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### Let's Change the Subject: Grounding Social Change in Indigenous History and Philosophy

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# Let's Change the Subject: Grounding Social Change in Indigenous History and Philosophy

## Abstract

This article urges altering the discourse around social change. Too often it is antagonistic and negative; it also overlooks continuing colonizing practices and how injustices to Indigenous peoples have helped to shape past and current injustices toward other groups. First, the article foregrounds the religio-political ideology of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery and the boarding-school experience to remind readers about the broader criminal history of the United States toward Indigenous nations and peoples and how colonization is not a thing of the past. Any call for social change should remember this. Second, the article looks at three dimensions of Indigenous philosophy that would be good to affirm as we strive for a better world: relatedness, sustained peace, and an ethic of preservative care. Limited calls for justice that avoid continuing colonizing practices and that begin with negations and hate are not responsible and will help to continue the sustained violence we no longer want. For sustained peace, the strategy should be to begin with an affirmation (here an affirmation of Indigenous wisdom) and a broader historical understanding of the injustices that continue to bring harm to millions of people within the borders of the United States. By changing the subject in this way, it will not only make for more peaceful activism, but it will also create better allies to Indigenous nations and peoples.

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## Let's Change the Subject: Grounding Social Change in Indigenous History and Philosophy

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# LET'S CHANGE THE SUBJECT: GROUNDING SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

**ROBERT MICHAEL RUEHL**

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A commonplace suggestion is that people who seek to change the culture, political climate, and institutions of the United States should adopt an inclusive approach respectful of diversity. However, many of the conversations about change in the United States are inward-looking; advocates for peace, racial healing, better relationships, and more justice usually neglect the topic of indigenous nations and peoples and how they fit into the broader picture of change. To be a more responsible change agent, two shifts in perspective are recommended. First, carefully examine and understand the colonizing practices that have shaped, and continue to shape, the lived experiences of indigenous peoples. Second, study and learn from indigenous wisdom; allow the values, concerns, and perspectives to inform new ways of imagining the world and how to live in it. To be relevant, minimally, theories and practices to cultivate a better world should be mindful of the above aspects. Without this minimal awareness, attempted improvements might, out of luck, help indigenous nations and peoples to address and correct long-standing injustices; more likely, however, reforms ignorant about these aspects will perpetuate the status quo and reestablish similar injustices. After 500 years of attempts to convert, displace, and diminish indigenous peoples, the time has come to be more mindful: acknowledging, learning from, and respectfully engaging their histories and wisdom.

This article begins by emphasizing the criminal history that went into founding the United States. One of the most pressing issues historically, and in the present, is the perpetuation of the Doctrine of Christian Discovery (DoCD). While it emerged from the Catholic papal context, the ideological dimensions advancing Christian supremacy and the ability to seize non-Christian lands

influenced Protestantism and Manifest Destiny. The DoCD continues to influence approaches toward ownership of land and the treatment of indigenous nations and peoples around the world. The boarding school movement, an attempt by the United States to “civilize” indigenous children by separating them from their families and cultures, was emboldened by this Christian supremacist orientation and has been defined as a form of cultural genocide that has contributed to extensive intergenerational trauma in indigenous communities (Churchill 1-76; Pember 1-15; Smith, *Conquest* 35-54; Woolford, “Discipline” 29-48). Informed social change, however, needs to move beyond this negative dimension. The following three sections address indigenous wisdom that change agents should embrace to help alter practices intent on creating sustainable peace and justice: understanding the world from a deeply relational perspective, developing a political community *seriously committed* to long-term peace, and embracing a gift economy nurtured by an ethic of preservative care. Basic mindfulness in these areas will allow advocates for social change to be better allies to indigenous nations and peoples. Before concluding, one section addresses the issue of cultural appropriation and a possible technique to avoid it, which incorporates ideas previously developed in this essay.

The purpose of this essay is to remind people who want to improve the United States that they should be responsible advocates for change, which means no longer overlooking indigenous history and wisdom. Unfortunately, such a lack of acknowledgement is too common, a problem that has affected feminist history and its relationship with indigenous nations and peoples. This essay is increasingly relevant when considering the place of Seneca Falls, NY, and the feminism that has grown out of this context: U.S. feminism emerged on the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and in contact with people from its five nations (Wagner 28-51). Feminism in the United States, arguably more than any other movement for change, should not overlook indigenous history and indigenous influences; to do so is just another act of colonial downgrading in the present. To be responsible and to truly embrace intersectionality, therefore, feminism needs to address indigenous concerns, while being mindful and critical of the intersection between feminism and colonization, Western Christianity, white supremacy, global capitalist ideologies, and feminism’s supportive role in indigenous oppression, both historically and in the present (Grande 179-212). Concerning the egregious violence against

indigenous nations and peoples that constitutes U.S. history, Robert W. Venables writes that “most citizens of the United States prefer collective amnesia” (ix); it is time to subvert this amnesic comfort in our roles as citizens, reformers, and educators.

## **U.S. HISTORY AND RELIGIO-POLITICAL IDEOLOGY**

The United States can be reimagined as a large crime scene. The country developed through deadly collisions between indigenous nations and peoples and Europeans and their descendants who focused on colonizing and conquering a supposedly new world and its inhabitants (Eakin 1-15). This alternative lens foregrounds the cultural violence, structural violence, and direct violence that sustained extensive harm against indigenous nations and peoples, three dimensions that Johan Galtung has identified as the “violence triangle” (291-305). From the DoCD and undermining indigenous sovereignty to the decimation of indigenous populations and the boarding school experience, the United States is haunted by significant atrocities and the rationales that continue to impair current relations with indigenous nations and peoples. By understanding this history, those seeking to cultivate sustained peace will be better equipped not only to critically examine U.S. failures, but also to avoid recreating them. By considering the wisdom of those who have survived colonizing injustices later in this paper, a different way of thinking, living, and relating may help to lead U.S. citizens, reformers, and educators out of the sustained violence that continues to shape the U.S. context.

To categorize what was done in the name of country, “group cause homicide” offers an interesting lens; this form of homicide is characterized by a group “with a common ideology that sanctions an act, committed by one or more of its members, that result [*sic*] in death” (Douglas 263). The best sub-category is that of the extremist; it includes Hezbollah and The Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord. While extremist homicide is “killing motivated by ideas based on a particular political, economic, religious or social system” that includes either individual or group offenders, U.S. crimes against indigenous nations and peoples move between motives that are political, religious, racial, and socioeconomic in nature. Extremist in character, the offenses are “prompted by a fervent devotion or a system of beliefs based on orthodox religious conventions” (Douglas 263). Homicide of this type “results from intense hostility

and aversion toward another individual or group who represents a certain ethnic, social, economic, or religious group” (Douglas 269). Through hierarchical structures, military training, and political and religious documents, many people within the spatio-temporal boundaries of the United States committed murders grounded in a religious nationalism that reduced indigenous populations by millions of people (Newcomb 303-342). Rooted in the DoCD, religiously-based ideologies justified the seizure of indigenous lands and the displacement of indigenous nations and peoples. The separation of indigenous children from their families and cultures through the boarding school experience was another dimension of policies and actions intent on eradicating indigeneity (Adams 5-94; Glauner 911-66; Piccard 137-85; Woolford, *Benevolent Experiment* 21-96).

To understand the deep historical roots of the religiously-based homicides of indigenous peoples, the place to begin is with the DoCD, which supported Manifest Destiny, shaped U.S. legislation, oriented the law in other “developed” countries, and continues to shape international law in the present (Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery”). It is often incorrectly believed that the DoCD is in the past; however, it continues to be used to support legal and political decisions regarding land ownership in the present, from the United States and Canada to Australia, Russia, and China (Miller “American Indians” 330). The DoCD emerged from the papal bulls of Pope Boniface VIII, *Unam sanctum* (1302); Pope Nicholas V, *Romanus pontifex* (1455); and Pope Alexander VI, *Inter caetera II* (1493). These documents assert that salvation comes only through the Church, that the Catholic Church is the supreme authority, that Portugal has the right to subdue Muslims and non-Christians as enemies of the faith, that non-Christian lands can be seized, and that Columbus, Ferdinand, and Isabella have the right to discover and possess non-Christian lands and to spread the Christian religion to non-believers. This formed the foundation for international law during the time of exploration; it shaped the actions and policies of England, France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain (Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery” 2-21). This influence is present, for example, in the authority King Henry VII gave to John Cabot and his sons in 1496: he gave them the right

to find, discover and investigate whatsoever islands, countries, regions or provinces of heathens and infidels, in whatsoever part of the world placed, which before this time were unknown to all Christians.... And that the before-mentioned John and his sons or their heirs and deputies may conquer, occupy and possess whatsoever such towns, castles, cities, and islands by them thus

discovered that they may be able to conquer, occupy and possess, as our vassals and governors lieutenants and deputies therein, acquiring for us the dominion, title and jurisdiction of the same towns, castles, cities, islands and mainlands so discovered. (qtd. in Hart 21)

As Steve Newcomb argues, the merging of Christian religion and law played a key role in contact with indigenous nations and peoples, whether the “discoverers” were Protestant or Catholic; European contact was hostile and grounded in the idea that indigenous peoples were enemies of the faith, both religiously and racially inferior (309-310). Religiously-guided international law necessitated subduing heathens, which often resulted in the forced removal or extermination of indigenous peoples as part of the civilizing process. Europeans and Euro-Americans often disregarded indigenous peoples’ welfare and decimated indigenous populations and nations based on the idea of Christian supremacy and racial superiority.

The DoCD extends well beyond its Catholic roots and the shaping of U.S. colonial history; in other words, just because the DoCD has Catholic roots does not mean that Protestants in the United States have not heavily relied on it to justify their actions and decisions. For example, and with the idea of a “Christian nation” in mind, the DoCD has shaped U.S. Supreme Court decisions to the present. In *Fletcher v. Peck* (1810), the Supreme Court deemed indigenous peoples as having “a mere occupancy” for hunting and other activities, but having no title to the land (Gray 73-78). Discovery and conquest justified the European right to own land: “This is the right gained by conquest. The Europeans always claimed and exercised the right of conquest over the soil” (qtd. in Gray 74). Supreme Court members relegated indigenous peoples to an inferior status: “The Europeans found the territory in possession of a rude and uncivilized people, consisting of separate and independent nations. They had no idea of property in the soil but a right of occupation” (qtd. in Gray 74). *Johnson v. M’Intosh* (1823) reinforced this view; Chief Justice John Marshall declared that “discovery gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy, either by purchase or by conquest” (qtd. in Miller, “The Doctrine of Discovery” 68). This rationale made its way into other cases: *Martin v. Waddell* (1842), *United States v. Kagama* (1886), *Shoshone Indians v. United States* (1945), *Tee-Hit-Ton Indians v. United States* (1955), *Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe* (1978), and *City of Sherrill v. Oneida Nation of N.Y.* (2005). The above 2005

decision directly cites the DoCD in a footnote justifying European, and later U.S., sovereignty over the lands. In 2016, the Supreme Court declined to hear *White v. University of California*, a case concerning two 9,000 year-old skeletons. The Supreme Court supported the decision of California's 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which used the DoCD as part of its justification to repatriate the remains: indigenous right to occupancy "comes from the legal theory that discovery and conquest gave conquerors the right to own the land but did not disturb the tribe's right to occupy it" (United States Court of Appeals). In a nation advocating the separation of church and state, its laws and relationships with indigenous nations and peoples are grounded in international religious laws propagated by popes supporting the delusion that indigenous people are inferior.

The DoCD not only shaped the dispossession of indigenous lands, but it helped to justify attempted cultural genocide through U.S. boarding schools. The assumed barbarity of indigenous peoples is present in rationales to improve or exterminate them. In 1881, Carl Schurz, former Secretary of the Interior, asserted, "The circumstances surrounding them place before the Indians this stern alternative: extermination or civilization... To civilize them, which was once only a benevolent fancy, has now become an absolute necessity, if we mean to save them" (123). Echoing this sentiment in 1881, Henry Price, former Commissioner of Indian Affairs, claimed, "Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die" (qtd. in Adams 15); little doubt existed concerning which was to perish. In 1886, Lucius Q. Lamar, former Secretary of the Interior, asserted, "the only alternative now presented to the American Indian race is speedy entrance into the pale of American civilization, or absolute extinction" (qtd. in Adams 15). Economic realities also played a role; Schurz and Henry Teller, former Secretary of Interior, found it more economically sound to civilize indigenous people than to go to war to eradicate them. By Schurz's estimates, it would cost approximately \$1,500 over 10 years to civilize an indigenous child, but \$1 million to kill an indigenous person in combat. Likewise, Teller estimated that the continuous need to protect the frontiers was \$22 million, which could be used to educate 33,000 indigenous children per year (Smith, *Conquest* 37-38). The accuracy of their assessments is irrelevant; indigenous peoples were again diminished, their well-being assessed through cost-benefit analyses. Murder was too expensive, so education became

the chosen weapon through which the next systematic attempt would be made to conquer indigenous peoples. Euro-Americans had displaced indigenous peoples to about 2% of the total U.S. landmass, but this was not enough. The next phase was to take their culture and familial relationships away from them.

Captain Richard H. Pratt, who helped to found the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania in 1879, wanted to “kill the Indian and save the man” (qtd. in Smith, *Conquest* 36; Adams 51-52). The aim was to introduce indigenous children to U.S. institutions and culture, to teach them about individualism and private property, to help them embrace the Christian worldview, and to teach them how to be good citizens (Adams 21-27). From 1877 to 1926, funding for boarding schools increased, and the influence of the schools grew. In 1877, U.S. funding for the project was small, only \$20,000. In 1880, funding rose to \$75,000; in 20 years at the turn of the century, the United States provided \$2,936,080 to “civilize” indigenous children. In 1877, indigenous enrollment was 3,598; the enrollment grew little by 1880: there were 4,651 indigenous children in boarding schools. By the turn of the century, 21,568 indigenous children were enrolled. In 1885, approximately 25% of indigenous children had been part of the U.S. boarding school experience, but by 1926, the figure reached 83% (Adams 26-27). In an 1891 speech by Merrill E. Gates, President of Friends of the Indian, he asserted:

We do believe in a standing army; but it should be an army of Christian school-teachers! That is the army that is going to win the victory. We are going to conquer barbarism; but we are going to do it by getting at the barbarians one by one. We are going to do it by that conquest of the individual man, woman, and child which leads to the truest civilization. We are going to conquer the Indians by a standing army of school-teachers armed with ideas, winning victories by industrial training, and by the gospel of love and the gospel of work. (Barrows 9)

Empowered by the religio-political ideology that supported the taking of land through “discovery” and murder grounded in beliefs of supremacy, education was attempting to erase the cultural and intellectual heritage of indigenous peoples. The forced removal of indigenous nations and peoples from their traditional lands and the attempted erasure of indigenous cultures through educational conquest reveal not only how those within the United States have disregarded and diminished indigenous nations and people, but how a common

ideology intent on indigenous extermination has been systematically woven into the country's history. Politics, history, jurisprudence, and education in the United States can be understood better if the DoCD and the boarding school experience are acknowledged in conversations for socio-political change.

Since the Age of European Exploration, imperial conquests were couched in a religio-political language of Christian supremacy that expressly supported the subjugation of non-Christians, which allowed for murder, forced relocation, and cultural imperialism; in the United States, this came to include racial dimensions that relegated indigenous peoples to an inferior position closely associated with nonhuman, untamed animals. In the explanation to John Gast's "American Progress" (1872) depicting Manifest Destiny, George A. Croffut writes, "This rich and wonderful country—the progress of which at the present time, is the wonder of the old world—was until recently, inhabited exclusively by the lurking savage and wild beasts of prey" (qtd. in Suzack 73). Upon "discovery" of North America, there were at least 12 million indigenous people, which is a low estimate (Mann 107-114), with approximately 5 to 10 million people in what is now the United States (Dunbar-Ortiz 39-42; Madley 356; Shoemaker 2-3; Zinn 16); in the United States, the indigenous population dropped to 237,196 in 1900 (Shoemaker 4). This decline in population is a result of the attempt to deal with the "Indian problem." The use of warfare and mass killing, along with the attempted extermination of cultures through educational practices, helped to disrupt or destroy entire indigenous nations or cultures. The attempts to exterminate them or to civilize them may seem like a relic from centuries ago; however, with a population decline of around 5 million people (a low estimate) and with approximately 100,000 indigenous children undergoing the boarding school experience (Smith, "Boarding School" 89), it is clear that the United States is a large crime scene grounded in Christian supremacist ideology. Kevin Gover reinforces this attribution of U.S. criminality in his speech at the 175th anniversary celebration of the Bureau of Indian Affairs when he associates his agency's history and practices with "ethnic cleansing."

Without acknowledging this history and how colonization continues to inform the present, any discussions of race and social change are myopic. Attempts to bring peace, struggles for social change, and cutting-edge theories are significantly irrelevant—and at worst, part of the colonizing process—if they neglect past and current colonizing practices and traumas as part of a larger

network of causes and conditions sustaining U.S. injustices. Racism, sexism, and classism cannot fully be analyzed and corrected without this criminality being addressed. Theory and practice, education, reform, politics, and economics in the United States are nourished by the criminal soil that is the foundation of U.S. culture, institutions, values, and visions of the future. Without remembering indigenous peoples and their suffering and continuous struggles, citizens, reformers, and educators who overlook this criminality are communicating they do not matter. Whether this is intended is irrelevant; indigenous insignificance is communicated by the absence and the neglect of this long violent history in discourses about fixing U.S. social, political, and economic ills. Unaware of this past, change agents are likely to reproduce portions of it, yet affirmations of new values and ways of being are needed too. Those working for a better world need a new way to think, speak, and interact with one another that goes beyond anger, resentment, and hatred; through affirming common indigenous ideas, new possibilities emerge for relating to one another. When these affirmations complement a better understanding of U.S. injustices against indigenous nations and peoples, a more responsible and robust foundation for social change may be established.

### **FIRST AFFIRMATION: RELATEDNESS**

Vine Deloria foregrounds the centrality of a relational approach in indigenous perspectives: “We are all relatives” (Deloria, *Spirit and Reason* 33-34). This statement is a crucial part of indigenous ceremonies, shapes views of existence, and affects information gathering concerning the world and its processes: it provides an orientation “for understanding nature and living comfortably within it” (34). For example, to understand vegetation that will be harvested is to understand the activities of other plants in the region and the seasons in which they grow; indicator plants, for example, helped the Pawnees to know when to return home from their bison hunts, so they could harvest corn. If everything is in a relationship, and since relationships change from moment to moment, all existence is in a process of fluctuation. An important part of life, then, is working to maintain proper relationships and the conditions that sustain them. Furthermore, these relationships are not only in the human realm; every aspect of creation is part of relationally dynamic processes, and all things have their unique ways of being. Knowledge of the deep relational, processual dimensions

is maintained through good relationships grounded in sharing wisdom with future generations; through the proper sharing of knowledge and right practices across generations, better relationships with the rest of creation are cultivated. To be is to exist interdependently.

This relational, processual view acquires deeper significance through the language used to talk about relationships; a familial discourse identifies connections with human and nonhuman beings, and this is a common approach from the Osage Nation to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. George Tinker writes his essay for his human relatives: “We humans are all related” (196). Ethically, this shifts our understanding; instead of seeing other people or groups as inferior, the emphasis on being relatives undermines our tendency to dehumanize one another. Tinker, however, indicates that this orientation extends to all beings: “Thus, ‘my relatives’ include many more than all you readers or all two-legged folk of the world. Indeed, it necessarily includes all of life on our planet” (197). This concept of life is broad enough to include mountains, rivers, and rocks; it destabilizes boundaries and values that foster exclusionary practices and actions intent on eliminating parts of this familial web. The challenge, however, is to acknowledge that to live is to engage in some acts of violence against members of our extended family, to honor those who are harmed, and to maintain balance through proper ceremonies:

These acts of violence disrupt the harmony of the world around us; they create imbalance that must somehow be repaired. Thus, it is important to Indian people to remember how to perform those ceremonies needed to re-create balance in the world, to maintain balance in our relationships with those other-than-human people around us. (Tinker 198)

To neglect relationships, which includes our relationship with the land on which we dwell, is to create imbalance. Care and the cultivation of balance are ultimate concerns; being mindful of interdependence and preserving it are significant for present and future generations.

A similar orientation exists in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address. This is not a prayer or a petition, but a way of opening and closing ceremonies and government meetings with gratitude to bring people’s minds together in thankfulness for all creation (Arnold, “Haudenosaunee Confederacy” 747; Gonyea 11-12; Jacques 13-14). It begins by recognizing one’s local community and all living things:

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as People. *Now our minds are one.* (Native Self Sufficiency Center et al. 2)

This communal gratitude expands to include Mother Earth, the waters, fish, plants, and medicinal herbs; it finally expands to the Creator who has given us “everything we need to live a good life” (Native Self Sufficiency Center et al. 34). The last part of the address reinforces inclusivity by instructing those listening to give thanks for anyone left out. It is not only the expansive, inclusive nature of the address that is important, but also the titles given, which reinforce Deloria’s and Tinker’s focus on relatedness. The Haudenosaunee speak of Mother Earth, the Thunder Beings whom they call Grandfathers, the Sun whom they call their eldest Brother, and the Moon whom they call Grandmother. The Haudenosaunee are focusing on their relationships with all creation, putting them in the position of an extended family through the names given. All beings exist in a web of relatedness that places them beyond the monetary economy; they are not resources, but part of an extended family. Humans are not separate from creation, but part of it, part of the environment and its ecosystems, and expected to maintain harmony guided through individual and communal gratitude for all creation.

V. F. Cordova emphasizes the implications of this relational orientation; she examines ethics as a philosophical activity grounded in the reality that most humans do not live in complete isolation, but take part in social interactions. Cordova describes a difference between indigenous thought and Western thought, with the United States as a prime example. The former focuses on the “We,” and the latter focuses on the “I” (173-81). Modern ethics in the West focuses more on the lone, autonomous self that is set against others, which is clear in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Indigenous thought, however, focuses on the interplay between self and other: the community is composed of selves who benefit and constitute the community, and the community helps to sustain and shape different selves. This is not an antagonistic interdependence, but one grounded in respect for differences and how those differences contribute uniquely to the social fabric. Each community also exists in a network of relations with other communities, both human and nonhuman; all creation is part of one life process where all things exist, optimally, in mutually-beneficial relationships

without severe hierarchies and processes of subordination or exclusion (Cordova 176-77). Indigenous thought begins from the idea that human beings want to be in community, to be part of consensual decision-making processes, and to contribute beneficially to the “We,” in the broadest sense of the term. Cordova is right to emphasize how the action of defining humanness is not neutral; how we define humanness makes a significant difference: “The We and the I produce different lifestyles, different ethical systems, different worlds” (181).

## **SECOND AFFIRMATION: POLITICS AND SUSTAINED PEACE**

Indigenous relational outlooks shaped their communities and political organizations differently from those in Europe. While indigenous political ideas helped to influence democracy later in the United States, specifically through exchanges with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy (Arnold, “Haudenosaunee Confederacy” 748; Bigtree 19-21), non-indigenous, Western political structures have remained strongly wedded to the idea of individualism, self-interest, male hierarchies, and capitalist politico-economic orientations. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, its values, and oral history have allowed something different to emerge, namely, a socio-political structure focused on peace, equality, and long-range ethical thinking supportive of the common good. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy developed a way of shaping its socio-political structures to preserve the best in all their people and to nurture fragile balances within the Confederacy, between other groups of people, and with the natural world. The Confederacy’s history and origins emphasize that it is through peace that life and relationships can flourish. Understanding this tradition better illustrates ways of relating that often are foreclosed in Western philosophy, politics, and economics; common U.S. approaches are not working, as is clear from environmental degradation, high violence rates, sexual assault, and other ways of harming human and nonhuman beings. Reflecting on and affirming Haudenosaunee history strengthens the ability to end cycles of violence.

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy dates back to at least 909 C.E.; the nations of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca merged to form a democratic society, which is the oldest continuous participatory democracy (Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation; Rosen 196-199). While grounded in peace, gratitude, respect, sharing, and consensus, the Confederacy emerged from long-

standing violence. The five nations had been engaged in sustained violence against each other; deep insecurity gripped much of the region now called New York State. Violence erupted for slight offenses, but eventually a person, the Peacemaker, crossed what is now called Lake Ontario, landing on its southern shore (Lyons "Faithkeeper"). Finally, he convinced the nations that peace was the best approach, that the Creator did not make humans to live in such a violent way. The problem was that one person remained stubborn. This was Thadodá·ho', who is said to have been quite monstrous with a twisted body and snakes growing from his head (Gonyea 9-10). Through words and songs of peace, Thadodá·ho' was transformed; in the last meeting, the Peacemaker approached Thadodá·ho', who was about to eat a meal of human flesh, but the Peacemaker offered him kindness, helping to restore his mind. Through the peaceful consensus of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, a democratic foundation was established: chiefs, clanmothers, faithkeepers, and the Grand Council continue to work for the people, the community, the Confederacy, and future generations. From discord and long-standing violence, an enduring democracy emerged focused on sustained peace; processes ushering peace into the world may take time, but they can be successful, transforming even the most violent into peaceful members of the community.

This approach shows that alternatives are possible. Violence and unsupportive relationships result from choices and conditioning, whether in the realms of actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values. Likewise, peace and caring relationships result from choices and conditioning, whether in the realms of actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values. These cultural choices and conditioning shape individuals and interactions with human and nonhuman beings. John Mohawk writes,

The culture we were born into nurtured each and every one of us to a belief in certain premises, and our socialization in that respect is surprisingly complete. We are each of us 'prejudiced' to certain beliefs, certain ways of seeing the world, and certain ways of being in the world. (92)

People exist in societies with specific orientations. Thinking about U.S. culture, the dominant values are linked to self-interest, acquisition and consumption, private property, and efficiency. Indigenous thinkers, such as Lyons, address what matters in traditional Haudenosaunee culture; they have chosen a different path:

We were instructed to be generous and to share equally with our brothers and sisters so that all may be content. We were instructed to respect and love our Elders, to serve them in their declining years, to cherish one another. We were instructed to love our children, indeed, to love ALL children... we could judge the decline of humanity by how we treat our children. ("Keepers of Life" 43)

There is no pre-established way a society has to be; the path is left open: Every society can make the choice to be more or less peaceful, more or less violent.

The world the Haudenosaunee cultivated was one focused on communal care. All things exist as part of creation, and all creation should be nurtured and protected. The underlying belief is that the Creator did not create the world and its inhabitants to be violent and to seek the blood of others. Instead, the relations we enter into, whether with other human or nonhuman beings, are intended to be for the benefit of all creation, so that all life will continue in a balanced way. The socio-political structure is one way of organizing humans to nurture this balanced dimension of creation. Every socio-political structure seen from this orientation is responsible for helping to ensure peaceful, balanced interactions. This indigenous worldview offers an ethical standard to assess all socio-political structures. Not only can we evaluate socio-political structures according to their contributions to the overall peace and balance of the created world, but we can evaluate them according to how they value the uniqueness of all members of society and beyond, and whether they are sustainable. Lyons writes, "In our way of life, in our government, with every decision we make, we always keep in mind the seventh generation to come" (qtd. in Lyons, "Keepers of Life" 42). Being deeply committed to those in the present is good, but not enough; we must think about what we will leave for others, the options and resources they will have. Respect for all creation, responsibility for future generations, and being mindful of the far-reaching web of relationships in which we exist provide a way to cultivate sustained peace that will endure for years to come and will transcend the mere absence of violence.

### **THIRD AFFIRMATION: GIFTS AND AN ETHIC OF PRESERVATIVE CARE**

At the heart of the Haudenosaunee worldview, and many indigenous perspectives globally, is the belief in the giftedness of all creation: all creation has been given as a gift for every human and nonhuman being. While it is common for people in Euro-American cultures to think in terms of private

property, self-interested individualism, and the need for more accumulations to increase one's net worth, the Haudenosaunee emphasize a lack of ownership because the Great Creator generated all there is. Humans are one dimension of creation, and we were given the opportunity to live, but we do not fully control our destinies. Much of who we are and where we are going in life is dependent on the ordering of the universe, our place in it, and the conditions that sustain our existence. Life is not something we earned, and much of the wealth or benefits we have has nothing to do with our activities because the causes and conditions that have allowed us to work, to save, and to thrive are largely beyond our control. To recognize this fact in all we do is to encourage a new way of being with each other that is focused more on giving than receiving, on peace than on violence, and on community than individualism. Ultimately, this worldview redirects us to live a life of gratitude directed by an ethic of preservative care.

Around the world, indigenous peoples have believed that Earth does not belong to us, but we belong to Earth; we are born from, and sustained by Earth, and the place in which one lives matters significantly (Whitt et al. 3-20). Existing in a specific location and taking part in specific social relationships are part of the giftedness of existence, which means our life, relationships, and the things that nurture us are gifts. Mohawk explains the implications of this outlook:

The world does not belong to humans—it is the rightful property of the Great Creator. The gifts and benefits of the world, therefore, belong to all equally. The things that humans need for survival—food, clothing, shelter, protection—are things to which all are entitled because they are gifts of the creator. Nothing belongs to humans, not even their labor or their skills, for ambition and ability are also the gifts of the Great Creator.... all people have a right to the things they need for survival, even those who do not or cannot work, and no person or people has a right to deprive others of the fruits of those gifts. (242)

These gifts rightfully belong to nobody; they should be shared with others. Instead of seeing the world and its resources, whether natural or human, as something to be efficiently used and deployed for financial gain, the giftedness of all aspects of creation, including oneself and one's labor, demands a more generous approach that sustains and enhances life. Replacing the values of self-interest, acquisitiveness, and greed, this gifted view teaches generosity, sharing for the benefit of all, and protecting and nurturing the gifts of creation.

The result is a life focused on cultivating the unique gifts of others. Humans and nonhumans should not be disparaged because they have unique gifts, but should be respected for their distinctiveness. This lesson is exemplified in the Haudenosaunee story about animals who played a game of lacrosse against each other (Calder and Fletcher 31). The four-legged animals and the animals of the air were opposing each other. While establishing the players, they came to the bat: it seemed to be a bird, but it had no feathers; neither side wanted the bat, but eventually the animals of the air accepted it. The different animals' gifts were important. The deer had speed and agility. The owl had great vision. The bear had great strength and size. The eagle was strong. Despite the fact that all beings have unique gifts, the animals marginalized the bat; they could not see the bat's value at first. As the game progressed, however, the bat played a crucial role. As the game was near the end, he was given the ball and able to fly with great agility, which allowed him to score the winning goal. As Calder and Fletcher comment, "This particular story teaches us that everyone is important, everyone has a particular talent, and these talents can make a difference in the final outcome of events" (31). The energy of the game, then, comes from placing gifts against each other; as the cosmos is composed of opposing forces, so is lacrosse and all life (Arnold, *Gift* 105-109). Life and creation are enhanced through inclusion, diversity, and the exchange of gifts (Arnold, *Gift* 1-2). This story reveals the significance of preserving the unique gifts of all beings.

From a worldview that values relationships and the uniqueness of all beings, esteems peace, and focuses on nurturing the world for seven generations to come, it is possible to extract a different ethical orientation, namely, what I call an "ethic of preservative care." Instead of beginning from an abstract position, such as thinking about the greatest overall net good or one's rational duty, indigenous philosophy and Haudenosaunee insights embed us in concrete relationships with responsibilities and respect for the uniqueness and well-being of the one to whom you are relating. An ethic of preservative care begins, then, from relationships and genuine concern for nurturing the gifts of others. To be able to nurture the other, deep understanding must be present; going beyond surface awareness, receptivity and deep understanding need to be cultivated. Interactions are about enhancing the other's gifts and freeing the other from things that could be detrimental. The individual and community are not separate; the gifts of the individual bring well-being to the larger community,

and the flourishing larger community helps the individual to thrive. This is the foundation for sustained peace. By seeing the self as always interconnected and nourished by a complex web of relationships, preservative care aims to cultivate a harmony where all things can flourish. This is not just the absence of violence, but it is an active, continuous cultivation of peace through preserving others' gifts. To care in this way, and to shape one's life and community around these values, all aspects of creation take on more significance; preservative care and gratitude bring fullness to life as every interaction becomes more important.

### **WORRIES ABOUT APPROPRIATING INDIGENOUS CULTURES**

Existing alongside the above topics are worries about engaging and incorporating other cultures into one's work. The potential of cultural appropriation cannot be avoided, and concerns about it have existed in U.S. higher education in a sustained way for decades. For example, Edward Said has researched how one society can create "knowledge" about another culture through contact, research, and misrepresentation, especially through such areas as archeology and philology, and he has argued that such misrepresentations have sustained imperialistic processes: "What we must reckon with is a long and slow process of appropriation by which Europe, or the European awareness of the Orient, transformed itself from being textual and contemplative into being administrative, economic, and even military" (210). Said's approach has helped to shape other scholarship, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*:

Said's notion of 'positional superiority' is useful here for conceptualizing the ways in which knowledge and culture were as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength. Knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed. Processes for enabling these things to occur became organized and systematic. They not only informed the field of study referred to by Said as 'Orientalism' but other disciplines of knowledge and 'regimes of truth.' It is through these disciplines that the indigenous world has been represented to the West and it is through these disciplines that indigenous peoples often research for the fragments of ourselves which were taken, catalogued, studied and stored. (61)

A few examples of struggles against cultural appropriation follow: the early twentieth-century controversy surrounding Robert Bringham's translations of

Haida poems; the litigation in the 1980s surrounding Michael Heller's aerial photographs of an indigenous ceremonial dance that was sacred and private; and the 1999 case in Phillips County, Arkansas, against the theft of the African-American blues legacy (Rholetter 299-302). How may we think of cultural appropriation? Is there a way to engage a culture in a responsible way that avoids cultural appropriation? And how do the answers to these questions inform the practices of being an ally to indigenous nations and peoples? These are the questions this section will seek to answer in a brief way to help ensure more ethical treatment of indigenous ideas and the cultivation of healthier relationships across cultures. So while the approach here is not meant to be exhaustive in any sense, it is meant to offer a way to assess work for cultural appropriation.

Unfortunately, the idea of cultural appropriation is not well defined because the taking of another's culture or property is not straightforward in every situation. The unapproved possession of artifacts, such as bones or tools, provides a simpler case, but how does one "possess" language, for example, and what does it mean to put restrictions on the use of language or concepts? This starting point is limited, however, because of the colonial context and its concerns for the property rights of authors and Western views of property. Instead of getting stuck within the skein of Western concepts, it is better to understand cultural appropriation as having at least three characteristics: (1) "relationships among people," (2) a "wide range of modes through which" appropriation occurs, and (3) a wide practice (Ziff and Rao 3). The first point is, arguably, the most important; cultural appropriation takes place in relationships of unequal power, which includes such things as greater military and economic strength. The history of this imbalance is important. Cultural appropriation takes place to enhance the more powerful group, and this is unidirectional and, therefore, exploitative: from the perspective of the violated group, the exchange does not provide a benefit to its members, and the exchange often tends to have a coercive or non-voluntary dimension to it. Reciprocity is lacking. This leads to the second point, as the many modes can include archeologists studying a specific indigenous nation, or it can be the use of indigenous botanical knowledge to further pharmaceutical advancements and profits. The modes should not be limited, but they should be assessed based on exploitative practices, which means new modes of cultural appropriation will emerge as

people attempt to exploit others in new ways. The third point makes it clear that cultural appropriation is an ongoing phenomenon shaping popular culture, the business world, and academia. With these three points in mind, exploitation becomes an important focal point: as colonizers occupied and seized indigenous lands for their own benefit, similar seizures occur today that disregard the welfare, rights, and sovereignty of indigenous nations and peoples.

This emphasis on exploitation, and the lack of reciprocal benefit, is clear in various responses to cultural appropriations. For example, in his chapter condemning anthropologists and anthropological practices, Vine Deloria argues for an equitable relationship between indigenous research subjects and academia.

Every summer when school is out a veritable stream of immigrants heads into Indian country. From every rock and cranny in the East *they* emerge, as if responding to some primeval fertility rite, and flock to the reservations.... An anthropologist comes out to Indian reservations to make OBSERVATIONS... After the books are written, summaries of the books appear in the scholarly journals in the guise of articles. These articles "tell it like it is" and serve as a catalyst to inspire other anthropologists to make the great pilgrimage next summer. (*Custer Died* 78-79)

Not only do the anthropologists get things wrong and, in Deloria's assessment, play an uncritical role in the perpetuation of colonizing practices, but implied in his observation is also the problem of exploitation:

Several years ago an anthropologist stated that over a period of some twenty years he had spent, from all sources, close to ten million dollars studying a tribe of less than a thousand people! Imagine what that amount of money would have meant to that group of people had it been invested in buildings and businesses. There would have been no problems to study! (*Custer Died* 93)

The anthropologist receives funding to study a problem; the person in this role publishes articles and books on the topic. The publishers, journals, and colleges or universities gain money or prestige from the publications, and the scholar secures a better foothold in the field, may gain tenure through the publications, and adds to their professional reputation. Indigenous nations and peoples do not benefit, and often, the scholars have not consulted the indigenous group before publishing the "insights." There is no significant reciprocal benefit; these relationships are exploitative in nature.

Confronting cultural appropriation through the lens of exploitation and a lack of mutual benefit is present not only in Deloria's writings, but in practice. The first issue is direct engagement with indigenous peoples; in situations of anthropological research, for example, it has become more common to have strict research protocols and indigenous boards overseeing the practices, collection of data, and the interpretation of data (Kovach 141-155). For those writing books and articles, it is crucial to focus on indigenous publications and articles, using indigenous writers and scholars as the foundational source. This means respecting indigenous evaluations, guidance, values, concerns, and welfare. Instead of assuming positions of power and authority, the approach should be a deferential one marked by a deep desire to listen carefully and learn; and this means openness to being corrected, acknowledging mistakes, and correcting those mistakes. This has important implications for research: research is no longer about taking an objective view of a subject that is written about from a disembodied perspective. Instead, research and scholarship should take on a peacebuilding dimension. The question for those doing research is this: How will I use my research and communication of that research to build better relationships for all people affected by my scholarship, and how will I direct my research toward promoting sustained peace for all humans and nonhumans alike? A fundamental paradigm shift is needed: losing the naïve assumption that education and research are impartial and objective, while foregrounding the intention to make all research activity conform to a larger strategy for peacebuilding.

How, then, is it possible to reduce cultural appropriations? The answer may begin with violence, which has three clear dimensions: direct violence; cultural violence; and institutional violence (Galtung 291-305). This means that the cultivation of peace should focus on three different dimensions: direct peacebuilding, cultural peacebuilding, and institutional peacebuilding. Individuals need to bring peacebuilding behaviors into everything they do. Transformations in attitudes, beliefs, and values need to occur; cultures need to embrace and advance peacebuilding. Finally, institutions need to reorient themselves around missions, practices, and values that promote peacebuilding in every dimension of life. On the individual level, researchers need to approach research as an ally to indigenous peoples, seeking to infuse indigenous values into their research. This also means embedding research, communication of

findings, and service work within the context of colonization and working to challenge it. In the cultural dimension, this means believing indigenous values and history matter, paying attention to indigenous struggles for justice, and cultivating positive attitudes toward indigenous studies. In the institutional dimension, this means that educational institutions, peer reviewers, and publishers need to not only embrace indigenous values and respect them, but also seek to advance and publish writings on indigenous issues and ideas, being sure to be an ally in decolonization and peacebuilding practices. Following the ideas expressed above, to avoid cultural appropriation, it is important to honor interdependence and the many relational webs that sustain all of us. It is important to direct all research and publications toward sustained peace and to think about how it will help to ensure the thriving of all beings for seven generations. It is important to structure research and publications in a way that includes an ethic of preservative care, making sure that all research, publications, and teaching are not grounded in exclusionary, non-reciprocal practices, but also grounded in inclusive practices intent on nurturing the unique gifts of others for the mutual wellbeing of all those we encounter and for the betterment of future generations.

What all of this may look like in more detail is a conversation for a later date. Any conversation must be carried out in respectful collaborations with others intent on cultivating peace personally, institutionally, and beyond. The above orientation has offered, therefore, only broad brushstrokes. The affirmations presented in this paper can guide all dimensions of life, including opposition to cultural appropriation. The idea of cultural appropriation with its exploitative, non-reciprocal nature clearly opposes the affirmations offered in the sections above. If this is not enough for some readers, another approach may be helpful when thinking about how to support peacebuilding in the various realms identified by Galtung, an orientation offered in Anita L. Sanchez's *The Four Sacred Gifts*. Over two decades ago in 1994, a dream came to a Mohican man, Don Coyhis. Eventually, his dream, through consultations with elders, became the foundation for an international movement; it offered four sacred gifts to bring all humanity together and to heal the pains affecting international and personal relationships (Sanchez 1-28). Represented by a multicolored hoop symbolizing unity and interdependence, the first sacred gift given to every human being is the power of forgiveness. The second is the power to heal. The

third is the power of unity, and the fourth is the power of hope. Any personal, cultural, or institutional dimension that resists or undermines the four sacred gifts should be questioned and challenged, and this includes the practice of cultural appropriation that undermines the sacred gifts above. If one's life, research, education, and publications oppose these gifts or do not advance them, the issues should generate a level of suspicion and should be addressed in a healing way. In other words, it is time to hold ourselves accountable, our cultures accountable, and our institutions accountable. In every dimension, it is time to wage a courageous struggle for healthy peacebuilding, and it is time to hold each other accountable—in a peaceful, healing way—to make sure that life is better for those seven generations in the future. It is time to see research and all education as part of the peacebuilding process and to resist the exploitative dimensions of cultural appropriation that undermines it. Without such a paradigm shift, scholarship, education, and the interpersonal dimensions in academia will likely reproduce contexts and conditions supportive of cultural appropriation and exploitative, unsupportive practices.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

As seen in the first section describing the DoCD and the boarding school experience, U.S. history is grounded in colonizing practices that attempted to exterminate or subdue indigenous nations and peoples, a history leading to unjust institutions, practices, laws, and values that continue to shape the United States, especially through court decisions. To speak of justice and reform without addressing this history and its effects on the present is problematic. By not addressing such issues, critical analyses and attempts at social change are incomplete; the treatment of indigenous nations and peoples remains a blind spot. Second, without paying attention to these dimensions, there is the chance of replicating or mutating past injustices. The next three portions of this paper addressed dimensions of indigenous philosophy that should be affirmed in social struggles today. Instead of being defensive or reactive, affirmation is a good starting point for resistance. It is time to look beyond the status quo, its foundations, and the actions, beliefs, institutions, and values buttressing it. By turning to indigenous philosophy and by affirming its wisdom, change agents can embrace a different orientation that is more healing, one open to nurturing relationships, interdependence, sustained peace, gifts, and an ethic of

preservative care. The last section turned to the topic of cultural appropriation, which is grounded in an exploitative, non-reciprocal relationship. Guided by the three affirmations and the four sacred gifts, some possible criteria exist by which scholars and readers can address whether or not research, publications, and education are contributing to sustained peace or sustained violence. As cultural appropriation perpetuates sustained violence, it should be resisted in a way that honors indigenous values and wisdom, and this means that academia needs a paradigm shift: its focus should be on developing knowledge and practices that support sustained peace for all.

Not only is this essay about indigenous history and how indigenous philosophies can help to improve our lives and actions to change society, but the deeper philosophical issue is this: resistance and struggles for change should not begin in the negative, but in the affirmative. Social change should be grounded in a radical declaration: "Yes!" It concerns avoiding the negation already in the status quo that diminishes human and nonhuman beings, using them as a means to an end. This alternative approach affirms the best in life and thought that will help change agents to allow all beings to flourish. But it also concerns the affirmation to live out this approach in good times and bad; it is about serious commitment to something new, a way of being and relating that disrupts cultural, institutional, and direct forms of violence (Galtung 291-305). It is a way of living that chooses and nourishes cultural, institutional, and direct forms of peace: a way that moves beyond the absence of violence to cultivate peace in a sustained way for seven generations to come. As a society, negativity, belittling, anger, hatred, revenge, and the constant diminishment of others have become the norm; none of this helps to cultivate peace. Divisions and us-against-them mentalities do not help; guided by the Haudenosaunee example, it is time to offer words of peace and to sing songs of peace to all those around us. If we do not change soon, we may find that our aggression, resentments, entrenched hatred, and limited views of what counts as justice will have eclipsed the possibility of affirming, nurturing, and preserving anything at all. To try to change society for the better through the use of hatred and anger will, at best, bring more of the same, so let us begin with an affirmation that something better is possible. Therefore, let us begin all we do with an affirmation of sustained peace, preservative care, the unique gifts of all beings, and our inescapable interdependence.

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