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Reservation Development in the United States: Peripherality in the Core

VICKI PAGE

Statistics indicate that American Indians form one of the most disadvantaged minority groups in the United States. Poor health, low-paying jobs, and low levels of education, along with high levels of unemployment, all contribute to the American Indian's seemingly endless state of poverty. Their cultural persistence, some argue, exacerbates the problem. Studies do indeed indicate that Indians generally maintain their cultural distinctiveness, even after their introduction and adjustment to an urban, industrial style of life. The fact that many reservations are pursuing industrial development as a strategy for attaining economic and cultural self-determination increases the ramifications of Indians' adjustment to the industrial way of life.

Federal policies and sociological analyses concerning American Indians in the past have failed to take into account long-term and world-wide system changes that not only impinge on the United States but which also have consequences for the United States government's relationship with American Indians and reservation development. Therefore, the major aim of this essay is to examine the intertwined "problems" of the persistence of Indian poverty and culture using the metropolis-satellite and world-system explanations. Focusing on the political and economic underpinnings of ethnic relations, these approaches allow not only the location of Indian-United States relations among

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more general, world-wide politico-economic processes but also a specification of these processes' impact upon the reservation economy and Indian ethnicity. A second aim is to illustrate United States-world system relations as a possible basis for alternative United States-Indian policy considerations, and for addressing the cultural dilemma that Indians face in their efforts to industrialize.

METROPOLIS-SATELLITE

Historically, federal Indian policies have been based on the acculturation approach to Indian ethnicity and poverty, which posits that before white contact American Indians were backward and undeveloped, but that the Indian condition will constantly improve as they become more and more integrated into the mainstream social and economic milieu. This framework is similar to the larger modernization theory, which argues that "nation building involves a process of integration of formerly diverse social groups into one political economic order with a shared sense of identity," and that societies evolve more or less along uniform lines toward progress and modernity.¹ Both of these theories have failed, however, in that neither can account for the fact that diverse ethnicities within nation-states persist, along with underdevelopment across nation-states.

More recently, the political relations of the United States and American Indian reservations have been described as a metropolis-satellite situation in which the politico-economic relations are more imperative than the urban-rural dichotomy.² Economic surpluses are taken from rural areas and used for the benefit and growth of urban power centers. Thus, the backward condition of American Indian reservations is not due to the retention of traditional ways, "but result from the way in which United States' urban centers of finance, political influence, and power have grown at the expense of rural areas."³ Results of this exploitation of Indian lands and resources by the United States metropolis include political oppression and neo-colonial subjugation, decimation of Indian populations, destruction of political and economic self-direction, and the burgeoning role of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior in

conducting Indian affairs.⁴ Increasingly, metropolis-based corporations are wielding considerable influence in the political arena, as well as in Indian affairs.

Jorgensen argues that the history of Indian/White federal relations has been a series of administrative attempts to civilize reservation Indians using an urban-development approach.⁵ The resulting policies, instead, have plunged them into a state of perpetual economic and social poverty. First, as a result of the passage of the General Allotment Act (Dawes Act) of 1887, much Indian land was either tied up in heirship status or sold or leased to non-Indians. This situation left many Indians to depend upon family farming and ranching, which did not meet their subsistence requirements. Second, reflecting the notion that Indians themselves are to blame for their "backwardness," federal education policy used boarding schools to "white" educate and re-socialize Indian children. This policy not only separated many Indian families but also, generally, failed to destroy "the so-called restrictive, backward influence of tribal life." Third, the termination and relocation policies of the 1950s were similarly designed to make American Indians "responsible citizens." In 1954, the House Concurrent Resolution 108 declared that the government was withdrawing federal responsibility and services from Indians as soon as possible (i.e., termination). This proved to be less than successful and in some cases disastrous, making destitute Indians who had already been poor.⁶

The Employment Assistance Program, better known as the relocation program, is intended for any Indian who is prepared to leave the reservation to seek employment in an urban area. It provides two basic services, the Direct Employment Program, and the Vocational Training Program. The former is designed to relocate individuals who have a marketable skill, while the latter is intended to provide vocational training in addition to job opportunities.⁷ Although approximately half of the relocatees return to the reservations while many others end up in slums without steady employment, the relocation program has been considered successful "in terms of both return on the government's investment and the satisfaction of the Indian participants."⁸

WORLD-SYSTEM THEORY

In American sociology, world-system theory has developed out of opposition to the various versions of modernization theory as proposed by such authors as Rostow, Portes, and McClelland.⁹ Modernization theory "tended to refuse the ideas that deep structural factors might prevent economic progress, and more importantly, that the very international context which was supposed to be spreading modernization might itself be such an obstacle."¹⁰

Recognizing these factors, world-system theory posits that "the existence of strong manufacturing powers with the ability to extend their markets and their political strength throughout the world re-directs the evolution of feeder societies."¹¹ Although both the metropolis-satellite and world-system theories draw on Frank's thesis of the "development of underdevelopment," they explain uneven development on different levels.¹² On the one hand, the metropolis-satellite account of Indian and rural poverty is specific to the United States. While insightful, this explanation does not allow us to see what is unique, or not unique as the case may be, about the American Indians or the United States relative to political and economic relations with the rest of the world. World-system theory, on the other hand, explains uneven development on an international basis and allows an examination of modernization processes of which the United States-American Indian relationship is only one instance. Additionally, world-system theory addresses change in the structure of Indian societies; the metropolis-satellite thesis does not.

According to world-system theory, the growth of the global, capitalist division of labor and its processes divides the world into the core, periphery, and semi-periphery, as opposed to the metropolis-satellite theory, which emphasizes only two divisions (urban-rural) and the nation-state as the unit of analysis. The metropolis concept corresponds to the core, however, which can be described as strong, central, modern, diversified, industrial nations; in contrast, the satellite concept corresponds to the periphery, described as weak, marginal, monocultural, agricultural, or extractive nations.¹³ The metropolis or core, as a center of economic and political power, extracts economic surplus from the rural-periphery areas, therefore growing at the latter's expense.

The two theories are also similar in that they attack the unilinear theories of development, but again at different levels of analysis. Specifically, the metropolis-satellite thesis is one of counter-acculturation, while world-system theory is one of counter-modernization. All nation-states, as well as regions within nation-states, have not developed evenly. Moreover, distinct local identities remain within supposedly uniformly modernized nations. Acculturation and modernization theories cannot account for these discrepancies. These theories have failed to explain why reservations remain underdeveloped, and why traditional Indian cultures still thrive. Both the metropolis-satellite and world-system explanations argue that uneven development is the result of modern nation-states expanding internationally or locally into undeveloped regions. Supposedly, as modern nation-states expand, they use resources extracted from undeveloped regions to fuel their continued development. This process not only blocks the development of these regions but also directs their change away from development. Frank's concept of underdevelopment is not only a lack of development, "but may also be a positive result of unfavorable economic relations—hence the phrase, 'development of underdevelopment.'" ¹⁴

The changes wrought in what Hall terms non-state societies as a consequence of their interaction with more advanced societies is referred to as reactive change.¹⁵ This change may be directed toward the impacting society, toward earlier forms of organization, or frozen at a specific level of development. The extent and permanence of change within non-state societies depend upon shifts in market articulation between the expanding national sector and the region being absorbed, and within the world economy. The more closely articulated a region is to the world groups, the more forceful are the pressures placed on local groups. If these pressures are strong and enduring, the change in the structure of local groups will be drastic and difficult to reverse; if not, as in the case of low levels of market articulation, the change will be not so profound nor so difficult to reverse.

As a specific illustration of reactive change among non-state forms in a modern or core nation, American Indian groups of autonomous bands have been transformed (in some cases) into tribes as a result of the impact of absorption. As the needs of the United States and the rest of the world for more natural resources

have increased through time, so has market articulation between reservations and the central sector. Because of the nation's increasing need for the natural resources found on many reservations, Indian tribes have taken on the same economic role in the primary industry sector, and to some extent are becoming amalgamated into a single labor force. This process of fusing ethnic and class solidarity has helped lead to the emergence of a new ethnic identity referred to as pan-Indianism.¹⁶ According to Hall, new ethnic identities tend to take on distinctions that already exist in the cultural milieu.¹⁷ In this light, then, pan-Indianism may be viewed as an ethno-political strategy similar to those of American blacks and Hispanics.

One reactive strategy of American Indians to corporate energy development on their reservations has been to form pan-tribal and tribal organizations that are very like modern corporate entities. Some of these include the Alaska Native Industries Cooperative Association, an economic and political organization composed of Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts of western and interior Alaska; the National Indian Youth Council, the Council of Energy Resource Tribes, and the International Indian Treaty Council.

Furthermore, as members of a core society, American Indians occupy a special position in the class structure. In this regard, ethnicity or ethnic consciousness is defined in cultural terms, but has as its objective political and economic gain. According to Wallerstein, ethnic—as well as party—divisions are manifestations of class divisions.¹⁸ A particular manifestation is influenced by a nation-state's position in the world stratification system and the relative efficiency of ethnic, party, or class organizations in promoting group interests.¹⁹

Ethnic divisions in the periphery are aligned with labor divisions. That is, when labor is plentiful, ethnic distinctions will coincide with indigenous distinctions; when labor is scarce, however, ethnic distinctions will resemble the division of labor. In contrast, core ethnicity tends to be a reactive phenomenon and responsive to the presence or absence of a cultural division of labor. And, in cases where ethnic groups are regionally located—many Indians are on reservations in the United States—the region will tend to have colonial-like relations with the central nation.²⁰ These colonial-like relations are analogous to those of

the metropolis-satellite structure described earlier, and manifest peripherality in the core (e.g., industrial and governmental siphoning off and partitioning of reservation land and natural resources).

American Indians in this perspective, as an ethnic group which is located in peripheral-like regions of a core nation, therefore organize in order to enhance the possibility of their economic improvement. As internal colonies, however, American Indian reservations are economically and politically dependent upon the federal government and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as on metropolis-based industry and corporations, for goods and services, and, in some cases, simple survival. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that reservations also supply the central United States with the raw materials (such as lumber, coal, oil, and natural gas) required for its further growth and development. Consequently, the persistence of Indian poverty can be explained in large part by the Indians' particular position within, and relations with the local and international division of labor in the capitalist world economy.

DEVELOPING THE UNDERDEVELOPED

In the past, knowledge of the value of Indian lands was limited, so corporate and government pressure on reservations to develop was slight. In the 1950s, however, the value of Indian resources became apparent. This discovery, coupled with the growing world energy crisis, increased demands on the energy supplies of the U.S., particularly those of American Indian reservations.²¹ Thus, beginning about 1962, the Bureau of Indian Affairs expanded its "development" program of training and relocating to include actively promoting the industrialization of reservations. Cooperating with federal, state, and tribal organizations, civic organizations, and private businesses, the BIA contracts for development projects, usually dealing with reservations' natural resources. To hasten the process and add a competitive edge, the BIA offers inducements to firms to locate on reservations (as opposed to going outside of the United States). One such inducement is the promise of financial assistance to companies that will provide on-the-job training for Indians. This financial aid may

take the form of direct subsidies, or payment for recruiting and screening services. Another is to offer to build the structural facilities for firms. Further incentive to companies to locate on reservations is the fact that employers would have few or no taxes to pay.²²

Interested parties in the development of reservations include federal agencies (e.g., the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Department of Energy); state governments, which gain from taxes on extractive industries; and local, non-Indian communities, which see reservation development as a stimulus for their local economies. Pressure for development also comes from tribal governments as a strategy for strengthening reservation economies and creating jobs.²³ However, as reservation Indians become dependent upon the extraction of resources for the whole of their economic structure, continued development becomes a vested interest of the tribe, not just the tribal government. An example of "extraction dependence" is the fact that in 1975 approximately 70 percent of Navajo, Laguna Pueblo, and Arapahoe tribal revenues came from mining leases and extraction.

The relative accessibility of reservation resources and the possibility of large profits draws multinational corporations to become the major developers of reservations.²⁴ The Nixon administration's energy crisis and Project Independence brought many energy projects to Indian reservations, projects that resulted in development contracts with corporations including Anaconda Copper, Atlantic Richfield, Bethlehem Steel, Union Carbide, Texaco, Westinghouse, Peabody Coal, and Kennecott Copper.²⁵ By 1980, having been assisted further by BIA development policies and by their own economic and political clout, numerous multinational corporations such as Exxon, Kerr McGee, Amoco, Conoco, and Gulf Oil, had become involved in natural resource development on reservations.²⁶

Several of the circumstances surrounding corporate development lend support to the metropolis-satellite and world-system explanations of Indian poverty (i.e., peripherality). One is that, generally, reservation industries are neither owned nor controlled by Indians. Second, these industries are primarily raw-material or agriculture related. And third, these non-Indian-controlled business operations generate relatively few employment opportunities and comparatively little income for reservation Indians.

In fact, despite resource development and increased federal appropriations for their affairs, American Indian poverty persists. Jorgensen attributes the failure of federal Indian policies partially to "mismanagement" by the BIA, arguing that the bureau encouraged the development of livestock operations at the same time quasi-cartels were taking over the industry, and that the bureau advised tribes to allow non-Indian corporations to exploit Indian resources.²⁷ Furthermore, many tribes have accused the BIA of failing to protect their interests with regard to controlling mineral leases (i.e., the BIA has consistently under-negotiated royalties or established low fixed royalties). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many tribes have neither the capital nor the skills or adequate counsel to utilize their own resources.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Some of the natural resources currently being extracted from Indian lands are minerals such as copper, nickel, lead, chromite, zinc, vanadium, titanium, and thorium, in addition to oil, coal, timber, and natural gas. Since 1980 the Northern Cheyenne have had an agreement with the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) that allows the company to explore oil and gas reserves on the reservation for thirty-three years. The Northern Cheyenne get six million dollars, 25 percent of the production profits, and relatively no say in the exploration plans. Along with large profits, ARCO gets a twenty-year tax holiday and free access to the reservation's lands, roads, and water.²⁸ This contract is typical of other multinational corporations' development and exploration contracts with tribes such as the Chippewa, Potawatomi, Menominee, Stockbridge-Munsee, Oneida, Winnebago, Navajo, and Hopi.²⁹

Development of Indian reservations has brought increased revenue to one of the poorest minority groups in America. Notwithstanding, it has also resulted in litigation concerning delinquent royalty payments, the disturbance of Indian burial and religious sites, and inadequate health and safety practices, such as the high rate of lung cancer and fibrosis among Navajo uranium miners.³⁰ Other consequences of reservation development include community and kinship disruption, environmental destruction, and the loss of large quantities of natural resources, as

well as the demise of traditional economies, such as fishing and herding.³¹ One most recent example of community disruption concerns the Hopi-Navajo reservation re-partitioning and the consequent displacement of many of these peoples from their traditional homelands.

The apprehension of Indians concerning industrial development on their lands thus encompasses many concerns—environmental issues, the influx into and takeover of their economies by non-Indians, and a lack of tribal control over development, in addition to potentially devastating effects on their traditional cultures and ways of life. Similarly, Owens warns that if reservation control of development is not attained, “energy development will prove to be the latest and most devastating fiasco of federal Indian policy.” She suggests actions that should be taken to gain economic control.³² For instance, tribes must regulate business activities on their reservations by using appropriate laws and codes. In addition to this jurisdictional control, tribes must establish financial control through increased taxation, production-sharing and service contracts, and enforceable Indian-preference hiring clauses. Third, tribes must gain managerial control, the ability to conduct research and business operations, and to provide training programs for the full range of jobs available on the reservations. Finally, and alternatively, by building a commercial infrastructure to keep more dollars circulating on the reservation, tribes could create a diversified and self-sufficient economy.³³

According to world-system analysis of Indian reservation development and poverty, the dynamics of the larger world economy impinge upon the United States economy, of which reservations are a part. Thus, by failing to take into account the wider systemic changes that confront Indians, Owens’s strategies for self-direction, while well intended and liberally pro-Indian, are misdirected according to the world-system perspective. Wallerstein argues that the host-parasite relationship that exists between peripheral and core areas is a necessary condition for the maintenance and promotion of capitalism. Therefore, the chances for reservation-controlled development, even significant development itself, seem unlikely. Wallerstein argues that the only hope for change in regional economies within national metropolis sectors is change in the entire world economy.³⁴ More importantly, he posits that this change only will come via a world socialist revolution.³⁵ This solution is too broad and encompass-

ing for the scope of this discussion. The point, however, is that since changes in the world economy account for changes in a region's articulation with the world economy, the dynamics of the so-called metropolis-satellite relations between the underdeveloped Indian reservations and the greatly developed urban United States have to be examined from both an international and a local perspective.

For instance, as the United States has become more closely articulated to the world capitalist economy, it has more forcefully impinged upon American Indian reservations. The general push by federal, state and local agencies to acculturate Indians through various programs of education and economic activity were and continue to be instances of this growing impingement, and are coincidental with the United States' increasing need for Indian resources, namely energy. This impingement is affected by the international political climate surrounding natural resources, particularly oil, and United States' relations with the primary suppliers. As a consequence of this impingement, reservations have not only become more industrially developed but also have become more clearly peripheral, while Indian cultures have become less distinct. This latter point speaks to the larger issue of an inherent contradiction in the development process, and the cultural dilemma that developing reservations, as well as Third World nations, face. That is, it seems impossible to maintain simultaneously both traditional Indian cultures and values and to develop economically. In order for Indians to remain culturally distinct, they must acquire the power and modern business skills necessary to control their building industries. In order to acquire this power and skill, however, they must acculturate (i.e., lose their cultural distinctiveness). Is there a solution to this dilemma, short of a "world socialist revolution"? Perhaps insight may be gained from within the world-system perspective itself.

Out of the world-system analysis of ethnic peripherality, the concept of reactive ethnicity has been expanded upon by Nagel and Olzak,³⁶ who argue that developmental processes promote the ethnic mobilization of increasing and organizing resource competition along ethnic boundaries.³⁶ In this analysis, ethnic development, whether economic or political, is seen as being relationally and situationally activated (e.g., Indian organizational development, which has occurred due to the impingement of the metropolis U.S. onto Indian reservations).

Specifically, Nagel and Olzak identify five developmental

processes that are most likely to activate ethnic mobilization and development: urbanization; increased scales of organization; expansion of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy; expansion of the political sector; and establishment of supranational organizations.³⁷

Urbanization promotes ethnic mobilization in that ethnic ties and networks aid in the urban transition of rural migrants: job competition in cities' "ethnically diverse labor markets" promotes organization along ethnic lines, which in turn enhances ethnic boundaries; differences among migrant ethnic groups become pronounced upon contact, and provide a convenient and salient basis for urban ethnic organization and mobilization.

Large-scale organizations arise from the competition that other large-scale organizations present at the national level. To be effective, ethnic groups must reorganize nationally or capture a large constituency. These national-level organizations produce national-level ethnic boundaries and provide a substructure for mobilization. In the case of American Indians, many tribes have joined together to combat resource colonialization by forming such organizations as the Council of Energy Resource Tribes (CERT) and the International Indian Treaty Council.

The expansion of secondary and tertiary economic sectors, and associated urbanization processes weaken segregated labor markets, resulting in ethnic competition; the increased material resources that economic development provides strengthen the political capabilities of peripheral ethnic populations in both peripheral states and regions within core states. Peripheral resource development (e.g., oil and coal in American Indian reservations and Native Alaskan territories) encourages ethno-regional solidarity as a response to the national sector's policies of extraction and exploitation.

Expansion of the political sector raises issues concerning national identity, creates an arena for competition for politically controlled resources—much of which is organized along ethnic lines (e.g., reservation boundaries)—and results in the formal recognition of ethnicity as a basis for resource competition. For example, certain ethnic groups become designated as deserving of special treatment, or become targeted for special legislation (e.g., U.S.-Indian treaties).

The rise of supranational organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), encourages interstate migra-

tion and provides economic and political incentive for ethno-regional movements, along with forums for self-determination claims and demands (e.g., attempts by tribes to claim perceived rights to ancestral territories, traditional lifestyles and religions, and payments for damages resulting from broken treaty agreements).

Perhaps, then, Nagel and Olzak's extension of the reactive perspective on ethnic persistence and mobilization in modern and modernizing states indicates that, short of a world socialist revolution, Indian peripherality can be overcome or at least combated by using creatively and politically the processes of peripheralization (i.e., urban, industrial, bureaucratic intrusion) either against themselves or to their own benefit.

Some of the most recent and most innovative strategies for reservation development oriented toward self-determination include (1) turning to small businesses for employment, rather than to large corporations; (2) persuading Indian businesspersons to build privately owned reservation enterprises instead of relying on government-funded, make-work jobs; (3) re-negotiating natural resource contracts for higher royalty payments; (4) instituting gambling, such as bingo and blackjack games or race tracks, as short-term money-making projects; and (5) using appropriate technologies and alternative energy sources in agriculture that do not require large initial capital investments, to grow organic foods.³⁸ Strategies such as these indicate that perhaps Indian ethnicity may not need to be forfeited for economic survival.

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