

**21<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of American  
Indian Psychologists & Psychology  
Graduate Students**

**Historical Factors of  
Cultural Disenfranchisement:  
Reversing the Trend**

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# BLACK ELK SPEAKS

- You have noticed that everything that an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the *Power of the World* always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the “Old Days” when we were a strong and happy people, all of our power came to us from the “Sacred-Hoop-of-the-Nation”. As long as Hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The *Flowering Tree* was the living center of the Hoop and the circles of the four quarters nourished it. The East gave Peace and Light, the South gave warmth, the West gave rain, and the North with its cold and mighty wing gave us strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the *outer world* , with our Religion. Everything that the power of the world does, is done in a circle.

# BLACK ELK SPEAKS

- The sky is round, and I have heard that the Earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The wind, in its' greatest power - WHIRLS. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The Sun comes forward and goes down again in the form of a circle. The Moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is - in everything where POWER moves. Our tipis were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle: the Nations Hoop - a nest of many nests - where the GREAT SPIRIT meant for us to hatch our children.

# **Presentation Overview**

- **Introduction**
- **Definitions of Terms**
- **Overview of Historical Factors of Cultural Disenfranchisement**
- **Cultural, Social, Tribal, and Individual Changes to Reverse Cultural Disenfranchisement**
- **Summary and Discussion**

# Introduction

- Harjo, J. & Bird, G. (1997). Selected comments from Joy Harjo, Gloria Bird, Patrica Blanco, Beth Cuthand, & Valerie Martinez (Eds.) Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America. (pp. as needed). New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Sacred Hoop (Native World) has been broken by many forms of cultural disenfranchisement:
  - Asymmetrical Relationship between Dominant Culture and the various Native or Tribal Cultures

# Introduction

- **U.S. Federal Policies (Assimilation & Acculturation)**
  - **Involuntary Theft of / Removal from Homeland**
  - **Imposition of an “Unnatural Social Order**
  - **Suppression of Language, Ceremonies, Culture, and Spirituality**
  - **Destruction of Indigenous Family Systems**
  - **Residential Schools**
  - **Denial of Historical Importance**

# Definitions

- **Cultural Disenfranchisement:** To detach or loosen the civilization of a given race or nation (at a given time or over all time); its' customs, its arts; its' conveniences, etc.
- **Cultural Asymmetry:** The greater power of the dominant Euro-American culture to affect, control, or oppress tribal cultures or individuals of tribal cultures.

# Definitions

- **Bi-Cultural Competence: Properly qualified, able or fit, with capacity to fully discharge one's individual or social role within more than one culture within a larger society.**
- **Liminal: Of or having to do with a limen or threshold, especially of perception. The marginal position or role in society assumed through the achievement of bi-cultural competence (Douglas, 1984).**

# Cultural Asymmetry

- I live on a reservation now...my people do not know when they are citizens or when they are not. They send word to the Department, “We wish this and so.” The department sends word back, “you are citizens of the United States. We can’t do that for you.” They send in for something else. The word comes back, “why, you are wards of the government. We cannot grant you that.” Where are we now? “Miss Johnson - at the first convention of the Society of American Indians, 1911[Marks, 1998].

# Cultural Asymmetry

- SENATE MEASURES WOULD DEAL BLOW TO INDIAN RIGHTS: With little debate and no public hearings, a Senate subcommittee last approved two measures that would knock out some of the oldest principles in how the country's 554 American Indian tribes are governed and deprive them of basic operating money if they do not agree to the changes (*The New York Times*, August 27, 1997).
- Continued attempts to modify public policy through legislation disadvantageous to native communities and individuals.

# U.S. Federal Policies

- Assimilation and Acculturation
  - Dawes Allotment Act of 1887
    - Designed to alleviate dependency through division of reservation lands into family/individual holdings. Designed to correlate with education (Anglicization) of tribal children
  - Four essential problems:
    - Tribal culture and customs judged to have no value and Anglo values were though superior
    - It was thought that native people would desire to abandon their ways for those of the “advanced civilization”.
    - Any “left over” acreage would be deemed surplus.
    - Allotments adequate for self-sufficiency.

# U.S. Federal Policies

- **Assimilation and Acculturation**
  - **Don C. Talayesva (or Sun Chief), a Hopi born in 1890: “Water is as precious as food...we had strict rules about the use of water...sometimes the water gave out...men went to distant springs & women stayed up all night to catch a trickle from the Oraibi spring... the dances and ceremonies were for rain, not pleasure...there is health-giving power in water and it is a good practice to bath in cold water, to wash our hands and face in snow...we filled one hundred cisterns hewn from the rocks by our ancestors when we could(Simmons, 1942).**

# U.S. Federal Policies

- Assimilation and Acculturation
  - **The Federal Indian Boarding School System developed and implemented by Richard Pratt.**
    - **Designed for the Anglicization of tribal students, through Richard Pratt’s belief: “killing the Indian to save the man.”**
    - **Impacted native families through forced removal of the children and subsequent transportation and placement at “schools”, such as Carlisle in Pennsylvania.**

# **U.S. Federal Policies**

- **Federal Indian Boarding School System's Impact on Families and Individuals:**
  - Loss or Disruption of Language
  - Suppression of Spiritual Practices and Beliefs
  - Suppression of Culture through Enforced Changes in Grooming and Clothing Practices
  - Disruption of Families through placement in Distant “Schools” and no Home Visits Allowed

# **U.S. Federal & Local Policies**

- Denial of Historical Importance
  - **In the teaching of biased history in the Public School system**
  - **Public policy development & implementation done in absence of an accurate historical view**
  - **Difficulty in having language requirements in public schools**
  - **Media misrepresentation and the use of non-Natives for Native roles or lack of use of Native performers outside the stereotype in movies/ TV, etc.**

# **Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend**

- **Social Justice and Public Policy: Between Dominant and Tribal Cultures**
- **Individual Responsibilities Roles & Behaviors**
- **Tribal Policies and Actions**

# **Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend**

- **TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY**
  - **Tribal Councils and Business Committees Must Act.**
    - Establish an Endowed Non-Profit Agency in Washington to Impact Public Policy and Legislation
    - Native People Should Expose the Agendas of Candidates for Public Office and Vote this Issue in a Block.
  - **Progressively orientated members of the dominant culture must “Reach-Out” to Tribal Governments**

# **Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend**

- **REACQUISITION OF A STABLE LAND BASE**
  - **Social and Public Support for Development & Implementation of Progressive Policies Designed to Help Tribes Acquire or Re-Acquire Historical Properties**
  - **Sheep are the Highlights of Creation, Comments by Buck Austin, Traditional Dine Medicine Man (Austin, 1954).**

# Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend

- **STRENGTHEN  
TRADITIONAL TRIBAL  
FAMILY**

- Examine through research the strengths of indigenous family functioning.
- Teach these strengths in native education programs and other social services
- Begin to re-learn and use the traditional methods within the tribal family
- Without the Family We are Nothing  
Comments by Tom Johnson, Pomo,  
1941

# **Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend**

- **BECOME A LIMINAL HUMAN BEING**
  - That is, within the process of working toward bi-cultural competence as an individual, let yourself be transformed into what Mary Douglas (1984) describes as liminal beings, that is; an individual living comfortably in the margin between cultures, equally adapt at functioning in either culture. The most “dangerous” type of human being to the status quo.
  - **BE DANGEROUS BE LIMINAL**

# Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend

- **BE DANGEROUS**
- **BE LIMINAL**
- **BE TRIBAL**
- **BE ADEPT WITHIN THE  
DOMINANT CULTURE**

# Cultural Disenfranchisement: Reversing the Trend

- **HOW TO BE LIMINAL**
  - Find an elder/spiritual leader in the Native culture and find a mentor/ instructor in the dominant culture, spend time with and learn from both of them.
  - Step into history: participate in tribal ceremonies, beliefs, & practices
  - Learn as much as possible about both of the languages (Tribal and Dominant).
  - Learn as much as you can about great thinking and thoughts - read source material if possible - look for great themes and myths embedded in literature **EVERYTHING** works by these principles
  - Be as good as you can be at what you do in the larger society

# Summary & Discussion

- INTRODUCTION & TERMS
  - Use of a ceremony to contain and empower the discussion
    - Cultural Disenfranchisement (CD)
    - Cultural Asymmetry
    - Bi-Cultural Competence
    - Liminal
- PRESENTED OVERVIEW OF HISTORICAL FACTORS OF CD
- RECOMMENDED VARIOUS METHODS TO REVERSE CD
- A New Dream (Wuski A-Baw-Tan).