholar. I am extremely skeptical of such claims because too often they mask a deep-seated elitism; moreover, such claims have often been the basis for excluding people of a particular social class and ethnic backgrounds from participating in the highest levels of academia. Well-roundedness would include, not exclude, the incorporation of Native languages into college curricula. Well-roundedness would include teaching stu-

dents about the realities of Indian life as well as the lived experience of other groups, and would ideally explore how the influential positions of many whites in American society are related to the relatively poor position of others.

Just as education continues to denigrate Native languages, so has religion contributed to the vast spiritual malaise of Indian communities. The effects of religion on Indian language and culture cannot be understated, for it was in the religious organizations, the early missionizing groups, that the first systematic attacks against indigenous languages were initiated. Whereas the fortune seekers viewed Indians as either slaves, animals, or in the way, missionaries came to see Indians as souls in need of saving. I will examine just a few examples pertaining to the Tlingit, which are interesting in terms of what is said and what cultural assumptions are tacitly present.

Anatolii Kamenskii, a Russian Orthodox priest who worked in the village of Sitka for several years beginning in 1895, had little knowledge of Tlingits or other Indians when he reached Alaska. He credits Louis Henry Morgan's book *Ancient Society* with providing the foundation of his knowledge of Indians.[20] Published in 1887, *Ancient Society* was one of the seminal texts in defining cultural evolution. According to the theory of cultural evolution, all cultures evolved through similar processes, from savagery to barbarism to civilization, with Western Europe being the pinnacle of civilization. It is not surprising, then, that he viewed the Tlingit as he found them through this lens of cultural evolution. "The social life and the social system of the Tlingit Indians resemble, to a degree, one of the forms of the traditional, semisavage state which characterizes human life on the eve of the civilized era."[21] Thus, his role as missionary was to facilitate the Tlingits in their final transitional stage from savagery to civilization. Inculcating Christian monotheism was the first step, Kamenskii thought, in ridding them of their culture and, by extension, their state of savagery:

> When the Russian discovered Alaska and for the first time met with the Tlingit—the inhabitants of its southeastern part—they were in a stage of savagery; as far as their religion was concerned, they were in a stage usually called fetishism, in its shamanistic form. Having lost the clear notions of the Deity, their coarsened minds became incapable of conceiving of God as the creator and the Providence of the universe.[22]

Here we find Kamenskii considering the possibility that Indians at one time knew the "Deity", but somehow lost that knowledge. This idea is in line with the supposition of some scholars at the time that American Indians were indeed one of the lost tribes of Israel, and therefore they could be accounted for biblically. Kamenskii himself states that some Tlingit customs resemble those found in the Old Testament, which strengthens the belief that they were a "branch of Israelite people who had long ago migrated to the New World."[23] Therefore, early missionary teaching included a strong desire to biblically reconcile the very presence of Indians in the Americas.

Another missionary to the Tlingit, Carrie M. Willard, who would eventually teach school at Sitka, thought of mission work in terms of a blacksmith

metaphor reminiscent of William Blake. I read her metaphor this way: the hammer is the missionary, the iron is the Indian, the blacksmith is the Christian God, and the forge is the Bible. Thus, mission work is "like the work of the blacksmith under whose hammer the iron constantly cools. Over and over again it must go to the forge, and the hammer must know the rest."[24] This violent imagery is consistent with Willard's conception of herself as a civilizing force among savages.

Sheldon Jackson was probably the most influential and famous American missionary in Alaskan history. In 1880, around the same time that European powers were carving up Africa for colonization, Jackson was supervising the carving up of Alaska for different Christian sects. He did not want to concentrate all the sects in one single area and in turn neglect other parts of Alaska: "[Jackson did not want] thousands of barbarians outside without any chance to hear the gospel. So we called a convention in New York City of the great missionary bodies; and, with a large map of Alaska before them, they decided on their separate missions."[25]

With so many sects preaching various forms of Christianity throughout Alaska, one has to wonder whether or not there was general religious confusion among the Alaskan Natives. These sects were, however, unified in one belief: Native religions, cultures, and languages had to be abolished. Jackson combined his missionary zeal with the desire to assimilate Indians, by inculcating them with American ideals, albeit in segregated schools. As he stated to Congress before the House Committee on Territories in 1904:

> When the Native has thus become useful to the white man by supplying the markets with fish and fresh meat, and when he has become herdsman and teamster with his reindeer he has not only assisted the white man in solving the problem of turning to use of civilization the vast territory of Alaska, but he has also solved his own problem. If useful to the white man as a self-respecting and industrious citizen he has become a permanent stay and prop to the civilization and his future is provided for.[26]

In this statement it is apparent that Jackson believed an Indian's worth could be quantified in terms of how he could benefit whites. Also, Jackson was trying to justify the money Congress had given him to organize Indian education programs in Alaska. His selling point was that assimilation would enable whites to enjoy unfettered access to Alaskan Native resources; moreover, assimilation through religious education would make Indians useful inasmuch as they would be willing to work for the white absentee owners of canneries, mines, and lumber companies. Should the Alaskan Natives get it in their heads not to assimilate nor to provide labor and resources for whites, the US Navy would always be readily at hand to convince them otherwise. In promoting one system in Alaska, whether religious, political, educational, or legal, the government was really promoting all such systems. These systems mutually reinforced one another and justified what was essentially a desire for economic gain. As mentioned previously, because of the realities of racism at

the time, these systems were ultimately setting Indians up to fail, which is symptomatic of structural violence. Insofar as religion and education promulgated notions of assimilation doomed to failure, we should not be surprised that the internalization of failure finds an outlet in hostility toward systems of authority and authority figures.

Far from serving, protecting, and keeping justice and peace within the community, authority figures, especially representatives of law enforcement, are seen to be the tools of a system of oppression that has existed for years. It is suggested that the way to combat such perceptions and realities is to have members of oppressed groups educated and then represented in American institutions in order to eventually change them. This solution, although unsatisfactory in some respects, appears to be the only workable possibility. Even so, the threat of violence, as we have seen, is always at hand, though at a structural, not physical, level:

> And when minority organizations register the fact that little progress can be made even by organized struggle; when they are confronted with the structural violence of our societies; when they for instance realize the role of the judiciary in maintaining social control; then we shall reach the final stage: the resort back to physical violence. Minorities who cannot any longer be controlled by simply symbolic force, must be kept under control with the help of physical force. The physical force is used by the official agents of the state's machinery of enforcement, that is the police.[27]

It is important to note when Skutnabb-Kangas writes "resort back to physical violence" he is not talking about minorities being violent, he's talking about the resurgence of violence against minorities. When oppressed groups realize that the ideology behind colonization has not really changed, the government will have to resort once again to physical violence to keep groups oppressed. This has been happening for some time in America and other "developed" countries whose "developed" status relates directly to exploiting "underdeveloped" countries.[28]

The concept that colonization is not effective without the necessary silencing of the oppressed through all forms of institutionalized violence is not new. Fanon and Memmi recognized this long ago; however, what is not fully understood is how the oppression of indigenous languages and beliefs has been inextricably entwined with an overarching, though usually unstated, system of institutional violence. The effect on Indian communities has been catastrophic. The violence, both physical and structural, upon which Indian education in America was founded can be defined, according to the original draft of the Geneva Convention, as a form of genocide under the articles defining cultural genocide.

When the United States ratified the Geneva Convention in 1988, some forty years after the convention was first drafted, it submitted its own version of the convention that further narrowed the definition of genocide to exculpate the US for anything for which it could have been held retroactively

responsible. I say *further narrowed* because just after World War II the "United States was able to remove an entire article delineating the criteria of cultural rather than physical or biological genocide" from the original version of the convention, as drafted by the United Nations Secretariat and Dr. Raphael Lemkin, the man who coined the term *genocide*.[29] As a result, in the final draft of the Geneva Convention, a statement regarding the forced transfer of children is all that remains of what had been an entire article defining cultural genocide. The components the US had removed were:

> The forced and systematic exile of individuals representing the culture of a group; the prohibition of the use of the national language, or religious works, or the prohibition of new publications; systematic destruction of historical or religious monuments, or their diversion to alien uses; destruction or dispersion of documents and objects of historical, artistic, or religious value and of objects used in religious worship.[30]

The Geneva Convention applies equally to the World War II context in which it was drafted, and to the situation of Native Americans. The jailing of Indian leaders (and activists such as Leonard Peltier), the explicit goals and aims of Indian boarding schools, the usurpation of Indian lands, and the practices of museums all fall within the purview of cultural genocide.

The fact that the US government retained the clause regarding the forced transfer of children is interesting if one examines the history of Indian adoption practices in the United States. Preference for Indian adoptions was almost always given to non-Indian families. The US government, at the urging of Indians and social workers, stopped this practice in the 1970s. The Indian Child Welfare Act passed in 1978 allows tribes to have a say in how Indian children are adopted. On a general level, emphasis is placed on keeping Indian children within the extended family and hence the tribe. Furthermore, legislation has been passed since the US ratification of the Geneva Convention that is intended to curtail practices that could have been construed as cultural genocide in the original draft of the Convention. The National Museum of the American Indian Act (1989) and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (1990) are but two examples of this type of legislation.[31]

In regard to the suspect practice of submitting its own revised form of the Geneva Convention, to which nearly a dozen European countries formally objected, Ward Churchill points out that although the United States gutted nearly the entire article pertaining to cultural genocide, the American prosecutors at the Nuremberg Trials relied on the article defining cultural genocide to obtain convictions.[32] The chances that Native Americans will be allowed a national forum to discuss the effects of cultural genocide appears remote at best. If the United States still vehemently denies the physical genocide of Indians, any acknowledgment of the perpetration of cultural genocide seems remote. Without acknowledging the realities of cultural genocide and attempting to understand how they affected and continue to affect Native Americans, the loss of more than two hundred Native languages over the

course of this century will merely seem to be an unavoidable fact rather than the consequence of a systematic and institutionalized effort to eliminate indigenous cultures.

In addition to the external forces that worked to devalue and presumably eliminate the Tlingit language, it should be noted that there were internal forces within the Indian community that had similar goals, however different the rationalizations may have been. Tlingits were not passive victims in this large cultural push to replace the Tlingit language with English; in fact many Tlingits at the time viewed such a change as not only beneficial, but also necessary for survival. The most obvious example of such an internal force would have to be the Alaskan Native Brotherhood (ANB).

From its creation in 1912, the ANB promoted an English-only, pro-Christian policy within its membership. Such policies can be seen to be the by-products of the assimilationist era within which the ANB was formed. The pro-Christian theology is not all that surprising given that the founders of the ANB had attended Indian education programs formed by, and modeled on, Christian organizations. As for the English-only policy, found in the second article of the ANB's constitution restricting membership to Indians who spoke English, the Tlingit language was not in danger of being lost at the time the ANB was founded, and most tribal members still spoke Tlingit as their first language. However, at that time and in that political climate, there was a danger to an individual's physical well-being by virtue of simply being an Indian. In such a political climate, one's physical survival takes precedence over any language concerns. According to the Dauenhauers:

> When the ANB was founded, the Tlingit language was not seriously threatened with extinction, but the Tlingit people to a certain extent were.... On the other hand, Indian wars had been fought within the lifetime of that generation. The critical issue was not to protect the language, which was still strong, but to resist continuing loss of hunting and fishing rights and insist on civil rights.... Now the situation is opposite. There seems little danger of physical genocide, but the language is moribund, and the community is suffering from a spiritual malaise.[33]

With the threat of physical genocide ameliorated, concerns about cultural and spiritual preservation can be pushed to the foreground and addressed, and such is the current climate among the Tlingit. The ANB no longer has an English-only policy, and I would be remiss not to mention the tremendous amount of work that has been done over the past decade in reviving the Tlingit language. The Dauenhauers especially deserve credit for this strong push towards a renewal of the language and the cultural preservation that goes along with such endeavors. Tlingit language verb and noun dictionaries, grammars, workbooks, audio tapes, and compact discs have been invaluable resources for those interested in the language. Yet even these valiant attempts at language renewal will not be enough if individual tribal members do not begin to find meaning and purpose in preserving the language.

Thus, as the Tlingit language and religion have been slowly replaced by English and Christianity, the questions of what is left? and what will become of us? are of paramount importance to Tlingit tribal members. The Dauenhauers suggest that Tlingits sit down and have a good, long, truthful talk, asking themselves whether they want to preserve the language and Tlingit culture:

> While it is generally politically and emotionally correct to proclaim resoundingly, "Yes!," the underlying and lingering fears, anxieties, and insecurities over traditional language and culture suggest that the answer may really be, "No." What does a "Yes" answer mean? We often find that those who vote "Yes" to "save the language and the culture" expect someone else to "save" it for others, with no personal effort, commitment, or involvement of the voter. But language and culture do not exist in the abstract, as alienable "products." They exist as active processes in the here and now. We find a widespread pattern of people expressing or voting for the concept and the "product" but declining to become involved personally in the process.[34]

Can the culture be saved without saving the language? Perhaps the culture rearticulates itself in the new language, holding onto what is important and letting go of what is not. The disruption of language seems to have created a concomitant disruption in culture. Whereas language, custom, physiognomy, and locale seemed, at one time, to be a fairly good demarcation of identity, mixed blood, mobility, and the predominance of the English language have created a tribal membership that is various and diverse. No longer can stereotypes define an entire group, nor are tribal rolls, based on outmoded ideas about blood, necessarily the best authority upon which to base an identity. On the surface, saving "the culture" might seem easier than saving the language, yet there is a certain elusiveness to culture-saving that makes the complexities of the two issues very similar.

If the language is to be saved, it will require the hard work of tribal members. That work may be made easier if social systems are established to promote, not discourage, use of the language, for instance, enabling Tlingits to practice the language in the stores, restaurants, and schools of southeast Alaska. Languages have been known to be saved, but they have to be socially relevant to the needs of the community.

The Tlingit language is a difficult language to learn, harder than Greek, Russian, or Latin.[35] There are an estimated five hundred to nine hundred speakers left, and "if the current trend in Southeast Alaska continues and is not slowed down or reversed … Tlingit will probably become extinct within the next forty or fifty years."[36] I have studied it now for four years, yet I have only a limited understanding of its complexities. It is hard to determine whether the Tlingits I know, and knew, for whom Tlingit was their first language, conceived of the world differently. Perhaps this is because English is now their everyday language. Differences in perceptions seem to be more generational than linguistic.

Most of the speakers I know have passed away, and without exception they spoke English as well as they spoke Tlingit. Moreover, the older members of my family for whom Tlingit was their first language express sadness at the passing of the language. Often they can no longer speak the language fluently and desire a forum in which they could regain what was lost. They bemoan the younger generation's seeming indifference to learning the language, and frequently encourage young tribal members to do the necessary work of relearning the language. Unfortunately, opportunities are not readily available for younger tribal members to learn the language. It is far easier, and thought to be more socially applicable, to learn one of the European languages in school.

Whereas learning Spanish or French might endear young tribal members to the American education system, the acquisition of those languages does not necessarily remedy the spiritual malaise within the Indian community. Though the Tlingit language may have no power in and of itself to heal the spiritual malaise of the culture, the language, when viewed as an integral part of Indian life, can bring about a renewal of interest in tradition, which is a healing process. Spiritual malaise is remedied by reinvigorating tribal communities with a sense that their traditions and languages are important and relevant in the modern world and that tribal beliefs and languages can aid in understanding the modern human condition. A revitalization of Indian identities through tradition and language can give Indian students the self-confidence and positive self-identity that was so strongly denied in the boarding school experience. Then, perhaps, the term "Indian education" will not seem such a haunting contradiction.

NOTES

1. Dennis Tedlock, trans., *Popul Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 79.

2. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, eds., *Haa Kusteeyi (Our Culture): Tlingit Life Stories* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994).

3. James Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York: New Press, 1995), 58.

4. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Bilingualism or Not: The Education of Minorities*, trans., Lars Malmberg and David Crane (Avon: Multilingual Matters, 1981), 307.

5. Robert Allen Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 7.

6. Donald Mitchell, *Sold American: The Story of Alaska Natives and Their Land, 1867–1959* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), 95.

7. Ibid., 95.

8. Skutnabb-Kangas, *Bilingualism*, 307.

9. Ibid., 307.

10. Ibid., 314.

11. Owana McLester-Greenfield, "Educated or Indian? (Either/Or)," in *The Worlds Between Two Rivers: Perspectives on American Indians in Iowa*, eds. Gretchen M. Bataille, David Mayer Gradwohl, and Charles L. P. Silet (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 98.

12. Ibid., 101.

13. Oliver Maxson Salisbury, *Quoth the Raven: A Little Journey into the Primitive* (Seattle: L&H Press, 1962), 62.
14. Ibid., 64.
15. I obtained this information from Clara Peratrovich, a Tlingit elder in the village of Klawock, who has worked closely with the Klawock School. She mentioned that the book has actually been banned twice; the second time occurred when the book was reissued under a different title.
16. Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, “Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues in Reversing Language Shift: Examples from Southeast Alaska,” in *Endangered Languages: Language Loss and Community Response*, eds. Lenore Grenoble and Lindsay Whaley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 66.
17. “Native American Languages Act,” in *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom* eds. Alvin M. Josephy, Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 200.
18. In a *New York Times* article (9 April 1998) entitled “Indians Striving to Save Their Languages,” James Brooke says that of the nearly two hundred Indian languages still extant in the United States, only twenty or so are passed on at home from parents to children, which is a sign of a healthy language. Brooke goes on to state that the federal government spends only two million dollars a year to save endangered Indian languages.
19. Alvin M. Josephy, *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom,* 2d ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 201.
20. Anatoli Kamenskii, *Tlingit Indians of Alaska*, trans. Sergei Kan (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1985), 24. Also, see Henry Lewis Morgan, *Ancient Society* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).
21. Ibid., 33.
22. Ibid., 53.
23. Ibid., 33.
24. Carrie M. Willard, *Among the Tlingits: The Letters of 1881–1883* (Sitka: Mountain Meadows Press, 1995), 9.
25. Mitchell, *Sold American*, 92.
26. Ibid., 99.
27. Skutnabb-Kangas, *Bilingualism*, 324.
28. The term “developed” is used in the same fashion that “civilized” was used in the past centuries.
29. Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights Press, 1997), 365.
30. Ibid., 366.
31. Both pieces of legislation are discussed in Josephy, *Red Power.*
32. For a good discussion of this issue, see Churchill’s *Little Matter of Genocide*, 366–67.
33. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, *Haa K̲usteeyi*, 93.
34. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, “Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues,” 63.
35. According to the Dauenhauers, “Linguists rank it [Tlingit] among the most difficult languages in the world. Tlingit is much harder to learn than German, Russian, Japanese, Greek, Latin, and other languages commonly taught.” See Nora Marks Dauenhauer and Richard Dauenhauer, *Beginning Tlingit* (Juneau: Sealaska Heritage Foundation Press, 1991), 4.
36. Dauenhauer and Dauenhauer, “Technical, Emotional, and Ideological Issues,” 61.