

The (In)Visibility Paradox:
A Case Study of American Indian Iconography and Student Resistance
in Higher Education

by

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores American Indian student activist efforts to protect and promote American Indian education rights that took place during 2007-2008 at a predominantly white institution (PWI) which utilizes an American Indian tribal name as its institutional athletic nickname. Focusing on the experiences of five American Indian student activists, with supplementary testimony from three former university administrators, I explore the contextual factors that led to activism and what they wanted from the institution, how their activism influenced their academic achievement and long-term goals, how the institution and surrounding media (re)framed and (re)interpreted their resistance efforts, and, ultimately, what the university's response to student protest conveys about its commitment to American Indian students and their communities. Data was gathered over a seven-year period (2007-2014) and includes in-depth interviews, participant observation, and archival research. Using Tribal Critical Race Theory and Agenda Setting Theory, this study offers a theoretically informed empirical analysis of educational persistence for American Indian students in an under-analyzed geographic region of the U.S. and extends discussions of race, racism, and the misrepresentation and mis/treatment of American Indians in contemporary society.

Findings suggest the university's response significantly impacted the retention and enrollment of its American Indian students. Although a majority of the student activists reported feeling isolated or pushed out by the institution, they did not let this deter them from engaging in other social justice oriented efforts and remained dedicated to the pursuit of social justice and/or the protection of American Indian education rights

long after they left the institution. Students exercised agency and demonstrated personal resilience when, upon realizing the university environment was not malleable, responsive, or conducive to their concerns, they left to advocate for justice struggles elsewhere. Unfortunately for some, the university's strong resistance to their efforts caused some to exit the institution before they had completed their degree.

DEDICATION

For Teddy and Riana:

You inspired me to the very end.

Sólo le pido a Dios

Sólo le pido a Dios que el dolor no me sea indiferente,

Que la resaca muerte no me encuentre vacía y sola sin haber hecho lo suficiente.

Sólo le pido a Dios que lo injusto no me sea indiferente,

Que no me abofetee la otra mejilla después de que una garra me arañó esta suerte.

Sólo le pido a Dios que la guerra no me sea indiferente,

Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte toda la pobre inocencia de la gente.

Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte toda la pobre inocencia de la gente.

Sólo le pido a Dios que la engaña no me sea indiferente,

Si un traidor puede mas que unos cuantos que esos cuantos no lo olviden fácilmente.

Sólo le pido a Dios que el futuro no me sea indiferente,

Desauciado está el que tiene que marchar a vivir una cultura diferente.

Sólo le pido a Dios que la Guerra no me sea indiferente,

Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte toda la pobre inocencia de la gente.

Es un monstruo grande y pisa fuerte toda la pobre inocencia de la gente.

- León Gieco (1978)

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Introduction

Excerpt 1

*[I decided to go to MSU for graduate school because I just didn't want to go back to my undergraduate institution. I had already done it. I heard about MSU when] I was looking for jobs on the computer and I got a call from [a friend]. She said: I don't know what you think about [MSU] but there's this program, it's called [the Native Teacher Preparation Program] and I think you should apply for it. I was like: what kind of program? And I asked her more about it. And the more I asked her about it, [the more] I was like: that's what I want to do. That's **exactly** what I want to do! I want to go into teaching. I want to go back to the rez. I want to get a master's in education and specifically in special education. It was like out of nowhere and it was perfect. [But my experiences fighting against the loss of Native faculty, mentors, advisors, programs, and other services while at MSU wore me out] ... I graduated [from MSU] on a Friday. I moved out [of student housing] on Saturday. I was back home [on the rez] by Sunday afternoon. I left so fast that I didn't want to be there anymore. I didn't want to be on campus anymore. I didn't want to have anything to do with that. It had been so miserable in every possible way by the end that I was so happy to be done with it and to get out of the situation and to just leave and teach. I just wanted to go teach and be with my students and do more than I could there. [More] than anything I could try to attempt to do in that setting.*

Excerpt 2

I saw this huge exodus from the University. I saw people that I had worked with leave. I saw [my Native professor] leave. I saw [the Native American advisor in the ethnic student support office] leave. There were just these people on campus that were leaving and the people that [MSU was] bringing in were being treated just as awful too. [Even] the new [director of the American Indian resource Center] was really mistreated and actually left shortly after [she began]. She was pushed out too. I was pushed out [as a student and employee], she was pushed out, and [the administrative assistant for the Native Teacher Preparation Program] was pushed out. There was just a lot of pushing. There was a lot of just trying to get rid of people; making it hell for them on campus and making them want to leave. If they didn't leave, making them want to leave...And I saw that there was some other drama going on with [other groups] ...In the Latino community—I know there were some other things going on with different ethnic groups on campus, but nothing compared to, at that time, nothing compared to what was happening to Native programs and Native students.

Universities are increasingly positioning themselves as supporters of diversity and as institutions who welcome diverse perspectives yet many campuses remain inhospitable to American Indians. Unfortunately, as Carol Barnhardt (1994) has pointed out, information currently available about the experiences of [Native] students...and about the existing programs and policies for Native students, is primarily

quantitative (i.e., statistics on enrollment figures, completion rates, course enrollments, program costs). These statistics are used as the basis for making many decisions about programs and policies..., often with little contextual knowledge as to their meaning. (p. 119).

While there is growing scholarship focused on acquiring more contextual knowledge about the experiences, needs, and desires of Native students, as well as what leads to their persistence and graduation, through interview research and other qualitative approaches, there remains great need for more of this type of research. This case study seeks to add to that cadre of research.

The excerpts above were drawn from interviews with two American Indian student activists at a predominantly White university I refer to as Mountain State University. The students were part of a group that questioned university policies and decisions that imperiled American Indian education programs, faculty, and support services – all of which they believed are critical to Native student success. Their experiences, and those of their peers, in asserting their education rights, as Native peoples, and the university’s response to their activism, suggest there is much to be learned about how campus climate, administrator attitudes, and services for Native students impact retention, graduation, quality of life, and academic experiences. This study is a case study. It is not about American Indian student activism across the board. Rather, the context of Mountain State is unique in that it remains among the public universities identified in a 2005 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) press release issued by its Executive Committee as an institution that utilizes “mascots,

nicknames or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity or national origin.”¹ Therefore the following case study is about American Indian student activism when it is intended/seeking to protect education rights of Indigenous peoples at a predominantly White institution that utilizes an American Indian tribal name for its athletic teams.

This study is not just about mascots. The demands of the student activists extend far beyond simply calling for the eradication or respectful usage of the school’s athletic tribal namesake. With that said, I do focus a great deal on the athletic nickname. This is because the tribal nickname serves as a signifier of how certain practices can transform postsecondary institutions into overtly hostile environments. A tribal athletic nickname is a reflection of how American Indians are depicted on campus, rendered at once both visible and invisible in the milieu of higher education. In the case of Mountain State University, the nickname influences its institutional climate and is reflective of the climate toward people of color – and American Indians, in particular – and allows the university, and its alumni, to literally profit from a practice that interferes with the health and success of students.

The Role of Campus Climate on Educational Persistence.

¹ Later that same year MSU issued a letter to the NCAA in response to this claim, explaining its athletic nickname was respectful and honored the peoples the state is named after. The university additionally provided documentation that demonstrated it had permission from one of the state’s tribal bands to use its name and related iconography (documents on file with author).

The central focus of this case study is on how university administrator attitudes, policies, and decisions influence campus climate and, in turn, affect the persistence and experiences of American Indian students. Although racial segregation in U.S. high schools has increased, postsecondary institutions continue to become racially diverse and are likely to be where most students experience their first substantial interracial contact (Rankin & Reason, 2005). This is a testament to the power of public universities and colleges, which often welcome and tout the importance of diversity along myriad racial, sexual, and economic lines in their mission statements, but can be especially stressful for students of color who experience campus climate² much differently than their White counterparts (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Perhaps not surprisingly, research has found campus context plays an important role in influencing student persistence (see generally Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). That said, students of color are more likely to report experiencing harassment³ and the perception of campus climate as more racist, hostile and less accepting of minority groups than Caucasian students (even though White students recognize racial harassment at similar rates as students of color) (Rankin & Reason, 2005). Unfortunately much of the studies on campus climate and achievement have focused primarily on the experiences of women, African Americans and Latinos/as at pre-dominantly White institutions (McCabe, 2009; Solórzano , Ceja, & Yosso, 2000)

² Here I am using Rankin and Reason's (2005) definition of campus climate where "campus climate" is understood as not only a function of what one has personally experienced but also as influenced by perceptions of how members of the academy are regarded on campus (p. 52).

³ Defined as any offensive, hostile, or intimidating behavior that interferes with learning (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 43).

leaving little known about the experiences of American Indian students who are now enrolled in postsecondary education at higher rates than in the past.

Comparing enrollment and graduation rates.

American Indians now account for 1.1% of total enrollment in colleges and universities, but just 0.5 percent of faculty members at degree-granting institutions (Wiedeman, 2008). In 2008, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported the number of American Indians and Alaska Natives enrolled in higher education more than doubled in the past thirty years (Wiedeman, 2008). This increase in enrollment is reflective of a larger trend in undergraduate enrollment across the board. By 2010 undergraduate enrollment in public institutions had increased going from 10.5 million students in 2000 to 13.7 million, a 30% increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012c). Such an increase in postsecondary enrollment for American Indian/Alaska Native students is important for tribal nation building. As tribal nations continue to strengthen their infrastructure, systems of governance, health care, education systems and other areas, many have stated a desire for educated citizens who can not only fill these positions but can lead these initiatives. However important enrollment in higher education is, what many are now concerned with is ensuring Native students not only enroll but graduate with the skill sets necessary to serve their communities.

Unfortunately, postsecondary attrition rates for Native students continue to be a challenge. Of the data available on the experiences of American Indian students in postsecondary education, Tierney (1992) suggests their experiences are influenced by an attitude of “official encouragement and institutional discouragement.” Although Tierney

made this statement in 1992, there remains substantial evidence to suggest this continues to be the case. That is, while universities publicly proclaim to welcome Indigenous⁴ students, their policies, practices, and overall climate serve to present barriers to their academic success.

Although enrollment is increasing, American Indians remain least likely to be enrolled in colleges or universities and simultaneously experience the lowest graduation rates from postsecondary institutions (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). Only 52% of American Indian/Alaska Native students who graduated in 2004 enrolled in college immediately after high school compared to 74% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Of those who enrolled in a four-year institution in 2004, only 39% completed a bachelor's degree by 2010, compared to 62% of white students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). These numbers have remained relatively stable. In 2012, 39% of American Indian/Alaska Native students who started in 2005 as first-time, full-time students at four-year institutions graduated, compared to 60% of White students (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). What's more, of those who attend postsecondary institutions, almost 77% attend public two- and four-year colleges and universities. This is important because public institutions are more likely to utilize American Indian mascots, athletic nicknames, and imagery in an ahistorical, racially

⁴ I generally use the term "Indigenous" when referring to the descendants of the first inhabitants of the Americas. However, out of respect and recognition for the diverse forms of self-identification of those who participated in this study, I sometimes use the terms First Nations, Indigenous, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native American, Indian and Native interchangeably.

hostile, or abusive manner – regardless of whether Indigenous students have objected to its use (American Psychological Association, 2005; Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012; Hofmann, 2005; National Congress of American Indians, 2013; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005).

Therefore in order to improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Native students, it is important to understand their needs and experiences in higher education. Campus climate is but one important factor influencing American Indian/Alaska Native student achievement. Research has also found lack of mentors, lack of finances, and lack of hard funding for Native-serving programs as often-overlooked but important factors influencing persistence (Barnhardt, 1994; Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). Moreover, culture-related extracurricular activities, relations with faculty who have an understanding of Indigenous cultures and histories, and financial support from either personal or institutional sources have also been found to influence Native student persistence (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). Factors such as access to culturally relevant programs and curriculum as well as receiving academic support through counseling, tutoring, and mentoring are equally important for persistence (Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). Still, it is important to note that “other research has pointed to the prevalence of racism and policies inconsistent with the goal of supporting Indigenous students across college campuses” as influencing campus context and potentially interfering with student success (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012, p. 65).

Mascots.

The presence of Indigenous mascots adds another layer of complexity to campus context. Research has found the low number of American Indian students enrolled in postsecondary education can exacerbate feelings of isolation, loneliness, or not belonging (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). Such feelings become increasingly pervasive for students enrolled in institutions that utilize Indigenous mascots and iconography. This is because these students may be forced to deal with a proliferation of inaccurate, stereotypical, and otherwise racist depictions of themselves, as Native peoples, and their culture, on a daily basis. And while some public universities have sought to depict their Indian mascot and/or iconography in a manner they believe is respectful, fewer still have actively sought to educate the public about the accurate history, experiences, struggles, concerns, and beliefs of real-life American Indian peoples. As Brayboy, Fann, Castagno and Solyom (2012) put it,

In an era when individuals in the United States drive Cherokees, Dakotas, and Pontiacs, and when the U.S. Congress is disheartened by the loss of a Kiowa, Comanche, Blackhawk, or Apache attack helicopter, there appears to be little attention paid to the lives of the Cherokee, Dakota, Kiowa, or Apache peoples (p. 65).

The lack of understanding about the concerns and challenges facing real-life American Indians is concerning for two reasons. First, the general public is often under- or ill-informed on important issues facing American Indian peoples. Since the majority of American people may have no direct, personal experience with American Indians

(Pewewardy, 1994), they may base their knowledge on what little they have learned in schools, books, and media (Harjo, 2006; King, 2005; Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 1994). This leaves American Indian students, and their programs, vulnerable to the material and political interests of institutional leaders who may have learned little, if any, accurate or comprehensive information about this diverse population. Second, lack of comprehensive information about American Indians leaves students vulnerable and defenseless against peers and university fans who may take up race-based mascots in stereotypical, aggressive, racist, offensive, and ignorant ways (King, 2005; Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 1994). The behaviors of uninformed or poorly informed fans, combined with sparsely informed administrators whose decisions may trample or ignore the rights and challenges of Native communities, can serve to create a racially hostile campus environment. Such campus context can affect the health, academic experiences and achievement of Native students – including, in some cases, whether they remain enrolled.

About this study.

This case study explores the protest efforts and real-life experiences of eight individuals who struggled daily with the paradox of attending a university that embraces American Indian mascots and iconography while failing to recognize the real-life experiences, histories, voices, and concerns of its real-life Indigenous peoples. In order to understand the student's university experiences and struggle for access to education in a non-violent and hostile environment, I combined document analysis, participant observation, and in-depth interviews. I began by examining the contextual factors that led students to resist university policy and decisions regarding American Indian programs

and services. Next, I examined what the students wanted from the university and the communication strategies used to approach and inform administrators of their desires. Of course, this necessitated an examination of how the university interpreted and/or responded to their advocacy/demands (measured through media reports on student protest efforts), which I have included. Their resistance efforts, sustained over a year, from 2007-2008, took a heavy toll on many of them. Thus I also examine the consequences faced during their time at the university, and after, for their decision to engage in public and private forms of protest.

Data for this study was gathered from 2007-2014 and coded during the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014. Findings were analyzed by combining an offshoot of Critical Race Theory – Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) – with Agenda Setting Theory (AST). With foundations in law and education, TribalCrit seeks to ensure research is contextual, culturally relevant and that it honors the self-determination and sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2005). Agenda Setting Theory examines how media can serve to advance the interests of powerful political and social leaders by promoting or upholding assumptions about a particular group (Griffin, 2003). Although AST research has rarely been used to advance social-justice goals, pairing AST’s focus on media influence with TribalCrit provided for a robust framing and analysis of data within a social-justice framework. For more information on my research methods, please refer to appendix A.

What were the students protesting and why does it matter?

The student activists listed several university policies and decisions as factors that influenced their decision to protest. These factors were selected because the students believed they whittled away important resources necessary for American Indians to graduate and thrive in higher education. They accused MSU of:

- Threatening to withhold important support and funding for American Indian related campus and community events including the annual pow wow;
- Violating various memorandums of understanding between the university and its neighboring tribes by terminating a nationally-acclaimed Native Teacher Preparation Program, which prepared American Indians to teach in tribal communities, without consulting with or informing the tribes;
- Refusal to retain important American Indian-serving faculty, staff, and allies;
- Failure to replace key academic support staff and administrators in a timely fashion, and;
- Lax enforcement of the athletic nickname and respectful treatment of American Indians on campus.

The students argued all of these factors fostered a hostile campus environment that not only left them feeling unwelcome and that interfered with their academic success. The activists originally sought to work directly with administrators in private meetings to address their concerns. However, university leaders often responded to the students' request to speak to them, as a collective, by refusing to meet with them as a group and forcing individual students to meet with them instead. During those meetings higher administrators sought to dominate the conversation and/or dismiss their claims, accusing

them of being unnecessarily aggressive in matters that, according to the administrators, warranted no concern, and forcefully ended the meetings.

To the students it appeared their struggles and concerns had fallen on less than sympathetic ears so they chose to voice them in a more public manner. They held peaceful protests in the hopes of: (1) raising awareness of how the university (mis)treats real-life American Indians on campus; (2) calling for an investigation into the treatment of American Indians on campus, and; (3) holding the university accountable for its decisions. Although administrators chose to also ignore these efforts, the protests generated modest interest among media and surrounding community members. Students used this opportunity to meet with reporters and explain that they were motivated to protest, not out of a desire to needlessly shame their university or to protect their individual interests, but because they were concerned for the collective well-being of Native students and for the future opportunities, programs and support structures available to the next generation of students. The education struggles faced by Indigenous students, they explained, represent their struggles to be seen as human, as students, as scholars, and as people rather than simply as mascots or as commodified symbols of a time and peoples long forgotten.

Organization and what I hope you take away from this project.

The students in this study embody many of the academic and social struggles faced by Indigenous peoples in the U.S. for centuries. For many, their resistance efforts held personal significance because the situations they faced imperiled their existence as students. The use of the tribal namesake, and its related iconography, as well as the

school's subsequent treatment of its Native faculty, staff, and students undermined them as budding scholars, as members of sovereign Indigenous nations, and as human beings. Some scholars have commented that often what rests on the line for American Indian activists is not just a question of representation but of self-worth, it is a matter of "securing some reason for remaining alive" (Sayer, 1997). In this case, remaining alive meant seeking a reason to remain enrolled and achieving at Mountain State University.

"Like the miner's canary the Indian marks the shift from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere and our treatment of Indians even more than our treatments of minorities reflects the rise and fall of our democratic faith" (Cohen, 1953, p. 390). The educational struggles faced by the students in this study represent more than theoretical discussions of power, rights, and justice. They embody the contemporary failure of universities to promote the retention, persistence, and graduation of American Indian students. Not only that, but as many activists pointed out, the additional use of inaccurate race-based mascots make a mockery of Native peoples and their cultures and open the door for prejudicial (mis)treatment by the dominant cultural against, not just American Indian nations, but all other ethnic minority groups (American Psychological Association, 2005; Banks, 1993; Steinfeldt, Foltz, LaFollette, White, Wong & Steinfeldt, 2012). The students in this study engaged in comprehensive efforts to inform their institution that the use of American Indian mascots and the concomitant (mis)treatment and (mis)representation of real-life American Indian peoples at predominantly White institutions places the morals and ethics of the Western university system at stake. Although the university may not be able to fully control how fans take up Indian

nicknames and imagery, their decision to utilize these types of mascots, in the face of opposition from Native peoples, make them complicit in promoting inaccurate and harmful depictions of minoritized peoples and capitalizes on their oppression and marginalization. They additionally pointed out that *all* universities have the responsibility to promote accurate and socially relevant information and to maintain racially inclusive and respectful learning environments yet, they reasoned, MSU cannot fulfill this responsibility if the campus continues to serve as an avenue to showcase racist practices.

This book begins by offering a detailed historical background of the university and the issues in question. The first chapter is concerned with the social, political, and economic relationship between American Indians, the state, and the university. The second chapter provides an in-depth look at the events surrounding the protests and the stakes associated with university decisions. It begins to outline what I believe is a call for a type of student bill of rights (based loosely on the idea of a patient's bill of rights) as the activists identified five basic rights they felt every Indigenous student deserves.

1. The right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs;
2. The right to access culturally informed academic and student support services;
3. The right to be recognized and respected as members of a political, not just racial, group;
4. The right to attend institutions that feel safe and not hostile to their presence, and;
5. The right to be seen as viable, present, “modern” human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects.

Although they are listed as discrete rights they are meant to be understood as interrelated and interdependent.

The third chapter explores the students' desire for conflict resolution and administrative competence in intercultural communication. The students' communication approach and expectations for conflict resolution was influenced by their identity, as Native peoples, and was not always understood or embraced by university leaders. This chapter explores the resulting epistemological, ontological, and axiological tensions that arose when the students sought to work directly with university leaders, using their particular individual and cultural styles of communication, to address their concerns. Chapter four examines the role of the media in framing student struggles and concerns to the larger public. I address the degree and nature of reporting and what it means for advancing discussions on American Indian struggles for educational justice. Chapter five offers a comprehensive look at how and why the student's believe the school's tribal athletic nickname influences campus climate and educational rights. They argue the university is concerned more with controlling the image of Native peoples as caricatures and symbols rather than with the educational rights and education of its Indigenous students and ensuring campus remains a safe space for all.

Chapter six is concerned with the personal cost of resistance. When university's disregard, silence, or otherwise subvert the voices of student activists by publicly minimizing their voices and concerns, this can not only present negative short-term effects but detrimental long-term effects for the students involved. The physical, psychological, and professional effects of activism continue to reverberate long after

students leave the institution and can manifest in compromised professional opportunities, racial battle fatigue, and other personal challenges to intimate relationships. I conclude with a discussion on what universities can do to better support their Native students.

This case study involves American Indian students advocating/demanding the right to determine how they are included and depicted in higher education. If this study demonstrates anything it is that American Indian student activists are both courageous and resilient. Their actions serve as the embodiment of real-life struggles that have been faced by Indigenous peoples in the U.S. for centuries. Although not all who were involved graduated. Like the student in the second excerpt, some found themselves feeling pushed out of the institution before they had a chance to complete their degree, through the use of humor and other creative strategies they found ways to help each other persist, as long as possible, and to amplify their already marginalized voices. Their experiences urge us to consider how Native peoples are represented in college campuses and what happens when the iconography associated with them differs from their real-life experiences and concerns.

The activists raise complex and perhaps controversial questions. Should institutions be held responsible for ensuring a friendly learning environment that strives not only to *enroll* but to *graduate* American Indian students at significant or meaningful rates? Do public institutions have a responsibility to ensure they support and publicize research and practices that the contemporary experiences and challenges facing American Indians? And, to what extent do American Indian students themselves have a right to

determine how they are depicted on campus? As you might imagine, answers to these questions are complicated and not often prioritized or easily entertained by fans, administrators, or supporters. Nevertheless they remain pertinent if we are to achieve parity in the area of American Indian education.

As one student put it, it is important to force administrators and the public to grapple with these difficult questions as they have the power to help ameliorate or change the ways universities support Native students. It is also important for Native students to share their experiences, “not just for ourselves but for those who will come after us. So they don’t feel so alone in their struggles. So they know of the struggles we faced.” The students in this study were not passive reactionaries to their surroundings. Instead they actively engaged the university and surrounding community, seeking to dialogue and propose alternative solutions for what would make the university more inviting to Native peoples and more conducive to their success.

What follows is a complicated and rather unhappy tale. It is a record of how an institution’s general policies and internal decisions served to further marginalize and push out members of historically marginalized and oppressed groups. It reveals how people of color are continuously subjected to racial (and gender) inequalities in White-dominated institutions. It is a reminder that the coexistence of power and subjection in academic spaces is important to explore because it adds another layer of complexity to the context of contemporary American society (Chase, 2008). Importantly, by examining how factors such as race, power, material interests, and differing notions of justice influence campus context this study addresses the role of the institution in influencing the

experiences of Native students and interrogates its responsibility to the very students it has outwardly dedicated itself to serving.

Part I

How Students Framed Their Struggle:

The Desire for Self-Determination and Education Rights

Chapter 1 – Setting the Stage

Campus climate and the conditions that led to student protest

The subject of diversity, of its importance and value, has become ubiquitous with modern day universities and colleges. With students of color enrolling at higher rates,⁵ many postsecondary institutions have seen fit to proclaim their desire to nurture, foster, and welcome racial, sexual, religious and other forms of diversity. Perhaps it is because of the public nature of the majority of these institutions that many have chosen to align themselves with language that reflects the growing public from whom they draw political and financial support (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Some have even sought to formalize their position by stating their commitment to diversity in their mission statements.

Today's scholarship on the veracity of mission statements remains divided. That is, some scholars argue mission statements provide important information by outlining the goals of the institution, serving as blueprints for both future decisions, policies, and programs and upholding the values, morals and ethics for those affiliated with the institution (Davis, Ruhe, Lee & Rajadhyaksha, 2007; Dumas-Hines, Cochran & Williams, 2001; Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Others believe mission statements serve as window dressing or a kind of "rhetorical pyrotechnics." In other words, they are "pretty to look at perhaps, but of little structural consequence" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p.

⁵ From 1976 to 2011, the percentage of Hispanic students rose from 4% to 14%, the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students rose from 2% to 6%, the percentage of Black students rose from 10% to 15%, and the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students rose from 0.7% to 0.9%. During the same period, the percentage of White students fell from 84% to 61%. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013; Digest of Education Statistics, 2012; NCES 2014-015, Chapter 3).

456). This cynical view is based on the belief that mission statements serve as little more than a collection of stock phrases, intentionally written to equivocate the university's stance as aspirational. Rather than providing a clear sense of what/how the university seeks to realize its mission, such statements provide nothing more than flexibility by communicating, "nothing [is] beyond the reach of the organization...and sidestep[ing] any effort at prioritizing current activities or future initiatives" (Morphew & Hartley, 2006, p. 458). The degree to which mission statements and, more importantly, universities deliver the anticipated results has become an increasingly important question given that "simply having a mission statement for political or accreditation purposes without institutional, operational reinforcement of the statement" may not necessarily lead to the end described in the mission (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007, p. 101). Scholars are now turning toward evaluations of campus climate to find the answer.

According to Rankin and Reason (2005), although racial segregation in U.S. high schools has increased, postsecondary institutions continue to become more racially diverse. This means many students are likely to experience their first substantial interracial contact when they arrive on college campuses. Campus climate then becomes an important area of understanding for higher education administrators, policy makers, and researchers (Rankin & Reason, 2005). In a study surveying over 7,000 students enrolled in public university and colleges across the nation, Rankin and Reason found

that students of color experience campus climate⁶ much differently than their White counterparts. For example, students of color experience harassment⁷ and perceive the climate as more racist, hostile and less accepting of minority groups at higher rates than Caucasian students (even though White students recognize racial harassment at similar rates as students of color). This can seem counter to its mission to support diversity many universities espouse. Although some schools are trying to address these issues by offering programs and additional services intended to support the success of its diverse student groups, some campuses do more than others. What's more, while public universities and colleges generally claim to value diversity along myriad racial, sexual, and economic lines a few claim a *specific* commitment and relationship with a particular political/racial group: American Indians. The overt commitment to this particular group usually arises as a result of the university's decision to utilize Indigenous peoples as athletic nicknames or mascots. The remainder of this chapter focuses on the context of where this study is situated and how campus climate affected the American Indian students in this study.

Mountain State University.

There are currently 566 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. and approximately 400 non-federally recognized tribes (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). In 2010, there were 5,220,579 American Indians and/or Alaska Natives (alone or in

⁶ Here I am using Rankin and Reason's (2005) definition of campus climate where "campus climate" is understood as not only a function of what one has personally experienced but also as influenced by perceptions of how members of the academy are regarded on campus (p. 52).

⁷ Defined as any offensive, hostile, or intimidating behavior that interferes with learning (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 43).

combination), comprising 1.7% of the total U.S. population of 308.7 million. Among this group 2,932,248 (0.9%) were American Indian and/or Alaska Native alone and 2,288,331 (0.7%) were American Indian/Alaska Native in combination (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). The population of American Indians/Alaska Natives (alone or in combination) increased by 27% between 2000 and 2010, compared to the 10% increase among the overall U.S. population (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, 2012). As the American Indian/Alaska Native population increases, so too do concerns about the social and political justice struggles they face.

In 2013 *Indian Country Today* reported that the Native population has, over the past several decades, migrated from rural reservations to big cities. Today roughly seven of 10 American Indians and Alaska Natives reside in a metropolitan area compared with 45% in 1970 and 8% in 1940 (Indian Country Today Media Network, 2013). Moreover in 2011, 30% of American Indians/Alaska Natives (alone) lived in poverty, compared to 16% of the entire nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). American Indians are also the population least likely to be enrolled in colleges or universities and often experience the lowest graduation rates from postsecondary institutions.

The state where this research takes place is home to seven federally recognized tribal nations. However, a significant proportion of the state's Indians live and work in urban centers and represent tribal groups from throughout the U.S (Lewis, 2014). The state itself is named after a group of Indigenous peoples of the state. Prior to the arrival of both military forces and Christian pioneers, the Indigenous population was flourishing with over 20,000 peoples who comprised distinct societies (Lewis, 2014). However, after

a series of bloody rampages initiated largely by the invading colonizing forces, who wanted to settle desirable land areas, those numbers whittled down significantly. In 1970, the Indian population was 11,273 – an increase from 6,961 in 1960. In 1980 there were 19,158 Native Americans (a number close to approaching the estimated 20,000 Indians inhabiting the state at the time of White settlement). According to the most recent Census data, in 2010, there are now over 50,064 peoples residing in the state who identify as American Indian,⁸ comprising 1.8% of the total state population (United States Census Bureau, 2010).

However increasing the Indigenous population may be, Indigenous peoples and their communities remain largely out of the public eye. A cursory search, using Lexis Nexis and NewsBank,⁹ of the two most prominent newspapers in the valley reveals stories about American Indians are featured sparingly and generally to the mostly non-Native readership under specific circumstances. Over the past five years, from 2009-2014, Native peoples are mentioned in news stories that fall under the following five categories: stories of cultural and economic deficit; stories of the offbeat or cultural interest; stories of land and mineral resource management; stories of violence, assault, and crime; and, stories of public (mis)representation.

⁸ Race alone or in combination with one or more other races. Please note: this census reported Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander as a separate category.

⁹ Although a content analysis would provide deeper insight on the relationship between these articles and media representations of American Indians, the focus of this search was simply to provide a small snapshot of the context in which American Indians exist and are framed to other (non-Native) groups within the state. I discuss media representations of the issues raised by the activists in more detail in chapter 4. Furthermore, the themes presented in this section do not vary greatly from themes covered during the years of activism featured in this study (2007-2008).

Stories of deficiency are usually framed around language loss (the need to “save” languages) and education deficit (the present achievement “gap” as a result of low test scores and low graduation rates). This theme includes discussing issues affecting American Indian communities from an impoverishment perspective. For example, such stories often refer to high rates of poverty among American Indian nations and suggest there is need for federal financial assistance in order to improve the living conditions. Other stories go on to frame the need for economic development in a way that actively restricts the presence of casino gaming within the state. Stories of the offbeat or cultural interest are generally limited to the unearthing and illegal sale of human remains/cultural artifacts and various pow wow, art, or other cultural celebrations (though stories of the latter kind are very few). Stories of land and mineral resource management include reporting on natural/mineral resources or the storage of radioactive waste on tribal lands. Stories of violence/crime report various murders, homicides, and assault of Indigenous peoples and, less frequently, cover the disproportionate rates of incarceration or interaction with the justice system faced by this population. Finally, stories of public (mis)representation center largely on the long-standing debate as to whether the state’s flagship university should retain use of a local Indian band’s tribal name for its athletic teams. Occasionally, and to a much smaller extent, these stories also mention struggles in asserting voting rights and issues of public interest such as changes in leadership at the state and tribal level. For example, the firing of a prominent Indian leader as the state director of Indian affairs led to several publications. Other stories under this category offered a critique led by Indigenous peoples on how they are depicted in the media. For

example, a few stories in 2012 addressed frustration with the stereotypical and monolithic representation of Indigenous peoples in *Disney's* newly released *The Lone Ranger* and the year before that, several stories featured objection to the media's referencing of international terrorist Osama Bin Laden by the name of well-known American Indian leader Geronimo.

Mountain State University is the state's flagship institution. Not unlike many of its public university counterparts, its mission statement reflects a rhetoric of support for diversity claiming to "zealously preserve academic freedom, promote diversity and equal opportunity, and respect individual beliefs." It is its devotion to promoting diversity that the Native students in this study, and many who have come before and after them, have questioned. Before I go on to describe the specific instances that led to student resistance efforts, it is important to understand the foundation upon which the university rests as this history continues to be reflected in the treatment and valuation of its Native students to this very day.

Mountain State University exists largely as a result of the forced displacement of the state's first inhabitants. After having been operated out of private homes, and later out of a local high school, the university was established in 1894 when Congress granted sixty acres of land from a military Fort on the east bench of the valley to the university (Peterson, 1992). The military Fort had historical ties to the Indigenous peoples of the state as it was established in 1862 to secure mail routes to California from "hostile" Indians (Voyles, 2006). State historical records suggest Indian attacks on colonizing and military forces were the result of desperation and impoverishment. These attacks

involved the Shoshone who were described as “desperately poor” and prone to theft. The documents go on to suggest they lacked self-control around “the possessions of the white men.” According to these records “horses and guns were a temptation too great to resist” (Utah Education Network, n.d.). The Fort was also responsible for “keep[ing] an eye” on the Christian faction that had settled in the valley and who were “reportedly destroying court records and committing other crimes” (Pedersen, 1967, p. iv; UEN, n.d.; Hibbard, 1999). Later the Fort was used to train military recruits and to house prisoners-of-war during World Wars I and II (UEN, n.d.).

In 1906, Mountain State University was granted thirty-two more acres and in 1934 it was granted another sixty-one (Balls, 2011). Today Mountain State University is considered not only the flagship university but the oldest and largest institution of higher education in its state. The campus is largely situated on a vast mountain bench, overlooking a major metropolitan area, and is approximately three miles, or eight minutes, from the state’s major downtown area (Pedersen, 1967, p. iii). With expansion of the campus in the early 2000’s primarily driven by the need to house athletes visiting the state for a worldwide athletic event, additional residential dorms and other university offices have been built around the original military base site (Roche, 1997).

Although it is built on traditional Native lands, the physical presence of real-life American Indians on campus remains minimal. While the school has over 30,000 enrolled students, Native students are the lowest enrolled population. In fall 2013, 145 American Indian students were enrolled, comprising less than 0.5% of the total enrollment population (Office of Budget & Institutional Analysis, 2013). That same year

the university reported it had never seen enrollment surpass 188 Native American students in the past five years (Office of Budget & Institutional Analysis, 2013). Though the university does not provide detailed information on the graduation rate of its Native students, available data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, which compiles education data for postsecondary institutions across the nation, placed the graduation rate of Native students at MSU at 40% in 2006 (compared to the 39% national average).¹⁰ Still the Native presence on campus remains strong in the form of tribal symbols, imagery, and a local tribal name which permeate virtually every inch of the sprawling 1,534-acre campus.

History of the Tribal Nickname.

On April 18, 2006 MSU renewed its application for its trademark circle and feather logo, which had been designed to represent the drum of its tribal namesake (Reg. No. 3,081,407). The logo, along with the tribal nickname, is among the “last of Native American names, traditions, and imagery being used, at least so prominently, by colleges across the country” (Speckman, 2012). In its application, the university explained it had been using the symbol since at least 1975 and intended to use it to brand clothing and other university-related merchandise. The trademark was approved and remains among one of the most popular insignia on university apparel including underwear, garden knomes, and shot glasses as well as various promotional materials (Speckman, 2012). As

¹⁰ Graduation rate of full-time, first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates within 150% of normal time to program completion. Data only available for the 2006 cohort.

a result of the use of the combined tribal name and trademark, Native Americans remain one of the hardest working demographics at the university without even having to be physically present. Their imagery is now the legal property of the university and is used to generate millions of dollars in revenue annually.

However these university practices have not been uncontested. Some Indigenous peoples insist the use of the logo raises questions about education and respect (Speckman, 2012). A feature story published in 2012 in MSU's alumni magazine features an interview with a member of the university-affiliated tribe who explains that drums and feathers are sacred, spiritual items for many Indigenous peoples. Their use is generally accompanied by sacred ceremony in which particular tribal and/or spiritual leaders are present and in which significant preparation has taken place. "A drum is considered the heartbeat of the people," he explains, while feathers "complete a ceremony, during which dancers wearing them are expressing themselves to the creator, who uses birds as a means of carrying songs and prayers between heaven and earth" (Wodraska, 2013). In other words, as one tribal leader put it, many Native peoples regard these symbols "with a reverence unknown to even the most ardent [MSU] fans...they are symbols that should be honored with as much respect as the Book of Mormon, the cross or a rosary" (Wodraska, 2013).

Unfortunately the sacred aspects of the symbol may be lost on university leadership or fans ignorant to this knowledge and who regularly take up the name and logo in a hostile and abusive manner. It is not uncommon to see fans pairing logo-infused

team wear with faux headdresses/war bonnets,¹¹ face paint (“war” paint), and other stereotypical merchandise on game day. In 2012 the Associate Vice President of Diversity and Equity at MSU explained that such behaviors can be commonplace on game day and become disconcerting for Native students who stumble upon them. For example, a young Native student confided in him an example of how this happens. She recounted a time when she had been on her way to the campus American Indian Resource Center on the day of an important football game. On her way, she spotted a teepee in a tailgate lot and “believing it might be a new location for [the] Native American blessing that she was on her way to witness [...]” stopped to visit (Speckman, 2012). What she discovered was a “‘completely inebriated man’ who was dressed as a Native American, marching around and doing his ‘Indian holler’” (Speckman, 2012).

I will expand on the significance of these behaviors shortly but before I move on to the individual ways such imagery is (ab)used, it is important to note that the university’s decision to embrace such symbols inspire this type of fan behavior. Moreover, when this type of behavior is exhibited the university may choose to not intervene, educate the individual, or correct such behavior. This has become evident as numerous Native students have reported that when they voice their concern to gate

¹¹ It has been said that, for those tribes who use feathered headdresses, these are generally used for traditional religious or ceremonial purposes and are generally constructed from eagle feathers (although other types of feathers can be used) and are considered objects of great importance and honor. Each feather on the headdress is earned and bestowed by an elder, spiritual and/or tribal leader, representing an individual act of valor or accomplishment. For this reason, each feather is, in fact, considered a sacred object somewhat comparable as the communion host is to Christians (Nihewan Foundation, 2002).

officials the fan's First Amendment rights prevail (Speckman, 2012). Thus today's American Indian MSU student must reconcile what it means to be both rendered an object for consumption and to be ignored or misunderstood when voicing one's opposition.¹²



Figure 1. Sports fan wearing a headdress and face paint at a sporting event (Speckman, 2012)

Mountain State's commitment to Indigenous imagery remains entrenched in its historical roots with minimal effort to educate leaders or fans on its significance or

¹² I recognize the importance and utility that academic norms of writing have. Included in these norms is an emphasis on offering written citations that correspond to claims made. However, I also recognize the irony, conflict and, if I may be so bold as to say – violence, this practice can have on the voices and experiences of people of color. Oftentimes, as is the case with mainstream media, the experiences, viewpoints and words of people of color get filtered and (re)presented through the personal and cultural lens of the journalist assigned to cover the story. In order to preserve the spirit of the claims that I am making, and in the spirit of the theoretical frameworks I am using to guide this study, rather than solely offering citations of the stories and incidents referred to throughout this study, I try to include images and the direct words of those involved in these struggles. I understand some of the images I have chosen to include can be emotionally disturbing and apologize for any discomfort this decision may cause.

responsible use. During the early years of the 20th century, the school, much like its academic counterparts, sought to build an institution that was not only competitive in education but also in sports. As other institutions across the nation adopted mascots and nicknames in reference to their athletic teams, MSU closely followed suit (Mudrow, 2007). Founded in 1850, it took MSU little more than 70 years to embrace the presence of the peoples that had historically inhabited the lands on which the university was built and that had been forcibly removed in favor of U.S. military and elite academic interest.

By the late 1920's the university's athletic players, including its football and basketball teams, were conservatively referred to by two names. The first was by the English name attributed to the Indigenous peoples who occupied vast parts of the state and the northern parts of the states bordering it. The other was the more colorful, and racist: "redskins."¹³ Campus newspaper archives reveal sparse usage of the tribal name began as early as 1921, while its yearbook archives indicate usage of the term "redskins" began around 1926. However, from 1927 onward the school's student athletes began to regularly be referred to by both names (Mudrow, 2007). Thus are the origins of the paradox wherein the presence of American Indian symbols, imagery, "legends," and

¹³ There is much debate around the origin and meaning of the term "redskin." Some argue the word was historically used, even by Indigenous peoples, as a harmless adjective to refer to the literal differences in skin color among various ethnic and social groups. Others point to the evolution of the term and its more sinister legacy in which various U.S. government agencies issued decrees and offered financial incentives for the racial and ethnic genocide of men, women, and children considered to be "redskin." Suffice it to say, many Indigenous peoples consider the term to be pejorative and offensive and have adopted a personal and public stance against its use as a mascot or team name. Out of respect for this history, I try to use the term as sparingly as possible; using it strictly to make the point that Mountain State University's legacy reveals the people of the state readily embraced the term as apropos for its athletic teams.

tribal name became embraced and proliferated campus athletics and publications while the physical presence of enrolled American Indian students did not.

In the 1970s, as university administrators became sensitive to mounting concerns of tribal members across the nation regarding the racist usage of Native American mascots, they attempted to address the offensive nickname. In 1972 university officials elected to stop using the dual nickname. They dropped “redskins” and formally adopted the tribal name as the institution’s sole and official nickname (Official Website of Utah Athletics, 2012). However this decision did not minimize the university’s continued exploitation of Indigenous symbols and imagery for entertainment and athletic purposes.

Rose,¹⁴ an Indigenous woman and former MSU administrator responsible for providing support services of American Indian students on campus, spent decades of her life advocating for equitable and just representations of Indigenous peoples both at her alma mater (which also utilized a Native mascot) and at MSU.

I came [to MSU] in the fall and I was just kind of getting used to everything. I attended a football game [that] fall of '92 and it was the first time that I had seen this whole [tribal] mascot. I – and this is what upset me to the point of – I didn't cry in front of people but I had tears. I was offended and I was so saddened at what I saw and heard. I had been invited to be the guest of someone who had good seats up in the snooty rooty section of the stadium and right before the game

¹⁴ The names of the individuals featured in this study have been changed to protect their privacy. All study participants were given the option of self-selecting a pseudonym. The names in this document reflect the names they have selected for themselves.

they announced that the [Native mascot] was coming out and they had this ridiculous looking White guy with a headdress on [riding] on a white horse. He was galloping around the stadium holding a spear like an African tribal man and war whooping. [He] threw the spear at a bale of hay and missed, of course. He was the [tribal mascot]. And the woman I was sitting next to, who I'd been conversing with before the game, she knew who I was. She knew what I was doing there. She put her hand on my knee and patted [it], like I was a little girl, and said: "Look at our Indian. Last year he only had a feather and this year he has a headdress!" And I just... I didn't say anything to her. I couldn't. I knew I was going to start crying so I just sucked it up and as soon as I got out of there, the next school day, I started in getting rid of it. It was awful. It was just awful. And we did get rid of it [the mascot]. You don't hear of him anymore.

Rose's story suggests the use of Indigenous peoples as mascots is both painful and that the resulting pain engenders action. It was largely in part of the tireless efforts undertaken by Rose and her allies across the nation that in 1996 Mountain State University made another bold move to mollify its racially offensive practices. They agreed to officially change the mascot from a stereotypical caricature of a tribal Indian to that of a red-tailed hawk.¹⁵ However, they retained the tribal name as the official athletic nickname. Second, the university agreed to better inform the public of the history of the

¹⁵ This animal was chosen because it was identified as an animal native to the state and had been among a list of alternative suggestions offered by the leadership of the school's tribal namesake.

mascot in relation to the tribal peoples by updating the university's official athletics website with a brief history of both its tribal namesake and mascot practices. In 2012 the website read as follows:

[Mountain State University] athletics teams are known as [tribal name] in honor of the American Indian tribe for which the state [...] is named. The [tribal name] have inhabited this area of the country for at least 1,000 years. There were originally 12 [tribal bands of people by this name...] throughout [the state and its neighboring state on the right]. The [tribe] were among the first American Indians to acquire the horse as a means of transportation, and in rock writing the [tribal peoples] are depicted as horses.

After several armed conflicts with [religious Christian] settlers in 1861, the [tribal peoples] were relocated to [a nearby basin] in [a] northeastern [part of the state]. Today, tribal headquarters are [located away from ancestral lands but within the state; the tribe has a membership] of 3,300 and its own tribal government, remains a vibrant part of the state.

The decision to continue to use the tribal name, and its associated imagery, however, was again called into question almost a decade later when, in 2005, Walter Harrison, chair of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Executive Committee, and president of the University of Hartford, issued the following statement:

Colleges and universities may adopt any mascot that they wish, as that is an institutional matter, but as a national association, we believe that mascots,

nicknames or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity or national origin should not be visible at the championship events that we control.¹⁶

Harrison went on to report the committee had voted to adopt a policy that prohibited any colleges and universities utilizing hostile or abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery from hosting any NCAA championship competitions. The announcement was shocking and affected eighteen schools which had been immediately identified as being in violation of the policy. These schools would be barred from continuing to use their athletic imagery or nicknames during NCAA events and would also be banned from hosting post-season NCAA sanctioned tournaments.

The newly adopted policy promised a hefty financial blow to the listed institutions as the ban meant these schools would no longer be able to profit from the sale of merchandise, patronization of university venues and services, and ticket sales involving NCAA-sanctioned games, events, and items. Ultimately the decision threatened to cost the universities millions of dollars in lost sales and revenue. News of the policy was met with mixed reactions. Whereas some of the listed universities used it as an opportunity to change their mascot and imagery, others indicated their intention to challenge the decision. Those opposed to the decision argued the usage of such names and imagery were intended to “honor” American Indian communities and stated their intention to preserve the “tradition” and history of their beloved symbols. Concerned because it had been listed as one of the offending institutions, administrators at Mountain State

¹⁶ NCAA News Release: August 5, 2005

University quickly drafted and submitted a letter appealing its implication in the ruling.

They argued MSU maintains a respectful relationship with the tribe and wrote:

As mores and sensitivities have changed through the years, so have the University's names, mascots and imagery. Through dialogue with [one of the tribal bands],¹⁷ the University has retired certain names ("Redskins"), images (cartoon characters), mascots (a [tribal] Warrior), clothing (feathered headbands for the drill team), and cheers. Today, the only enduring symbol of the University's association with the [tribal band] is the [tribal] name...[which] honors the University's association with the Tribe (Letter on file with author).

Accompanying the letter was a packet of supporting documentation, including a signed document from the Tribal Business Council of one of the tribal bands expressing approval of the University's use of the tribal name (Letter on file with author). In its packet, the university reiterated that, as the state flagship institution, its usage of the tribal name honors the tribe for which the state is named after. Additional documents outlined many of the university's American Indian serving programs, including its nationally acclaimed federally-funded Native Teacher Preparation Program (NTPP), which trained American Indian students to become teachers in American Indian communities.

¹⁷ The tribe used by the university is comprised of five separate bands, or groups, within the state. MSU received permission from only one of the bands to use the tribal name. Two others have voiced their displeasure with its usage but, out of respect for tribal sovereignty, have not publicly interfered with the band that has given permission to the university to use the tribal name.

In September 2005, after reviewing the letter of appeal and accompanying packet, the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network (ESPN) reported the NCAA had removed the university from its list (Associated Press, 2005). Since then, the university continues to publicly tout its commitment to diversity. For example the website for the Office of Equity & Diversity accessed March 5, 2012 expands on the university's mission statement by adding that:

[Mountain State University] is deeply committed to enhancing the success of diverse faculty, students, and staff, as part of our broader goal to enrich the educational experiences and success of all members of our University community. We recognize that a diverse and inclusive University enriches the educational experiences of all students, and enhances our excellence as a world-class institution for 21st Century learners. The Office for Equity and Diversity is proud to lead the University's efforts to support the success and achievement of faculty, students, and staff who self-identify as African American, Latina/o or Chicana/o, Asian American, Pacific Islander, American Indian, members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning community, and women in underrepresented fields.

This rhetoric promotes the belief that the university honors and respects diversity. Additionally the university provides an official "spirit guide" for fans, encouraging its students to also honor and respect diversity by specifically desisting in acts that disrespect American Indians. The guide is part of the code of student conduct and offers guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate fan behavior:

Due to the sensitive nature of the mascot issue, we need to be particularly careful not to perpetuate any Native American stereotypes. For example, do not wear war paint, dress in traditional Indian headdress, or do anything else that would be disrespectful to the American Indian nation or the [tribal namesake]. Do not use the tomahawk chop, although usage of the index and pinky fingers to form a [school symbol] is acceptable.

What Specific Factors Led to the Student Protests Featured in this Study?

The university's stated rhetoric both in terms to its commitment to diversity and in terms of maintaining respectful usage of the tribal nickname was called into question again in 2007.¹⁸ After experiencing a series of frustrating and hostile incidents on campus, Native students began reviewing MSU documents and materials, including official university websites, advertisement initiatives, and campus merchandise, for evidence of its commitment to Native students. What they found led them to conclude MSU's stated commitment to American Indians, and to its tribal namesake, was superficial in both intent and effect. For example, they noted that in 2009 Earl Clegg, campus bookstore director, pointed out the disturbing paradox between the university and its relationship with American Indians. Until November of 2008 the welcome banner for

¹⁸ It is important to note students began to question the university's decisions and actions prior to 2007. The initial efforts were largely behind-the-scenes and consisted largely of members of the Native Teacher Preparation Program meeting with departmental administrators and members of central administration to address their concerns. However they expanded their efforts in 2007 to include other students and address the use and enforcement of the school's athletic nickname. It was also at this time that they began to formally organize, reaching out to tribal members across the nation for support. These collaborations not only led to an expansion in the scope of their efforts but are what ultimately inspired them to proceed with a public protest.

the university's trademarks and licensing website displayed a shirtless man in the student cheering section wearing a blue headdress and paint on his cheeks (Berry, 2009). In the image (figure 2), members of the official university student cheer section celebrate with the depicted man.



Figure 2. Image posted to (and later removed from) University trademarks and licensing website

Clegg explained that this action serves as a contradiction. When the text in the spirit guide calls for very specific behavior intended to convey respect toward the tribe, and other American Indian peoples, but the image hovering above the guide sends the opposite message, this can be very confusing and can actually contradict the university's stated mission. Framing the text using this image not only weakens the overall message in the spirit guide it ultimately trivializes the need for the document itself. For the students in this study, this example, along with several others (listed below), inspired them to speak out and ask university leadership: why does the MSU's stated commitment to maintaining a "respectful" and "honorable" relationship with American Indians appear to be in name-only?

Instances in which individual students, staff, and faculty have demonstrated a lack of knowledge and overall disrespect for the history and experiences of American Indian peoples at MSU abound. I, however, have chosen to restrict the scope of this case study

to look at the following key events that occurred from spring 2007 to the fall of 2008.

These events are ultimately what led to student protest. I focus on these events for several reasons: (1) they were heavily documented in public forums; (2) they were explicitly mentioned and outlined as concerns by protestors; and, (3) they are evidence of the ways in which discrimination, racism or unsupportive practices are *institutionalized* within postsecondary settings.

Table 1. Timeline of incidents that inspired student protests at MSU

<p>Spring 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular Native professor of American Indian Education, and who is also the creator, director, and principal investigator (PI) of the Native Teacher Preparation Program, resigns • Guerilla-style marketing campaign for Ethnic Studies program spotlighting racist stereotypes of minority groups begins • “Cowboys & Indians” themed party advertised throughout residence halls
<p>Fall 2007</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSU awarded two federal grants, totaling over \$2.1 million, to continue its Native Teacher Preparation Program; however, rumors begin circulating almost immediately that the university may not wish to implement the grants and may shut down the program indefinitely • The American Indian Program Coordinator (AIPC) working in the Center for Minority Student Services resigns • Financial and university support for annual student-hosted pow wow is threatened • Fans of MSU rival school are permitted to display offensive signs referencing painful moments of American Indian history at NCAA-sanctioned volleyball game
<p>Spring 2008</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AIPC position remains open/unfilled • MSU administrators, upon the recommendation of the Associate Vice President of Diversity & Equity and the dean of the College of Education, elect to return the \$2.1+ million of recently awarded federal grant monies to its funding source (the U.S. Office of Indian Education); this decision effectively dismantles the program • MSU hires a director for the American Indian Resource Center (the first since 1996); the newly hired director for the American Indian Resource Center is forced to resign seven months later
<p>Fall 2008</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSU grants a vendor license to an independent merchant to sell t-shirts featuring stereotypical, culturally, and spiritually offensive Indian imagery on campus in anticipation of upcoming NCAA-sanctioned Blackout football game

Spring 2007.

During the spring 2007 semester Dr. Harold Joseph, the Native professor of Education responsible for creating and directing the Native Teacher Preparation Program (NTPP), resigns. Joseph had joined MSU faculty eight years earlier and, during his time there, received numerous institutional and local recognitions and awards for outstanding teaching and commitment to social justice work. His decision to resign was difficult and came about as the result of bullying and other personal conflicts he had experienced with senior colleagues in his department. Joseph had reported the behaviors to his dean, who made no attempt to intervene or engage in retention efforts. During this time, Joseph's co-director on the grant also resigned leaving their current student cohort, who was one or two semesters shy of completing the program, without access to their program's leaders as well as important support and advocacy.

That same spring, the university launched a guerilla-style recruiting campaign to encourage its undergraduate students to enroll in courses offered through the university's ethnic studies program. The campaign relied on stereotypes of communities of color to attract the attention of students. For example, the poster for the Chicano/a studies and Asian studies programs associated these cultures with food: a chimichanga and General Tso's chicken (respectively) while the poster for African American Studies with hip hop singer Jay-Z. The American Indian studies poster associated American Indians with casinos and gaming.



Figure 3. University ethnic studies campaign fliers (images cropped to preserve anonymity).

Angered by these depictions, students of color united, composed a letter outlining the problematic nature of the posters, and brought their concerns to both the interim

director of the ethnic studies program and to the university's Associate Vice President for Diversity and Equity (AVP). Unfortunately, they were eventually dismissed by both. During their scheduled meeting with the AVP the group explained why they were offended, how they had submitted a letter to the director of ethnic studies, and that the posters were causing them emotional discomfort. The AVP listened briefly, informed them this was an "easy" issue to resolve, promised "this won't ever happen again," and reminded them it is important for them to come and speak about these issues. However, he explained, although he was available as an avenue for them to express their concerns he was "not too good on the phone." He did not invite them to visit him in person either and suggested that, if ever they needed to contact him again, "email is best." The meeting ended twenty minutes later as the AVP held open his office door and saw them out without shaking their hands.

After the meeting, the students reported feeling as if the AVP had used the meeting to create borders. They explained that although he had urged them to communicate, he had done so in a way that established that he is not completely available to them (i.e. they can reach him by email but it was best not to bother him in person with their trivial – i.e. "easy" – concerns). A few weeks later, after much prodding from the students and a subsequent meeting with the representatives from ethnic studies, including its interim director (which the AVP and representatives from MSU's marketing

department also attended), the director emailed one of the male students in attendance.¹⁹

In his email the director outlines how costly it was to run the campaign and informed the student it was scheduled to end very soon and would thus phase itself out. He wrote:

[Sir],

Thank you for your email. The ads, for which we paid \$5,000-\$6,000 for the entire campaign, have been canceling themselves. No more ads appear in the newspaper and, from what I understand, the A-frame ads have one more day. I am writing a formal letter to you and your peers [which will be sent at a later date] explaining the decision not to remove them immediately, as well as thanking you for your well thought-out and articulated concerns. I meet with the entire Ethnic Studies faculty tomorrow, in our end of the year retreat. I wanted to convey to you, in my letter, any feedback I get from them as well. I did not want to act as an independent voice, as I represent the entire faculty. Allow me to continue to draft my letter and to forward it to you after tomorrow's meeting. It was a pleasure to meet you and hope that, at some point in the future, I will have the pleasure of having you in one of my classes.

Best,

¹⁹ Although I do not address this in detail in this chapter it is important to note that prior to this the director had been communicating about this issue with a female student whom the students had selected to as the email contact person. It was only after the in-person meeting that she stopped receiving responses to her email correspondence as the director chose to only address this male student instead. The preference of male administrators to listen to and communicate directly with male students is one of the many frustrations reported by female activists.

[Name of director] (Letter on file with author).

For the students, the AVP's insensitivity and the director's remarks and actions reflected not only an unwillingness to take actions to correct the situation but an overall lack of interest and understanding of how institution-sanctioned programs and initiatives promote racism, hostility, and abuse toward students of color. While the AVP and director promised the offensive posters would be removed immediately (Document on file with author), they remained on display across the university's sprawling campus in buildings, on the sides of university buses, and across university webpages for approximately two more months.

Later that semester, two of the student protestors, Leah and Gabby, who happened to be roommates, were walking through their dorm building when they noticed advertisements for an event scheduled to take place the following week. The event, intended to generate enthusiasm for an upcoming athletic event, was a dress-up party for those living in the dorms. The theme was "Cowboys & Indians," in honor of the fact MSU would be playing a rival team that used cowboys as its mascot. Outraged, the duo reached out to Dr. Joseph who encouraged them to contact the director of student life. The women heeded this advice and submitted a letter explaining their concern with potentially seeing themselves, their ancestors/relatives, or friends reduced to racist costumes or caricatures.

To Whom It May Concern:

We would like to bring your attention to an activity happening within [the residence halls] that we find to be offensive, derogatory, and racist. There is a

sign posted at the [main building's] front desk advertising an activity called "Cowboys and Indians." When asked what Cowboys and Indians was the individual at the front desk said it was an activity occurring in one of the residence halls. Therefore, we are not sure what exactly this activity entails. We can only assume that this is a game where the players are divided into two groups, thus creating opponents out of the "Cowboys" and "Indians".

While Cowboys and Indians, like Cops and Robbers, is a children's game played across the country that some adults may have fond memories of playing, we can assure you that as Indigenous individuals residing on this campus it is not a game that we would enjoy playing, nor would we want our fellow students playing. After all, there would never be any activities allowed on any university across the country called Nazis and Jews, Border Patrol and Wetbacks, Masters and Darkies, or even Mormons and Catholics. So the question is this: why would the term Cowboys and Indians be any less offensive, especially at a school [where the] mascot bears the name of an Indigenous group of people?

It is our hope that the housing and residence staff received some type of cultural sensitivity training as part of their annual orientation. However, it appears that this training may have missed a section on stereotypes and how they are the most covert form of racism that exists today. We hope the lack of this information is an oversight that will be quickly remedied.

If you wish to contact us to discuss this concern any further please feel free to contact us at [...].

Sincerely, Leah & Gabby (Document on file with author)

As Watanabe (2014) has pointed out, the letter “outlines succinctly, clearly, and persuasively the students’ objections to the proposed ‘game,’ and calls for a quick remedy to the situation” (p. 165). The students suggest a game that makes light of the violent genocidal history between the two groups portrayed is not only in poor taste but it does not belong on a college campus. Watanabe (2012) explains the students’ letter,

[...] makes readers acknowledge multiple oppressions in direct language intended to make them wince. The anger in such language is apparent and perhaps it crosses a line that shouldn’t be crossed. However, by naming oppressions using overtly derogatory terms that often float in the sludge of public discourse, the students’ audience is forced to confront a widespread complicity in continuing colonization and racism. The students, drawing on local and symbolic relationships they clearly understood, then, perform a practical and valuable service for their immediate Native community (p. 65).

In their interviews for this study, both women reiterated their absent desire to witness the symbolic violence that was sure to play out in this scenario.

[Our] thing was to get them to understand that it wasn’t [okay to play these kinds of stereotypical games using Native peoples as costumes] and to get them to understand that. [We also wanted to emphasize] how [using the tribal athletic] name [for something like that] was offensive.

Upon receiving their correspondence the dorm leadership was apologetic, explaining it had not been aware of the event, and promised to contact the event organizers. The advertisements were pulled and the event was cancelled shortly

thereafter. This was one of only a few victories the students experienced in changing how MSU engages Native imagery.

Fall 2007.

In September 2007 Mountain State announced it had been awarded a little over \$2.1 million in federal grant monies from the Office of Indian Education (OIE) to prepare students to become licensed teachers in the disciplines of math, science, and reading. These funds, originating from Title VII grant monies, were specifically designated to perpetuate the university's already successful Native Teacher Preparation Program. The program had previously been identified as a national model by the OIE and had been simultaneously used by MSU in its appeal to the NCAA as the primary example of the institution's commitment to Native peoples (Documents on file with author). The program was created by Dr. Joseph and operated out of the College of Education (Berry, 2009). Up until that time, it had been a national success; created for Indigenous peoples, by Indigenous people, with the intention to serve Indigenous peoples, and was largely responsible for raising the number of Native student enrollment and graduation rates within the college (Bulkeley, 2008). Prior to its inception, from 1979 up to 2002, only 14 American Indians had graduated from the department. However, since the program began in 2002, 33 students had graduated as teachers with nine more set to graduate in the spring of 2008 (Bulkeley, 2008). The university was excited to announce the award and the dean touted it. "The College of Education is fully committed to, and excited about, these new programs. We look forward to collaborating with the U.S. Office of Indian Education to ensure [its] legacy of success," he stated. Unfortunately this excitement and

support was short-lived as rumors began to circulate not long after that the university might not wish to implement the grants/continue running the program now that Joseph had resigned.

That same semester the American Indian Program Coordinator (AIPC) working in the Center for Minority Student Services resigned. This came as quite a blow as he was well-liked and respected by Native students, serving as an important ally and offering advocacy beyond academic advising. In his official capacity, he provided information about important scholarships, both tribal-specific and other more general opportunities, connected students with other services across campus, helped plan important cultural events, and supported Native student organizations. While the university did not officially comment on the reason for his resignation, some believed his departure occurred after he had been denied a raise that would have placed him at an earning level equal to those of his colleagues at the Center responsible for the same duties. News of his resignation was felt immediately among the student community and left many wondering who they would turn to for support.

As students reeled from the news of the resignation, their concern began to grow as they realized they had lost an important advocate responsible for aiding in event planning and the allocation of resources. For example, every spring the Native students at the university were expected to host a powwow to celebrate the cultural and spiritual relationships between Indigenous peoples and the surrounding environment and communities. The event is free and open to the public and largely organized, advertised, and hosted by students on campus. Student involvement is particularly important as it

allows Native community members and elders to learn about who the prospective future leaders of Indian country might be and what/how the university is preparing them to



Figure 4. Images (above and right) of a rival fan taken at a women's volleyball game.

assume leadership roles within their communities. Planning for the event begins during the fall semester, with the help of the AIPC. With the departure of the AIPC, students were stunned to discover support for the annual student-hosted event was threatened as several administrators within the Center for Minority Student Services informed them that, without an AIPC, there had been no clear budget allocated for it. The story of unfortunate inaction and bad behavior continued.

Toward the end of the semester, on November 9, MSU's women's volleyball team played a regional conference game at a rival university campus. At the game, fans expressed their support for each respective team, both verbally and nonverbally, via the usual cheers/jeers and signs. However the display of enthusiasm quickly soured as a rival fan took up MSU's tribal namesake and displayed messages that negatively implicated not the MSU players and fans, but American Indian communities in general. On

November 12, MSU's campus newspaper ran photos of a rival fan balancing a dry eraser board on her head with two messages: "Back to the reservation for [MSU]" and "Trail of Tears Part II."²⁰ Both statements refer to issues that are highly sensitive for many Indigenous people today and is especially painful for the Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Creek people who were forcibly removed from their homelands to reservation lands west of the Mississippi river, migrating by foot (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). The Cherokees call this walk, not "Trail of Tears" as many U.S. history books suggest, but "The Trail Where They Cried" because of the experience endured on the walk (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). The other message was particularly poignant for the university's namesake as various bands were forcibly relocated from their homelands to reservations as a result of various state acts and legislation. During the game the fan displaying the signs was neither approached by MSU or other university personnel to cease displaying her messages nor was she asked to leave the game.

Spring 2008.

The spring 2008 semester began without a replacement for the AIPC which meant that Native students endured a semester change without their academic advisor. Although there were other advisors available to them through the Center for Minority Student Services, they did not carry the same rapport or knowledge of tribal support services and opportunities as the Native advisor is expected to have. That semester the university also

²⁰ See Figures. Cobb, T. (Photographer). (2007). A BYU fan shows her classy side during a recent volleyball match between the U and BYU in Provo [Photograph], Retrieved November 12, 2007, from: <http://www.dailyutahchronicle.com>

announced its decision to return the education grants it had been awarded, effectively shutting down the NTPP for good (Berry, 2008; Bulkeley, 2008; Florez, 2008; Norlen, 2008; Yurth, 2008). This was a first for the university and in the history of these types of grants. The decision left students bristling in particular because it meant MSU would no longer honor its promise to neighboring tribes to help prepare teachers to teach in their tribal communities. Regrettably the university did not consult with nor inform the partnered tribal communities of their intention or decision.

That semester the university hosted an event to rededicate the American Indian Resource Center (AIRC). The event provided an important platform for MSU leadership to introduce its newly appointed director to the larger university community. The AIRC, whose mission is to serve as a “home away from home” for American Indian students by providing important support services such as tutoring, scholarships, computers for research, and a place for meetings, classes and events, is located in an area that is a fifteen minute walk from central campus. This area flanks the last remaining, operating vestibule of the military Fort. The Center had been originally dedicated in 1996 but remained without a director until this time. Unfortunately, the newly appointed director, who had been critical decades earlier in writing the original proposal that secured the building to be used for these purposes, and who had returned to oversee its operation, served in this capacity for a few months only before being eventually dismissed by the AVP. A decision that was not only controversial but that, once again, left students without another ally (since neither the AIPC nor Dr. Joseph had been replaced).

Fall 2008.

On November 6, a small group of White, male, university students applied for and were awarded a vendor license to sell merchandise for the upcoming “Blackout” football game. MSU was scheduled to play against a university whose mascot was a horned frog. In an attempt to “make some extra money” one of the vendors explained that a friend had drawn a caricature of the teams’ respective mascots and created game shirts to be sold to MSU fans (Totten, 2008). The end product depicted the profile of a hook-nosed man sitting atop a boulder. The man is shirtless, dressed in buckskin pants and wearing a headdress. In his left hand is a skewered frog, hung rotisserie style, over a large fire.

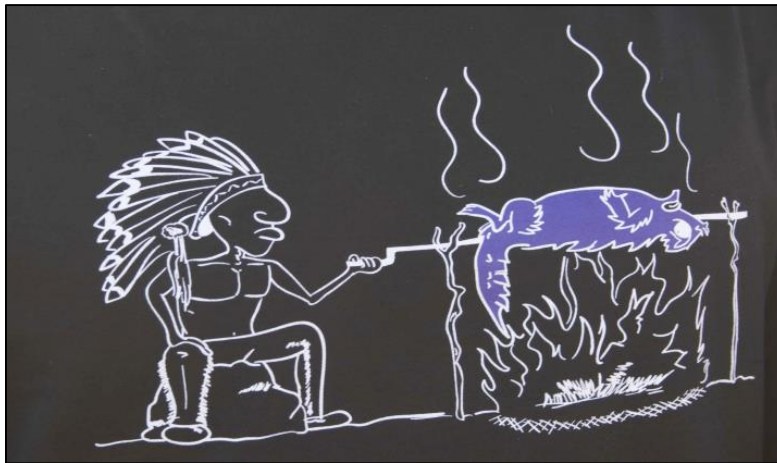


Figure 5. T-shirt sold at MSU

Upon noticing the shirts, a small group of concerned Native students approached the vendors and explained the shirt was culturally and spiritually offensive. Not only did it promote stereotypical representations of Indians, it was also a desecration since many tribes in the southwest, including MSU’s tribal namesake, consider the horned toad/frog sacred and representative of ancestors that have passed on. The students asked the vendors to cease their sale. However, although the vendors apologized for offending the

students, they explained they were not going to stop since they had already sold over 150 (Totten, 2008). Instead they elected to relocate their booth to another area on campus. Upset and demoralized, the students reached out to the office of the AVP to intervene. The booth remained operating for several more hours until, finally, the university asked them to leave.

Public Protests.

According to the students in this study, the culmination of these incidents, which happened over a relatively short period of time, demonstrate how the tribal namesake and trademark invites ridicule and disrespect from fellow students and breeds mockery and racism at athletic events (Native Village Youth and Education News, 2009). While not all incidents relayed here relate directly to the (ab)use of the tribal name and imagery, it is still important to understand the university's use of and relationship to its namesake in order to better understand the implications of the actions and decisions outlined in these examples. In the next chapters I outline a theoretical framework for understanding the implications of these examples. I argue that examining these instances from a theoretical standpoint that places race and racism at the center provides a deeper understanding of the everyday forces that serve to privilege a settler-colonial rhetoric of "honoring" American Indians while, in reality, university actions and practices actually serve to sanction a culture of racism that subverts and silences the voices, experiences and stories of American Indians. Such actions allow university administrators and alumni to reap profit from the pain inflicted onto Native students.

Further implications will become even more salient when I return to the examination of media coverage on the protest. Unfortunately popular media became a tool for university administrators to further perpetuate a rhetoric that vilifies and silences American Indians who express dissent in university practices and who might threaten the university's bottom line. However, before I go on, it is important to note who the students involved in the protest were and the prominent university leaders they met with and sought to work with.

Who were the student activists?

Most of the students involved in the protests were affiliated with or personally knew a student affiliated with the Native Teacher Preparation Program. As part of NTPP, students are taught the history of Indigenous education – about the various treaties²¹ and agreements made between Indigenous peoples and federal and local governments guaranteeing access to education and support programs. The students also learned a detailed history of the federal and education challenges faced by American Indians/Alaska Natives. Thus the activists used this knowledge to ground their demands for equitable treatment and representation at the university. Four of the activists featured in this study were graduate students (three female, one male – two were from a tribe in the southwest, one from a tribe in the northwest and one from a tribe in the upper midwest). The fifth was a male undergraduate student from a southwestern tribe

²¹ This term refers to legally binding agreements the U.S. government signed with American Indian tribes. Treaties confirm the legal and political status of American Indian tribes within this country (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013).

participating in a prestigious scholarship program offered by MSU to first generation college students. Three of the graduate students were graduates of the NTPP while the other was an NTPP administrator.

Throughout their time on campus, and prior to engaging in acts of public dissent, the group sought to work directly with key university leaders, voicing their concerns in private meetings. Their primary contact was with the school's Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity. This office was held by a Chicano male scholar responsible for overseeing all diversity related programs, engaging and recruiting diverse faculty, functioning as a source for student concerns and interfacing directly with senior administration. Additionally, the students worked occasionally with one senior administrator and one mid-level administrator involved in deciding the fate of the peoples and services they were trying to preserve. This included the senior vice president of academic affairs and the dean of the college of education who, like much of the highest leaders in postsecondary institutions, were both older White males.

About the protests.

During the fall of 2008 the students, who had been gathering with some of their fellow peers since spring 2007 to discuss their experiences and devise resistance strategies, decided it was time to take their concerns to the public and stage a public protest. This decision came after a series of meetings with administrators to discuss their concerns with each incident listed above. These meetings generally ended with administrators seeking to placate them by assuring they would "look into" the incident but ultimately doing little to enact resolution. Moreover as the number of incidents

increased, and with the previous ones largely unresolved, their frustrations began to mount. After months of meeting with administrators to discuss each concern, with little to no success, the group sought to raise public awareness and support. They wanted to highlight the collective loss of American Indian programs and faculty and staff as well as call for the establishment of namesake/American Indian Tribal scholarships/endowments and to gain support for a formal enforcement of NCAA policies around the use of the nickname. Additionally, they wanted support in calling for an investigation into the university's inaction and/or incomplete response to their concerns.

On November 26, 2008, one day before Thanksgiving, and again on December 4, the group marched from the American Indian Resource Center (AIRC), from the outskirts of campus, toward the center of campus, to where the offices of the highest university administrators are housed. They gathered at the steps of the AIRC, introduced themselves to the crowd, welcomed them, and explained their purpose:

Thank you for joining us on this historic day for American Indians on the campus of [Mountain State University]. Our objective is to ensure that the university honors their commitment to American Indians, especially to its namesake—[...]—who once inhabited the land we now stand on. As American Indian students, faculty, staff and supporters, we are honored to [advocate for] Indigenous people experiencing the same problems and concerns on campuses across our land.

We know our struggle for representation and equity is not unique. We stand together today because we have earned an opportunity to have access to

*programs. We stand together today because—just as the founders of this University believed—we deserve the right to have an educational institution that reflects the goals, visions, beliefs, cultures and knowledge of the community we come from. We stand here today—not only as students—but as activists and as holders and creators of knowledge. We march because too many of us are questioning the motives of the University. We question why the university is denying our people access to a higher education. We question the university’s inability to honor and represent American Indians in a modern, accurate, respectful and honorable manner. We march together today to remind [Mountain State University] that whether we have been treated with honor and respect is something **WE** determine as Native peoples—that respect and honor for American Indians is not just something that exists at the university just because the university says it does. We march together today to encourage [Mountain State University] to reflect deeply upon its treatment of American Indians and other populations and individuals who bring their various languages, cultures and experiences to the university. Diversity enriches the knowledge that is created and shared within universities. Diversity creates bridges and connections to the communities that exist—**independent of—and in relation to**—the conversations, issues, and research occurring **within** the university. We march together today to remind the university that it cannot exist or operate well without us!*

Over the last few years it seems [Mountain State University] has forgotten a lot of things. It seems the university has forgotten the value, richness, and

integrity of its diverse students, staff, and faculty. It has forgotten how proud it was to announce—less than a year ago—its appointment of a new Director for the American Indian Resource Center. It has remembered only that, as [the] Senior Vice President [...] once proclaimed, staff and faculty of color are simply “hot property” and just as property loses its value over time—the university seems to believe that so do its employees. Therefore, the university removes critical people from their positions when it feels they have stopped serving the agenda of the university—forgetting that these critical people have served as representatives and allies to the communities we come from and who have helped us succeed at this institution.

*The university has forgotten the political relationship our tribal communities hold with the federal government—a relationship that guarantees a right to education. [Mountain State University] has sought to homogenize—to neutralize the presence of minorities and diversity by denying its services to the members of our community. They have made it so that we cannot get the training we need to go back to our communities and serve as teachers. They have sent back millions of dollars to the federal government—money that was awarded to the university to help our Native brothers and sisters gain the training they need to return to our communities and serve as teachers to our youth. Instead the University promised to create a newer—better—program for our people and yet—**one year later—there are no American Indian students in this program because there is no program.***

The university has forgotten the promise it made to the [its tribal namesake]. A promise made when the National Collegiate Athletic Association warned [MSU] of the dangers of using people as a mascot. When the university became afraid of not being able to use the longstanding [tribal] nickname, it turned to the tribe for help. It promised the tribe that if the[y] would allow the university to use their name—the university would ensure the [tribal] name and people would be treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. It promised to help talented and motivated [tribal namesake] students to complete their university education at [MSU]. But it forgot its promise as soon as the NCAA looked the other way. Instead, the university has made it so that we cannot go one day on this campus without being reminded that the university only cares about Indians who exist in fantasy—Indians that cannot speak for themselves because they are seen only as mascots—as cartoon characters—as savages with feathers and drums. The university only remembers the Indians when it needs images that bring the university millions of dollars in profit from athletic ticket sales [...].

Our goals for this “March for Unity” are humble and honest. We hope to raise awareness of the injustices the university has wielded upon American Indians. We ask that the university uphold its commitment to Native communities by supporting the few remaining American Indian allies and students on campus and by creating scholarships and programs that exist, in reality—and not as fictitious promises to appease the resistance and opposition of Native students and communities. Today we take this opportunity to unite with Indians and non-

*Indians alike to be reminded of the support and strength we receive from members in the community. We see that we are not alone and we call on our Native and non-Native brothers and sisters to support us in our cause and lend a voice to these issues. We ask that the community to question and investigate the treatment of Native peoples at [Mountain State University]. **Why it is that there are so few remaining American Indian advocates on campus??***

Thank you for marching with us on this cold day [...]. Just as our bodies feel the cold—so, too, do our hearts. The university has treated us with their cold impetuosity for too long. We are proud to stand beside you today as we remind the university of promises that have been long forgotten. We offer informational flyers for those people who have questions regarding our purpose and issues. Please take a few and distribute them to bystanders wondering what we are trying to accomplish. After this speech we will begin our march. You are welcome to carry some of our pre-made signs.

We will march as a cohesive group to the university [student union building] where we will meet under the [tribal] Brave statue. At this time, we will read the “Call to Action” statement from the “free speech” grass area. We will then march toward the [final] Building—the location on the [Mountain State University] campus where the leadership—the president and vice presidents of the school—are located. At this building our “Call to Action” statement will be read again. Those of you, who have chosen to carry our pre-made signs, please return these to the March organizers upon your departure [so that they may be

recycled]. We encourage you to call friends to join us along the march route so our University Administrators will see our seriousness and concern. Welcome to our march. We are honored to walk beside you. (Document on file with author, emphases in original)

Figure 6 shows some of the signs they offered to supporters who had not brought their own.



Figure 6. Protest signs made by students (University name redacted)

The first demonstration, or “march for unity,” held the day before Thanksgiving was strategic as it allowed the activists to call the university to task about its presumed support for American Indians. During the call to action they explained that, for some American Indians, the celebration of Thanksgiving can be a reminder of a particular type of holocaust felt domestically. In an institution where there were so few American Indians, the loss of its Native leaders felt like another particular type of genocide in higher education. Their speech explained they sought to forefront ironies, contradictions and paradoxes at the university. For example, when the NTPP was in its heyday, its American Indian students were touted before university leadership and before the NCAA yet, as they saw it, after it was done congratulating itself for its good work, MSU worked actively behind the scenes to run this program under.

They urged those who would question their claim that people of color are not being valued by the institution to consider the following: First, consider the enrollment numbers of Native students on campus. This number has never exceeded 199. How did the university explain its intention to embrace and honor Native peoples if it wasn't prioritizing their enrollment, academic support, and graduation from the institution? Second, they wondered why it was that university leadership refers to staff and faculty of color in terms of ownership and domination. They highlighted the response to why MSU had failed to retain key Indian-serving faculty and staff, provided by one high-level administrator: “You've got to be fair– it's hard to hire *these kinds of people*...Once minorities are hired, administrators often have difficulty keeping them [...] If they come

here and are successful, other universities see that [and try to recruit them] – *they're hot property*” (McConkie, 2007, emphasis mine). For the students, this raised red flags. They explained that if one thinks in terms of ownership then one can give his/her possessions away or get rid of them when their value falls or when their “investment” refuses to tow the party line. Third, and relatedly, MSU officials explained the loss of faculty and staff because they had chosen to leave or because they were not qualified or performing to expectations. Yet, the students wondered, to what degree had the institution shown real effort to retain, mentor, or support these leaders? If MSU did not provide important mentorship and support so that staff and faculty could meet their expectations, whose responsibility was it to prepare them? Fourth, they argued even if MSU supports policies where the institution recruits people of color, the subsequent firing or departure of their staff and faculty suggest they are overwhelmingly abandoned once they arrive on campus. Why weren't there sustained efforts to support staff and faculty immediately after they arrive to ensure they are prepared to excel and *stay*? And finally, could MSU provide evidence of their claims? For example, if they attack the skills of people of color and offer those attacks as justification for letting them go, then could they provide concrete evidence of where its Native leaders were going wrong? Beyond the issues with lost programs and personnel, their speeches and signs offered various examples of how the school's refusal to create or enforce policy regulating usage of the tribal athletic nickname had allowed fans to misuse the (nick)name, to levy racist and hostile messages about American Indian peoples and beliefs, and to desecrate American Indian symbols and beliefs.

The group went on to explain the march was the result of escalating student frustration with events that had occurred in prior semesters. During the spring of that year American Indian activists and allies had begun to recognize the increasing disparity between the university's stated commitment to American Indians and its de facto behaviors. They had met that spring with senior administrators to discuss concerns they had about the rumors surrounding the uncertain future of the popular NTPP and had expressed concern about the losses of important Indigenous leaders. Moreover they had fought with administrators who had expressed uncertainty in funding the time-honored annual American Indian powwow and, of course, to address the lack of enforcement of respectful usage of the Indian nickname and iconography. At the end of it all, they explained, they wanted an opportunity to not only control how they are represented and perceived but to ensure the persistence of themselves and others.

Concluding Thoughts

The ultimate end of the activists was specifically intended to advance what Leech Lake Ojibwe scholar Scott Richard Lyons refers to as “rhetorical sovereignty” and what Comanche scholar Wallace Coffey and Yaqui scholar Rebecca Tsosie refer to as “cultural sovereignty.” Rhetorical sovereignty is “the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires in [the pursuit of sovereignty], to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse” (Lyons, 2000, p. 449). This, of course, necessitates an active role/presence in academia and all other forms of discourse. Cultural sovereignty is an extension of political sovereignty and refers to the right of Indigenous peoples to control and protect their

language, religion, art, and tradition (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). Cultural sovereignty has also been described as a process of repatriation or of reclaiming history, tradition, and cultural identity. As Cree scholar Michael Anthony Hart (2010) explains, Indigenous worldviews and voices continue to be subverted by the nations that dominate. In spite of this, Indigenous territories, knowledges and ways of living in the world persist (Archibald, 2008; Deloria, 1969; Smith, 1999).

Overall the history of MSU is rife with difficult interactions between the state's Native inhabitants and colonizing forces whose intention was neither to assimilate the people's nor learn about them and ask to share the lands. Instead the overall attitude toward the Native population perceived them as violent and warring and thus in need of being relegated to the outskirts of the rest of "civilization." These attitudes appear to shape/reflect modern day campus attitudes and behaviors in three overt ways. Perhaps it is the low enrollment numbers that have precluded university leadership to better learn to understand the concerns affecting Indigenous peoples and how to successfully engage in mutually respectful relational practices. For example the tendency to view Indigenous peoples as warring and dangerous, or as peoples to be pushed away or forcibly removed when they stand up for themselves and protect their right to inhabit particular spaces, appears to be reflected in the university's resistance to Native student dissent. Though I will expand on this more in the next chapters, it is important to note that MSU's leadership responded to these protests, headed mostly by Native female students in particular, by referring to their concerns and actions as "abrasive" and "adversarial." This kind of response was not simply reserved for the student dissenters but for any Native

person who dared question the university's decisions. In one particular instance, the director of the American Indian Resource Center was not only framed in this manner but fired for it. Another leader referred to Dr. Joseph, after he had left the institution, as "divisive." Such a decision to brand Native leaders, especially women, in this capacity is reflective of the overall paternalistic, patriarchal practices European colonizers have historically approached Indigenous peoples with. Finally, the university's lack of awareness for Indigenous cultural context, its inability to engage in competent intercultural communication with its Native students, and its inability to understand Indigenous forms of problem-solving and justice/conflict resolution appears to reflect the historic apathy and disinterest in engaging in mutually respectful interactions. I explore this more in chapter three. However, for now, the following chapter examines in greater detail the education rights claims the student dissenters made.

Chapter 2 – American Indian self-determination and the Assertion of Education

Rights

The growing enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Native students in education has led institutions, both at the K-12 and postsecondary levels, to publicly express a desire for improved graduation rates. According to education scholar Carol Barnhardt (1994), “the attempts by institutions to respond to the presence of diverse student populations has forced discussions and debates about minority issues into a very public arena” (p. 117). This has fortunately led to a small but growing body of research focused on better understanding persistence, retention, achievement, and graduation factors for students of color, including American Indian students. Such research has found campus climate, lack of mentors, and lack of hard funding for Native-serving programs as often-overlooked but important factors influencing persistence.²² In some cases, both academic institutions and their surrounding communities have expressed concern with the small number of Native teachers as this has been found to be an important, though often overlooked, factor in increasing Native student achievement (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Thus the majority of available research suggests there is an increased need to not only graduate more Native students but to prepare and recruit more American Indian/Alaska Native educators who can provide important education, academic, personal teaching and mentorship at all academic levels.

²² American Indians comprise the largest percentage of students of color at the institution in Barnhardt’s study.

Barnhardt's research is particularly useful in understanding the context that drove the students in this study to engage in acts of dissent. Ultimately the students indicated an overall desire to make campus climate less hostile while seeking to ensure the persistence of programs, events, and peoples they perceived as critical to Native student success. Although several of them were on the verge of graduation, preparing to exit the university as teachers trained to work in Indian-serving schools, they remained committed to doing what they could to ensure the perpetuation of beneficial teacher-training and other programs and services for generations to come. For them, creating a campus context conducive to Native student success meant not only questioning the growing dearth of support services and allies available but also the lack of long-term, hard-funding for Native-serving programs. Initially they sought to work directly with administrators, behind the scenes, to address their concerns but as time passed, their concerns remained largely unresolved. This inspired them to take the next step and work with media and on-campus allies to bring their issues to public light.

The events that led to the protests featured in this study are partly influenced by the university's choice to utilize an American Indian tribal namesake. However the tribal namesake was not the sole reason for the students' resistance. One of the critical issues that led the activists to question university policy and decision-making was the result of what they perceived to be a slight in treaty agreements, an overall lack of recognition of Indigenous peoples as political peoples, and an overall disregard for the learning environment faced by Indigenous peoples. Complicating things further was a change in university leadership and personnel that ultimately provided the context for the

termination of the university's successful NTPP to be dismantled. The change in personnel additionally made it difficult to find allies and leaders versed in intercultural dialogue and conflict-resolution styles that honored Indigenous cultural modes of communication. I discuss the desire and context for intercultural communication in the next chapter but now I turn to an examination of how the change in leadership affected campus climate and support for diversity programs in this study.

Campus Climate and University Leadership

From the early 1990's to 2004 MSU was led by two university presidents whose stated commitment to diversity led to meaningful increases in funding and support for its programs and initiatives. These leaders often worked closely with diversity-serving program leaders, including the school's AVP of Diversity, to uphold its institutional mission. The president who presided from 1991-1997 offered support in the form of encouraging and engaging dialogue across important stakeholders in the mascot debate. His support remained firm; he understood that engaging in respectful relationships with surrounding Indigenous peoples meant considering the potential need to eradicate the tribal namesake and its associated imagery. As Rose, who led the charge to eradicate MSU's racist Indian mascot and who worked for the Center for Minority Student Services, as well as an MSU-specific STEM program intended to increase the number of women and underrepresented minorities in these fields, in the 90's explained:

Fortunately, we had an advocate in [the president]. He was wonderful... he backed us up all the way on things. He wasn't like saying: "oh, we got to do this" but when I would go and have a meeting with him, he was always open and

receptive and wanted to do the right thing. So we did get rid [of] that [Indian caricaturizing mascot] guy. [He] finally went away. Then we had to find a different mascot because they didn't have an Indian anymore so we pulled in [a leader from the namesake tribe] ...at that time he was the cultural preservation officer for the [band of the tribal namesake] and he gave us several options just to kick around... [He] gave us the [...] hawk or an osprey. He gave us a bunch of different things then the students voted on it and then about that time I left.

Rose chose to resign from MSU in 1996 because she had been recruited for her dream job at another institution.

I was highly recruited by [another institution] and I had an opportunity. I had been [working for MSU's Center for Minority Student Services] and I was doing the [STEM] program but I had the opportunity to [direct] my very own Native American student services and I just couldn't pass it up. In retrospect, I should have stayed but I didn't and [I went] against the advice of a lot of fine people who said: "no, you really should stay." [But] I said: "no, I really want my own thing." We had just gotten the [American Indian] Resource Center building [charter] done [but] there seemed to be no heart in ever doing anything with it. I was working there doing stuff with students and using the [AIRC space] but there didn't seem to be any future in anything substantive happening.

Rose's commitment to MSU won out in the end and she returned in 2008 when, upon the heels of terminating NTPP, MSU enticed her with the directorship of her beloved AIRC. Unfortunately a change in the university leadership and personnel she had

been working with in the 90's left her without allies in promoting her vision for the Center upon her return.

I was part of getting that building and doing the proposal [back in the 90s]. I was really involved which is why I thought [those] people [who were still on campus when I returned], that were part of [the earlier work], would really stand up for me when I became director. Because we all had worked together to get the building and they knew what it meant to me. But I was wrong.

Succeeding the president described in Rose's first quote, who left before her return, was one who presided from 1997-2004. Ida, an African American woman and former MSU administrator responsible for promoting diversity and equity programs and services explains what made him so priceless to MSU's diversity mission.

I knew when I went to his installation that he had a commitment [to diversity] because he talked about his goal... I was running ethnic studies then, when he was installed, and he talked about the three or four missions ... that he really wanted to work on in his presidency – one of them was diversity. And I sat there thinking: I have never heard a White man talk about why diversity was important and he was the first person. Lots of people have done it since [but] he was the first person I had heard talk about diversity as academic excellence.

I remember him saying that if we were going to prepare our students that they had to be educated so that they understood the various cultures and diversities and ways of thinking and being and I remember him saying no one culture owns this and I was really impressed with that... He did a couple [other] things [that

demonstrated his commitment]. One of the things that he did was somebody donated [a substantial amount of] money to the university and told him he could use it however he wanted to and he created [...] a [prestigious] scholarship for students of color – intentionally for students of color. And he could've done anything with that money!

Not only did the president's actions reflect his commitment to diversity through the creation of academic scholarship programs, he embodied his commitment through being physically present to support the work being done by his diversity-promoting colleagues and employees. Ida goes on:

When I [assumed my position in central administration], one of the things that our office was responsible for were these different events [including] women's week, MLK, [and others]. He was present for all of them and always went to the welcome and then stayed for the talk. It wasn't until I went to other universities that I [realized that was unique]. I just thought that's what presidents did, right? Well it really wasn't. And then the next president [who succeeded him in 2004] didn't show up for anything. So [the initial president] would show up [and] the speakers would always remark that they can't believe the president stayed! You have no idea how many times I go around the country, speaking on university campuses, and the president is nowhere to be found. So there was that. And, [secondly,] there were times when he'd find out who the speaker was [and he'd offer to make the opening remarks and personally welcome them to the university]. Like I remember when Angela Davis came [and ended up visiting

*campus] twice. The second time, he was gone. The first time we brought her was for women's week. We brought her and Wilma Mankiller [...] In one year those were our two. I remember some of the members of the committee saying: "That is ridiculous!" You know? But until then the audience for women's week was never really huge, so it was really daring to say: "We're not to going to bring one speaker; we're going to bring **two**! And not only are we bringing two but they're both women of color!" Right? And [the president supported that and that decision led to our having] the most people we had ever had [attend this event]. When we brought Wilma Mankiller we had over 500 [in attendance]!*

Ida's story suggests it is not enough for a university to state its commitment to diversity but also for its leadership to embody it. Not only did the president demonstrate support for diversity by creating, funding, and promoting academic opportunities for historically underrepresented students, he personally attended events that promoted discussions and advocacy for social justice struggles. Furthermore he went a step further in his leadership and demonstrated support for his fellow staff, faculty, and administrators by making time to meet, not only with the prestigious guests they had invited, but to meet with his employees/colleagues and promote their ideas and events. Unfortunately the loss of this kind of support upon the instillation of the initial president's successor is what led Ida to resign from her administrative position and formally exit the university. She felt pushed out by the change in leadership. The succeeding president neither demonstrated interest nor support for her work, and that of her office. In the next excerpt she recalls the bristling encounter she had with the succeeding president, on the steps of central

administration's building, which convinced her it was time to resign. During the interaction the president acted as if she wasn't even present and addressed only her White, male counterpart – the vice president for academic affairs.

I chose to leave the university because [...] their commitment to diversity waned. There had been a president who was very much committed and he left and, from my perspective, he took the university commitment to diversity with him. Eighteen months had passed [since the initial president left] and I had never stepped inside of the [succeeding] president's office! He had never consulted me. He had never asked my opinion. He had never relied on anything. He had never attended an MLK event. He had brushed off everything we had done. And I knew right then, standing there [on those building steps], while he pretended I wasn't there, that there was no way I could stay.

Ida left shortly thereafter to assume a position at another university as the vice provost for diversity. Just as Ida left, Rose returned. Upon Rose's return in spring 2008, the university leadership that had taken over during Ida's departure remained. At this time, Rose also noted, not just the tepid support for Native programs and initiatives from central administration, but the campus climate and overall lack of Native presence on campus.

It was very adversarial as far as the Indian community [goes]. There was no... When I came back what shocked me was we had no sense of community on campus. We were no longer American Indians who got together: faculty, staff, [and] students. There was fighting [among] students and faculty and [the AVP for

Diversity who succeeded Ida was part of it] and, you know, all of this [overtly hostile] stuff going on. It was nothing like [when] I had left. Nothing whatsoever. Very sad.

It was these factors, identified by Rose – the campus climate that ranged between hostility and apathy toward Native peoples and their programs – which the students in this study were trying to address. Though they, like Ida, were never invited into the office of the succeeding president, they did seek to work with other university leaders to generate a sense of understanding of why it is important to respect and value Indigenous peoples, and their cultures, as well as support programs and peoples that contribute to their academic development and success. Unfortunately, the cold and distant attitude toward diversity embodied by the succeeding president seemed to trickle down and affect the ways Native students were received and treated by other university leaders. The following section outlines the concerns the students' sought to raise with university leaders. Later chapters closely examine the attitudes and responses of university leaders to the students and their issues.

Creating a Coalition for Native Educational Rights

As mentioned before, Rose had been considerably involved in efforts during the 1990's to reduce stereotypical acts inspired by the university tribal namesake. In many ways the resistance efforts of the Native students featured in this study continued her important work. The activists, many of whom were involved with NTPP, extended arguments about the negative aspects of having a race-based mascot/athletic nickname. They argued it isn't just the presence of the tribal name and symbols, which inspire

distracting and hostile incidents and contribute to the tensions identified by Rose that was affecting Native student achievement. Rather it is the university's overall climate, inclusive of its record for Native student enrollment and graduation, as well as its support for Native student support initiatives, that compromises the success and well-being of its Native students. In other words, their dissent was not driven solely out of frustration with the perceived (ab)use of the tribal namesake but out of concern to protect programs that guarantee education rights to Native peoples and promote their success. Their frustrations were shared by other students who were not involved in NTPP but who also understood how MSU's decisions and actions threatened Native education rights and hurt communities. Their fellow peers added other examples of campus aspects they found damaging to the list. Together the group began to piece together an argument demonstrating that campus was indeed becoming increasingly stifling place for Native students.

Because there were so few Native students on campus they turned to one another, through their personal social networks and through various Native student organizations, for support. They worked in small groups, comprised of similar student allies. In the beginning, NTPP students worked together but slowly brought in other Native students they knew from Native student organizations including MSU's chapter of the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) as well as the university's Inter Tribal Student Association (ITSA). These groups consisted of both undergraduate and graduate students from a myriad of majors and backgrounds. As mentioned before, they sought to work directly with administrators to address their concerns. However, upon experiencing

limited success (though small victories were found – for example, some funding was restored to the powwow), they came to realize they would have to create a stronger, unified front if they were to effect any change. It was then they decided to form a coalition.

On April 17, 2008 the group launched a blog indicating they had formed an official coalition “to protect American Indian education rights.” They described themselves as a grassroots organization with a focus on ensuring educational equality for Indigenous persons (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). They believed this could be accomplished two ways: first, by offering assistance to groups or individuals that “feel their voice is not being heard by educational institutions and government agencies throughout the United States” (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). They reasoned that by utilizing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), which the group had used to request information on the university’s appeal to the NCAA as well as request audit and account information on NTPP, they could “gather facts and data to create a case that provides complete and accurate information on injustices toward American Indians related to education and federally guaranteed rights” (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). Second, and related, they wanted to work toward eliminating racial hatred and institutional discrimination in policy and practice by disseminating information about federal laws and policies intended to protect Native peoples (through Title VII and otherwise) and by seeking to amplify the support network available to victims of racial discrimination. They sought to build alliances and coalitions with advocates by informing “key American Indian personnel (non-indigenous and indigenous alike) in the areas of American Indian

education throughout the United States” (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). They offered their services to connect the disenfranchised with key individuals (who remained unnamed but whom were partnered with the group) and who were described as experienced leaders “who have been successful at reforming American Indian Education and educating non-American Indians of concerns affecting Indigenous communities for years” (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). They believed these advocates could serve in the capacity of furthering discrimination claims by taking the case(s) of the unheard individuals to “key stakeholders within the responsible education institution or government agencies” (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com). Essentially the group wanted to help their fellow Native students and leaders not only feel validated but learn how to navigate institutions in hopes of ameliorating wrongs and promoting their success and persistence within the organization.

The remainder of this chapter examines the values and beliefs that guided their resistance efforts at MSU. At the heart of their effort was a desire to advance five basic education rights they felt every Native student deserves: (1) the right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs; (2) the right to access culturally informed academic and student support services; (3) the right to be recognized as members of a political, not just racial, group; (4) the right to attend institutions that feel safe and not hostile to their presence; and, (5) the right to be seen as viable, present, “modern” human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects. Although I will examine each right individually, in order to highlight their individual nuance, it is

important to understand that they are not intended to be taken or interpreted as discrete. Instead, as the activists pointed out, they are complex, related, and interdependent.

As peoples who are not only racialized but who also hold dual citizenship and political status in the U.S., the students found themselves trying to educate the university and the public about both treaty protected education rights as well as what they perceived were basic education rights for students. At the same time, they were seeking to outline a larger vision for what would make the campus climate more equitable – all tall orders. Before I go on to explore each individual education right, it is important to understand what the group meant when they referred to the status and concerns of American Indians, as both a politicized group and a racialized one. The following section outlines the theoretical framework I used to create this study and analyze data. The students' five basic rights are reflective of many of the basic principles guiding Critical Race Theory and, more specifically, Tribal Critical Race Theory as a justice-oriented project. Therefore I will present these theories before moving on to a close examination of each individual education right. I begin by addressing the claim that American Indians are a (socially constructed) racial group.

Theoretical Foundation: What is Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

Arising in the mid-1970's as a response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is predicated upon three main principles. The first principle, that race is and has always been significant in U.S. society, is an important one. According to CRT, racism can be understood as both ubiquitous and endemic to society. The second principle asserts that the U.S. was established with the colonial intention of promoting

and protecting the property interests of Whites (Harris, 1994; López, 2006). The third principle, relatedly, emphasizes the intersection of race and property as important because it served as the primary foundation in securing important rights for certain groups over others (Bell, 1995; Chang, 1993, 2002; Harris, 1994; López, 2006; Matsuda, 1987; M^ontoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990; Perea, 2000). Race, as a sociohistorical concept, has been used as a tool to construct a hierarchical structure based on supposed genetic differences and serves an important space for understanding inequity (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas, 1995; Matsuda, 1987).

From these principles arise the primary tenets that comprise CRT: First, not only is racism endemic to society but its intercentricity with other forms of subordination, including oppression based on gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent and sexuality, require specific attention to the ways in which race and these other intersecting identities create distinctive forms of oppression for unique groups (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw, 1991; Sol^orzano & Yosso, 2002). In other words, discrimination faced by Black or Latino men is not always the same as that experienced by Black or Latina women since aspects of gender bias and prejudice can mix with racial ones creating different experiences and contexts of oppression, subjugation, and exploitation for each. For example, Black or Latino men may be faced with assumptions that they are at higher likelihood to engage in aggressive or violent acts, to be absentee fathers, or to be poorly educated and best qualified for unskilled or entry-level/manual labor positions. While Black and Latina women may be forced to deal with assumptions that they are high sexual and promiscuous, single-mothers, and/or are particularly skilled in domestic labor.

Such assumptions can lead to discriminatory practices and behaviors that limit the types of opportunities available to members of each group. This becomes even more complex when we consider how sexual orientation, socioeconomic level, or other cultural and personal identifiers factor into the mix. The emphasis on understanding the intercentricity of oppression has led CRT scholars to call for research and scholarship that is interdisciplinary, draws from diverse fields (including history, sociology, ethnic studies, cultural studies and many more), and from a variety of theoretical traditions (such as Marxism, feminism, post-structuralism, and critical legal studies). CRT scholars believe this approach aids in better understanding the important function of race in law and policy and its impact on diverse communities (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993).

Next is an emphasis on the absolute centrality of history and context in law and social struggles (Crenshaw et al., 1995). This includes a commitment to challenge dominant ideology including notions of objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, equal opportunity, and race neutrality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Early CRT research focused on analyzing the effects of Affirmative Action, desegregation, and other race-based legislation in promoting so-called “equality” between Blacks and Whites (Bell, 1995; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Perea, 2000).²³ By questioning the supposed neutrality of law and policy as well as seeking to understand how and in what ways they function to benefit particular groups over others, CRT scholarship brings

²³ Much of the early scholarship addressed the monumental case *Brown v. Board of Education*.

visibility to racism as a system of oppression that upholds the material interests of those invested in White supremacist heteropatriarchal privilege.

CRT scholars also place value on experiential knowledge and posit that “reality” is situational and socially constructed (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Thus CRT practitioners solicit and incorporate storytelling and narratives as valid approaches through which to examine race and racism in the law, policy, and in society (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1990, 2000; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Olivas, 1990). Critical Race Theory’s focus on race and racism, as a system of oppression, is what sets it apart from CLS scholars. CRT scholars recognized that existing discussions of law and class were not only led largely by White scholars, they all too often ignored the presence of racial disparities. Critical race scholars, who were largely comprised of scholars of color, believed that by solely focusing on issues of class CLS not only failed to address issues of racial inequality but also overlooked and underplayed the role of race and racism in the very construction of the legal foundations upon which our society rests (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Harris, 1994; Parker & Lynn, 2002). This led CRT scholars to challenge mainstream notions of race, racism and racial power in U.S. society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Donnor, 2005; Matsuda, 1987).

Not only is understanding the role that race and racism play in U.S. society important to discussions of law, policy, and rights, the knowledges and experiences of people of color are also critical to discussions of rights, law, and justice. CRT scholars recognize that “African Americans and other people of color have always thought in theoretical terms about their conditions of social, political, and economic subordination in

a White supremacist society” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 8). As such, theoretical research should not only seek to advance methods that involve actively seeking out the voices and experiences of people of color, it should be interdisciplinary and include knowledge from diverse disciplines such as African, Latino/a, and Native American critical social thought.

And, finally, CRT scholars are committed to advancing a call toward activism and actively working towards the elimination of racial oppression, with the goal of ending all forms of oppression (Bell, 1995; Brayboy, 2005; Donnor, 2005; Matsuda et al., 1993).

This call toward advocacy and activism is what sets CRT apart from many other theoretical approaches. At the root of it, CRT scholars believe it is not only important to understand the indelible and seemingly innocuous ways in which racism, power, and privilege become normalized through law, policy, and practice but that we must work actively against these practices in order to advance the goal of social equity for all.

Race as a social construct

One of the most basic claims of CRT scholarship arises from the work of Michael Omi and Howard Winant who, in 1986, co-authored *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. In this important work, the authors posit race is a socially constructed category that has been used as a fundamental axis of social organization in the United States. According to this argument, resulting law and policy has allowed for this axis to differentiate racial groups and to show the superiority or dominance of one racial group over others (Banks, 1995; López, 2006; Omi & Winant, 1994; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Omi and Winant’s work suggests, in addition to law, social and academic practices have also served to perpetuate social inequities by

promoting scientific approaches that attribute intellectual, cultural, and moral capacities on the basis of biological race (Chang, 2002). Under this framework, scientific racism led to the promotion of biological determinism or biological destiny as justification for the unequal position of certain races. These beliefs have been maintained, supported, and legitimated by various laws and policies as rationale for upholding a “racial project” that disproportionately favors the rights and interests of some, self-perceived biologically superior, groups over others. The resulting racial project is “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 56). For example, Blacks have historically been “blamed” for their inferior position in society because physicians and scientists believed they lacked the capacity and/or motivation to advance their social and economic station. According to this logic, the reason for their depressed economic reality was perceived to be the result of some internal, biological deficit rather than the myriad social and legal practices, policies, and decisions that have effectively served to disenfranchise Black communities by preventing them from accessing the economic, academic and personal opportunities that had been available to Whites for many decades.

CRT scholars respond to theories of biological determinism by arguing that rather than deny the salience of race “because of its dubious scientific basis...the importance of race [must be] understood properly as a sociohistorical concept” (Chang, 2002, p. 88). At the same time, although CRT scholars concede race is socially constructed, used to justify the suppression and enslavement of African Americans and the dispossession of

American Indians from their ancestral lands (Deloria, 1969),²⁴ it still holds the capacity to dramatically impact the success, mortality, and livelihood of those who occupy lower positions in the resulting racial hierarchy. This is because racially discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, based on racist beliefs and assumptions, have served to comprise a system of power intended to support White racial supremacy and has resulted in the manifestation of racism.

According to Manning Marable (1992) the resulting concept of race has led to the proliferation of racism. Racism can be understood as “a system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Americans, American Indians and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms and color” (p. 5). Solórzano (1998) adds that embedded in this definition are three important assumptions: (1) a group believes itself to be superior; (2) the group that believes itself to be superior has the power to carry out their racist behavior; and, (3) racism affects multiple racial/ethnic groups. Ultimately, racism has come to be understood as comprised of both individual acts of meanness (Lawrence, 1987) and as manifested through institutional power (which people of color have historically had very little control over). While I acknowledge that individual acts of racism can have destructive and harmful effects, as such behaviors are responsible for promoting microaggressions toward people of color; this study is concerned with the institutional

²⁴ Although not a CRT scholar, I believe much of the work of Vine Deloria, Jr. reflects the values and tenets promoted by critical race theory. Moreover, Deloria’s work served to inspire one of CRT’s offshoots: Tribal Critical Race Theory.

manifestations of racism reflected in policies, laws, and practices, enabling macroaggressions to be perpetuated on a much grander social scale.

Microaggressions refer to pejorative subtle insults. These include verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual actions directed toward marginalized or minoritized peoples (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Such insults can be covert, conscious, and/or unintentional or they can manifest as “automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of [racial] inferiority” (Davis, 1989, p. 157). Macroaggressions, conversely, are overt attacks, insults, and/or pejorative statements made against minoritized or marginalized peoples by those considered to belong to the status quo or social majority. Unlike microaggressions, macroaggressions are neither directed at nor designed to offend a *specific* person of color. Rather they reinforce stereotypes of racialized groups as “either criminals, illiterates, or intellectual inferiors” (Russell, 1998, p.140). Macroaggressions can become manifest as a systemic and institutional form of racism when institutions promote discriminatory law, policy, and/or office practices that project inaccurate and/or damaging assumptions of a particular group.

Extending CRT: The origin of Tribal Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory offers a much-needed framework to examine the experiences of people of color and has evolved over time to address the specific legal relationships some groups have with the U.S. that others may not. Because the theory was originally developed to address civil rights struggles of African American people (Bell, 1995) it was originally oriented toward examining issues along a “Black-White” binary

(Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). However, this focus made CRT's original iteration an incomplete fit for understanding the experiences of those who are not Black and/or who may experience oppression as the result of more than one politicized subjectivity. In 1991, CRT scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the notion of intersectionality to draw attention to the fact that sometimes more than one factor influences a person's rights, standpoint, and positionality in society. For example, for women of color who experience violence – the unique combination between race, gender and other identity categories may leave a victim in a marginal position wherein remedies to rectify acts of racism and sexism may not adequately serve their needs (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Crenshaw, many of the experiences Black women face are not subsumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood...the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately (p. 1244).

Crenshaw's work received quite a bit of attention. Fellow CRT scholars responded by advancing arguments that, in order to better address issues of intersectionality, CRT could/should be adapted to address the experiences of particular ethnic/racial and other minoritized groups. Thus arose specialized forms, or offshoots, of CRT. They were intended to address the unique needs of diverse populations and push the theory beyond its original Black-White and masculine binary (Perea, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). For example, Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) currently emphasizes issues that affect Latina/o people in everyday life including immigration,

language, identity, culture and skin color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Espinoza, 1990; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Johnson, 2004; Montoya, 1994; Olivas, 1990). Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) emphasizes and critiques nativistic racism, the model minority stereotype, immigration and naturalization policies, as well as language discrimination and disenfranchisement issues affecting Asian people in the U.S. (Chang, 1993). Other offshoots focus on the intersectionality of race and sexuality, gender, and disability and include Queer Critical Race Theory, Critical Race Feminism and Dis/ability Critical Race Theory (respectively). QueerCrit seeks to “dismantle straight supremacy in law and society, and to oppose its mutually reinforcing interactions with other forms of oppression, including white supremacy and male supremacy” (Valdes, 1999, p. 1293; see also Misawa, 2010). FemCrit focuses on how attending to issues of race might inform feminism, and vice versa, and pays particular attention to male dominance as a social system (Caldwell, 1995; Wing, 1997). And DisCrit focuses on a dual analysis of race and ability as it applies to the field of education (Annamma, Connor & Ferri, 2012).

While these theories are helpful in understanding the more nuanced issues affecting racialized and otherwise minoritized communities, they do not adequately address the complicated legal relationship between American Indians/Alaska Natives and the federal government. This is because the liminality of Indigenous peoples as both racial and legal/political groups is unique to the American Indian/Alaska Native context, requiring a modification to CRT that would account for this (Brayboy, 2005). In 2005, Lumbee scholar Bryan Brayboy proposed Tribal Critical Race Theory, or TribalCrit, in order to fulfill the need for a theoretical frame to understand the desires and experiences

of Native peoples that is based on the shared history, voices, and experiences of Indigenous peoples. According to Brayboy (2005),

TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities. Though they differ depending on time, space, place, tribal nation, and individual, there appear to be commonalities in those ontologies and epistemologies. TribalCrit [thus] is rooted in these commonalities while simultaneously recognizing the range and variation that exists within and between communities and individuals (p. 427).

Rather than applying theories that do not have roots in the social and political experiences of American Indians, Brayboy believes it is important to forefront the seemingly shared knowledges, history, and, most importantly, shared desires of Indigenous peoples. TribalCrit is thus based on the understanding that Indigenous peoples have a “belief in and desire to obtain and forge tribal autonomy, self-determination, self-identification, and ultimately tribal sovereignty” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 433). Where sovereignty refers to the inherent right of tribal nations to assert self-governance, self-determination, and self-education; self-determination is the manifestation, operationalization, or enactment of sovereignty (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002). TribalCrit further asserts that any project that seeks to understand the motivations, experiences and treatment of American Indians within the continental U.S. must be rooted in an understanding of the political and legal relationship American Indians hold within contemporary U.S. society.

Any study on the struggle for American Indian/Alaska Native rights in the U.S. must begin with the understanding that American Indians/Alaska Natives hold a unique status in U.S. society as both a racial group and a political group. This unique status has influenced the overall goal and enforcement of federal policy (Brayboy, 2005; Deloria, 1969; Wilkins, 2002). As a result of this complex relationship/identity, the legacy of American Indian education in the U.S. cannot be understood separate from the legal and political relationship American Indians share with the federal government.

Education, for American Indians, has historically been the responsibility of the federal government. This is because prior to the creation of what is now commonly considered the United States of America, American Indian leaders ceded over one billion acres of land to the federal government in order for the U.S. nation-state to have a land base from which to exist. In exchange for these massive tracts of land, United States leaders entered into numerous treaty agreements promising to provide education, health care, and for the general welfare of American Indian peoples (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). This historic ability to engage in government-to-government relations, including exercising their sovereign right to engage in treaty-making, is what places American Indians in the unique position of being the only group that is considered both a political/legal group as well as a racial/ethnic one.

Although the federal government has offered education programs and services in its attempt to fulfill this obligation, the terms of such programs have at times been less than desirable and have left many feeling skeptical if not overtly hostile toward the intention of education institutions when it comes to Indigenous peoples. This is because

in fulfilling its treaty obligation of providing education, American Indian education, as it has been structured and administered by the federal government and numerous religious organizations, has been historically used as a mechanism to advance Christianization, assimilation, and cultural termination (González, 2008). The motto of “Kill the Indian, and Save the Man,” espoused by Richard H. Pratt, the military officer placed in charge of organizing education for American Indians in the late 1800’s can be said to summarize the general sentiment driving American Indian education efforts. This motto is synonymous with the Carlisle School – one of the first boarding schools for American Indians. At Carlisle, students were forced to fit into the image Pratt, as a representative of the non-Indigenous colonizing body politic, felt American Indians should represent. In order to receive education benefits, students were required to drastically alter their physical presence and behaviors while sacrificing their sacred cultural languages, symbols, beliefs, and traditions in order to reach the penultimate goal of assimilation. Failure to comply often resulted in severe punishment. This oppressive and violent model became the standard for American Indian education in the early twentieth century.

The federal government’s historic engagement in treaty-making practices with American Indian nations indicates the burgeoning nation-state recognized the sovereign status of Indigenous peoples. As a result of this recognition, federally recognized tribes share a distinctive government-to-government relationship with the government and their members have the benefit of dual citizenship wherein they do not lose civil rights because of their status as tribal citizens and individual tribal citizens are not denied tribal rights because of their American citizenship (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). This

unique history and relationship to the federal government is pivotal in understanding the historic and modern struggles faced by American Indian peoples in the U.S.

The legacy of the U.S.' attempts to detach American Indian/Alaska Native peoples from their cultural, spiritual, intellectual and physical roots inspires TribalCrit's claim that U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism. Moreover TribalCrit asserts that not only did imperialism play an important role but that its manifestation through colonization is what fueled the racialization of Indigenous peoples, mixing acts of nationhood with rhetoric of savagery (Brayboy, 2005; Williams, 2005). The U.S. imperial desire to colonize, promote White supremacy, and seek material gain, often through the pursuit of capitalist interests, is not limited to the domestic front. It has also served to influence foreign policy and continues to affect racialized peoples all over the world. However, TribalCrit argues that, within the American Indian context, the domestic U.S. was established as a result of the intentional manipulation of Eurocentric laws directly implicating Indigenous peoples and their home communities. These laws, steeped in policies rooted in the self-interested readings of legal concepts such as Manifest Destiny and the Norman Yoke, allowed White settler-colonists to "rationalize and legitimize" their decisions to steal lands from the First Nations by claiming a God-given right to their actions (Brayboy, 2005). For this reason, unlike CRT which claims that racism is endemic to U.S. society, TribalCrit asserts that, when it comes to American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) peoples, it is colonization, made manifest through the

prevalence of European American thought, knowledge, and power structures, that is endemic to society.²⁵

While TribalCrit differs from traditional CRT in its focus on the unique legal and political status of American Indians, what remains clear in both theories is an emphasis on the centrality of the experiential knowledge of people of color. Both theories underscore the importance of stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and argue that those who have experienced discrimination speak with a special voice to which we should listen (Matsuda, 1987). Focusing on voice and stories of the marginalized, minoritized and/or disenfranchised serves an important function in counteracting the stories of the dominant group (Delgado, 1989; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). This is because the dominant group often tells stories, sometimes referred to as “majoritarian” stories, that are designed to “remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups [e.g. non-Whites] and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 240). For example, media stories promoted by White-owned networks may frame communities of people of color as high-crime areas where drug abuse is rampant. However CRT and TribalCrit scholars, by collecting stories of marginalized peoples, create an opportunity for

²⁵ It is important to note that the belief that colonization, and not racism, is endemic to society is not meant to deny the role of racism in systematically disenfranchising minoritized peoples. Nor is it intended to suggest colonization has also not had a particularly detrimental effect on other marginalized groups. Rather the focus on colonization is intended to forefront that, when it comes to the domestic Indigenous context, White relationships with American Indians mixed colonial projects of taking land and claiming territory with the racialization of Indigenous peoples.

oppressed communities to speak back against these majoritarian stories and learn to trust their own senses, feelings and experiences, giving them authority in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality (Lawrence, 1995). This focus on what is sometimes referred to as “voice scholarship” is to provide a “counterstory” as a way to counteract or challenge the dominant story. For example, a counterstory to the majoritarian narrative of communities of color as hubs for high-crime and high-drug abuse might include a story about the lived experiences of the peoples of these communities absent victimry. The counterstory would provide data that disproves or adds a level of complexity missing from the majoritarian story – showing that crime and drug abuse is also a significant issue for White communities but that, since Whites are more likely to own their own homes and businesses, may receive less media visibility for it since unlawful acts occur outside of the public eye – behind closed doors – and thus may be less likely to be reported.

The emphasis on storytelling as a valid guide to theory and knowledge acquisition is compatible with Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Many Indigenous communities believe knowledge is transmitted through stories, thus stories and theories are always and immediately interconnected (Brayboy, 2005; Delgado, 2000; Kovach, 2005). Swisher (1996) underscores the connection between voices, stories, and perspectives when she writes: “Listening to the voices of the people and making sure they are heard through the writing; telling the stories of the people as metaphors and examples of schooling experiences; and presenting the perspectives of others [is important] to encourage [non-Indigenous] readers to see through a different lens” (p. 191). Storytelling

thus serves an important function in raising awareness and understanding about the experiences of Indigenous peoples. CRT and TribalCrit purposefully elicit stories, not just to pushback against majoritarian stories but with the ultimate goal of using them to work toward social change. This social justice component speaks to the importance of praxis – that is, the combining of theory into practice. This focus on praxis promotes research that is relevant to Indigenous peoples and requires projects undertaken with, by, or for Indigenous communities to not only strive to be useful and relevant to the people, but to work toward the advancement of social justice, tribal self-determination, and sovereignty.

Lastly, in order to understand the goals and experiences of Indigenous communities, including the goal of self-determination and the assertion of sovereignty, TribalCrit focuses on the importance of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions and visions for the future. Brayboy (2005) argues these aspects are “central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups” (p. 429). One aspect that appears to be consistent among Indigenous peoples is a belief in the importance of contributing to the success of the community. This does not negate the importance of individual success but rather reframes individual success so that it is viewed as intricately connected to the success and health of the community.

Why this all matters: Students’ protest and advocate for their educational rights

Returning to the subject of the student activists in this study, at the heart of their protest efforts was a desire to engage MSU, as political peoples, and advocate for rights

they believed would contribute to educational equity and Native student success on campus. Outlining what could potentially become a model for a student's bill of rights (based loosely on the idea of a patient's bill of rights) they identified five basic rights they felt every Indigenous student deserves. The first is the right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs. Second is the right to access culturally informed academic and student support services. Third is the right to be recognized as members of a political, not just racial, group. Fourth is the right to attend institutions that feel safe and not hostile to their presence. And, finally, the fifth is the right to be seen as viable, present, "modern" human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects.

The right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs.

The right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs was inspired largely in response to MSU's decision to terminate NTPP. The activists felt this decision not only endangered an important university education program, with its concomitant community partnerships, but imperiled the success and presence of a federally guaranteed program. In order to better understand their concern, it is important to know the history of the NTPP and how the successive decision to terminate the program was interpreted by the students.

What was the Native Teacher Preparation Program (NTPP)?²⁶

In 2001, MSU received official notice from the United States' Department of Education's Office of Indian Education that it had been awarded a professional training grant to prepare and train American Indian teachers to teach in Indian-serving schools.²⁷ These types of grants, arising from Public Law 107-110, Title VII (115 STAT. 1907), are specifically geared toward advancing Indigenous peoples' education. They exist out of recognition for the unique trust relationship American Indians/Alaska Natives have with the United States. According to section 7101, these grants are intended to "fulfill the federal Government's unique and continuing trust relationship with and responsibility to the Indian people for the education of Indian children" (20 USC 7401). This includes providing support for the preparation and training of Alaska Native/American Indian peoples "as educators and counselors and in other professions serving Indian people" (p. B-28). The Native Teacher Preparation Program was borne out of these professional grants (specifically from section 7121: Improvement of Educational Opportunities for Indian Children; 20 USC 7441).

The original grant, just shy of \$1 million dollars, provided funding to prepare 12 American Indian pre-service teachers to teach in schools that served American Indian populations. After receiving news of the award, the public relations department at MSU

²⁶ Much of the information in this section can be found on the students' blog, coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com, in a post titled "History of the American Indian Teacher Program" posted Tuesday, April 15, 2008.

²⁷ Although notice of the award was received in 2001, the students officially began the program in 2002.

issued press releases to tout the program. Newspapers picked up the press release and ran features on it across the country. As a result of this NTPP examined over 132 applications for the initial twelve spots. NTPP students were admitted to MSU under regular admissions policies and to the teacher education program with qualifications that met the minimum requirements for admission.²⁸

Since 2002, the program received five additional grants from the U.S. Department of education to continue training new students. According to Heseo'o, former program coordinator and principal investigator of the program,

NTPP was structured to be a three-year program; this included one year of professional induction services. Prior to enrolling in NTPP, participants had a range of college experience. Some had begun, but not completed, a bachelor's degree others had a bachelor's degree and were working toward completing a master's degree. Through NTPP students received teacher preparation as well as training and support to receive licensure, before entering the teaching workforce. They also received a monthly stipend for living expenses, tuition, a laptop computer and printer, to be used during their time enrolled in the program, health insurance, dependent assistance, books, training fees, tutoring services, academic counseling/guidance, and moving expenses. The hope of the program's creator

²⁸ Historically, NTPP students were among some of the strongest academic minds entering the academy. Upon graduation, each of the four NTPP cohorts had, at least, a cumulative grade point average of just over 3.5 (on a scale of 4.0).

and its personnel was that students could focus on completing their preparation program without feeling overwhelmed by financial, academic, social, or emotional concerns.

While generous in funding, NTTP was *not* a scholarship program. The grant required participants to pay back to the federal government what they received/or were awarded during their time enrolled in the program by teaching in Indian serving schools. In other words, the program was a “payback” program in which participants were required to teach in Indian-serving schools²⁹ for the same amount of time they received federal/programmatic support.³⁰ Upon admission to the program, each participant was asked to sign a payback agreement in which they indicated agreement to this commitment. If they failed to earn licensure, or decided to leave the program before completion, they were expected to reimburse the federal government for the amount of services received during their time in the program. The relationship between the U.S. government and tribal sovereigns is what enables federal programs that carry payback agreements.

In order to be eligible to receive this type of grant, MSU entered into memorandums of understanding with neighboring tribes indicating it would partner with them, and help recruit their eligible students, to train them to become teachers in their community. A copy of the MOU(s) is required to be submitted to the OIE at the time of

²⁹ As defined by the Office of Indian Education.

³⁰ This model is counter to the typical scholarship model which carries little to no formal obligations of payback.

application submission. These memoranda of understanding (MOU's) represent an official relationship between the university and its neighboring tribal communities to educate and prepare Native teachers to teach in their communities. Lastly, it is important to note that NTPP was designed to promote culturally relevant pedagogy and curriculum. The emphasis on culturally relevant practices was based on research that suggested integrating important aspects of culture and pedagogical practices is vital for promoting the successful achievement and completion of education of Indian students.

Why the activists were upset with the dissolution of NTPP

In a statement published on their webpage on April 19, 2008, the student Coalition explained their wariness and concern with MSU's decision to terminate the program:

In July of 2007, MSU's NTPP received nearly \$2 million [...] to be used to recruit 20 American Indian students to the University to be trained as educators so they could return to their communities and teach in schools that serve our Indian children. [...] Since the receipt of the \$2 million in grants, University senior administration in partnership with members of the College of Education, including the Dean, have incessantly attacked NTPP, its directors, both past and present, and its students. They have refused to let NTPP directors recruit new students, publicly and incorrectly framed the program as "mismanaged," taken away signatory authority from the director, withheld the director's salary, and most importantly, failed to support the current NTPP students by not providing necessary things such as textbooks and tutors. NTPP

staff jobs have been repeatedly threatened and one staff member was even told that she was not “genetically engineered” to run the grants. In addition, students have been framed as liars and not trustworthy by the College of Education. These are just a few of the examples of the ways in which Indian peoples have been attacked on a campus that exploits us on a daily basis with their mascot, the “[tribal nickname].”

In recent weeks, the education dean has proposed to terminate the grant projects and Sr. Vice President has agreed. NTPP directors were never consulted regarding this decision, rather, they were told that the projects were terminated only after the decision was final. NTPP is a successful program that has taken 5 arduous years to build has been decimated in a matter of months, for no other reason than sheer racism. One million dollars has already been sent back to the Office of Indian Education and the second million is in process. Sending millions in grant money back to the funding source is an unheard of act at the University. What kind of university would deliberately deny access to education for Indian people in this way? What kind of university would treat Indian staff and students like this? What kind of university would target a specific group of people and their community and not take responsibilities for their actions through formal apologies and recompense? [...] The situation at MSU is a classic case of our Indian peoples’ fight for sovereignty and for our right to equal access to education. The fight is against those in power who want Indian people and their children--our future--to fail.

Not only were students upset about how MSU's decision impacted students and existing university-specific programs, they argued such action could have long-term consequences for federal programs. As Heseo'o explained,

The decision to shut down the program and return the monies hurt Native students. It hurt those that had been recruited to start in the fall and who weren't funded but for NTPP. The ten or twelve potential students, [they] could have used [that money]. [But what bothers me is that MSU didn't seem to consider] what happens the next year when the Office of Indian Ed. goes to Congress and says: "\$2 million of the money you gave us last year went unused." That kind of action begs the question: why would they give us [Natives] all that money again if [we aren't] using it?

So not only does the decision reflect poorly on the Native peoples who are being blamed for not being able to implement the grants, it takes away resources [for us as a whole]. It potentially can take away resources from Native communities. I mean, it did take resources away at [MSU]. I lost my job, you know? We all did [at NTPP]. We lost our jobs. There was 10—excuse me—20 teachers that we didn't put in the classroom [because the grants were sent back] that we had money to put in the classroom. It's awful. It's really pretty tragic.

Unfortunately it is unclear as to whether the university was able to comprehend these far-reaching impacts or whether it took them into account when making their decision. The university's approach was instead to look at the short-term finances, the immediate cost, without acknowledgement of the broader implications of denying future

students the teachers that could have been prepared by the grants. Heseeo’o went on to explain,

I believe [MSU] didn't [consider the full impact]. And I remember us, I remember all of us [staff at NTPP] went to a meeting [with high-ranking administrators] one day and I remember [one of the staff members] bringing up something that was very theoretical. She had a lot of these quotes explaining why this [type of educational program] is important [for honoring treaty agreements and for improving Native graduation rates and achievement at all academic levels] and she was really trying to advocate for us and it was like they didn't give a shit, you know? I just remember thinking: "how can this not be important? This is an underserved community. You guys exploit Native communities [with your athletic nickname and imagery and even in getting these types of grants]." It was such a disconnect...of how they could do that and get away with it, you know? It was so crazy.

Heseeo’o highlights the ideological disconnect between the NTPP and the university housing it. The NTPP was concerned with theoretical and practical implications of the program, while the university’s disregard in the meeting, based on Heseeo’o’s impression, demonstrates a need to prioritize the university’s political and material needs and desires.

The right to access culturally informed academic and student support services.

Both Heseo'o and Gabby, a graduate of NTPP and one of the initial student protestors, explained MSU's decision to return the grants represented a violation of a second right. That is, Indigenous students' right to access culturally informed academic and student support services.

As Heseo'o's previous excerpt demonstrated, terminating NTPP served as but one example of how/why students experienced a threat to American Indian faculty, staff, allies, and related programs. It contributed to the disappearance of Native advocates on campus.

Here it is important to note that not only do Native faculty play a pivotal role in the success of Native students so, too, do Native staff members (Shotton, Lowe & Waterman, 2014).

Native faculty [and staff] serve as activists, advocates, and change agents in postsecondary institutions and in their disciplines by challenging dominant, racist, and discriminatory scholarship, practices and perceptions; by stimulating research in Indigenous issues; by developing and infusing curriculum that is inclusive of Native perspectives and scholarship; by assisting colleges and universities in recruiting and retaining Native students; and through networking with Native organizations (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 93).

The students felt the loss of the American Indian professor who held the dual role of professor education and American Indian studies as well as creator and principal

investigator for NTPP, of the Native staff working with/for NTPP, and of the American Indian Program Coordinator in the Center for Minority Support Services, as well as the dismissal of the director of the American Indian Resource Center, just seven months after having been appointed. They explained that this dearth in Native-serving peoples and services reduced their access to important personal counseling, academic and professional advising. Additionally, they lost access to academic support and important programs/space. Furthermore, the students were concerned that MSU's inability to replace the AIPC in a timely fashion caused their fellow peers to have limited, if any, access to important academic advising over the transition from one semester to the next. In an email sent on February 29, 2008 Gabby, who was serving in the capacity of American Indian Woman Scholar and ITSA president at the time, and was responsible for helping to plan the pow wow, reached out to the coalition, and its allies.

Hey,

I heard today that the position for our American Indian Program Coordinator was re-opened. I have some concerns with this that some of you might also have. First of all, I think that more should have been done to keep [the previous AIPC] in the position. As all of you know, he was exceptional; he went above and beyond his duties to be our advisor. He was incredible and very successful in the position, so what was done to keep him there and why are we even in this situation to begin with? Secondly, the fact that it's already been 4 months since [he] left is a problem. We've already been without an advisor for

way too long. To prolong it even further is too much, leaving us with extra weight on our shoulders to fill responsibilities that should be those of the AIPC.

The fact that it's happening RIGHT NOW is also a problem for me, we have so much to do for the powwow and it's such a hard time to go without a Program Coordinator. Please don't take this the wrong way, I'm not complaining. I LOVE being involved and I thoroughly enjoy working with all of you. I'm more than willing to do my part for ITSA/AISES, etc. Besides that, I'm so proud of everything that you are all doing, and I totally appreciate all that do and have done to make us so successful. But we need an advisor and have every right to one. And we need one soon. I want to know why the position is re-opened and why [filling the position has been] put off even longer.

To me, the message that we're given is that the American Indian students on this campus are not important, and we need to let that be known. We have a voice as American Indian students and it needs to be heard. I'm asking that you join me in asking these questions and getting some answers. Please e-mail me back before Tuesday to let me know if you're interested in being a part of this.

Thanks,

Gabby's message raises an important consideration: if an institution has a low number of Native faculty and staff to begin with and then loses some (including the only Native advisor), what does this mean for student success? Her email suggests it compromises the achievement of students by placing undue pressure onto them to pick up the slack and oversee important academic and cultural events, such as the powwow, with

limited direction. As Gabby explained, losing the AIPC and professor of education was difficult because student's perceived them as important advocates, allies, and pivotal in providing culturally informed teaching and mentorship.

*[The professor who left] influenced our development as professionals, students, and thinkers. I think that he was the only one that really could have. Like when it comes to teaching American Indian students, his knowledge on the subject was so in depth and so vast that he really completely changed how I even view myself...I remember [going] running...like right before I started the program [and thinking about how] my grandmother died and that was hard for me. I wasn't close to her. I didn't speak [our traditional language]. [Yet] she was a symbol of something **beautiful** and amazing to me. And to lose that and know that that generation [maintaining our traditional language and ways] was just disappearing and it wasn't being replaced—not just that it wasn't being replaced by next generations, not fully, but it was not being appreciated. It was not being valued the way I valued it.*

[The professor who left] was really the kind of person that made me understand how much that's worth. How much it's worth to think the way we think and to have the experiences that we have. I grew up [a little, during that run]. It's kind of like I use the analogy that a fish doesn't know it drinks water, breathes water, until it's on land. And it's similar to that [with exposure to our culture]. I just lived it. I didn't know that it was one of the most valuable possessions that I had because it had never been devalued or underappreciated or

challenged in any way at all. I've always been in my own little world and to see that other people are part of this world, but also they're not appreciated that way, [that] they aren't valued the way [hurt]. [It made me decide] I would value it [even more].

I think [the professor who left] was the type of person that could not only show me that but inspire that in me to help me see what I had. The most valuable thing that I had. And not just that but to understand that the most amazing thing he taught me was that [valuing and learning about our culture was] not about me; it's about us [as Indigenous peoples]. The sense of community, the sense of committing to us couldn't have come from anywhere else.

It is not uncommon for Native students to cite institutional climate or cultural differences as presenting challenges for their educational achievement. Factors such as competing worldviews and conceptions of legitimate knowledge can impact how Indigenous students experience college (Brayboy et al., 2012; Brown, 2000; Carney, 1999; Fixico, 1995). However, research on graduate students of color suggests resiliency and self-motivation, both present in Gabby's message, are important factors leading to success. Additionally, "supportive relationships, including mentoring and the desire to give back to one's tribe and support Native communities" are also important (Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 87). As Gabby points out, access to Indigenous faculty and staff is an important source of support because it keeps students engaged and committed to their education – not just to serve their own individual needs but to meet the needs of the

larger group. Losing important sources of mentoring means students now have to go outside their department to find suitable mentors, if they can find any at all.

Ultimately losing the three Native leaders in such a short amount of time concerned the students because it created the conditions to significantly impact the mentors available for Native students who now may have to search for other mentors (of color) or outside their area of study. In some cases Indigenous graduate students have responded to feelings of isolation and cultural discontinuity by creating “surrogate” communities comprised of Native students on campus (Brayboy et al., 2012). Students either connect through existing campus groups, in this case through ITSA, or through professional organizations, such as attending conferences or joining organizations such as AISES, or they created the communities themselves through joining informal networks of friends. However important these peer networks are nothing can take the place of having professional and academic mentors within the university system.

The right to be recognized as members of a political group, not just a racial group.

A third right suggested by the student’s is the right to be recognized as members of a political group, not just a racial group. This includes the desire to be seen, first and foremost, as a member of their independent sovereign nation. This right stresses the importance of understanding Indigenous students are part of a group of people (Natives) that are diverse in their histories, cultures, and ways of being. It does not mean that Native peoples don’t understand and appreciate the shared importance associated with a pan-Indigenous “racial” grouping. Rather, this right is intended to stress the point that not

only are Native peoples members of a racial group, their membership as part of specific tribal nations, or their political status, affords them treaty rights and other federal recognitions that guarantee particular education rights. The Coalition's use of language in stating its objective intentionally references the political status of Indigenous peoples.

They indicate a commitment

to ensure the protection and observation of education rights guaranteed to Indigenous people under the United States Constitution and Civil Rights Act; to provide representation and support individuals affected by violation(s) of Education rights by Education institutions or government agencies; and to eradicate racial hatred and/or racial discrimination supported by Education institutions or Government agencies (coalitiontoprotect.blogspot.com).

Unfortunately the political nature of Indigenous peoples as members of independent sovereign nations was often lost on university administrators as both its language and practice suggested they either had little or no knowledge of what this means. For example, in an email to Rose the AVP for Diversity refers to the leaders of the state tribes, not as chairperson's, but collectively as "Chiefs." This stereotypical language references not only the ignorance of central administrators in understanding the status and organization of American Indian peoples and may also be indicative of their overall ignorance to the history of physical and symbolic violence propagated by educational organizations. This may be why Indigenous students may be wary of them in the first place.

Heseo'o, Gabby, and Leah all pointed to why it's important to understand how the political status of Native peoples has affected the history of Native education in the U.S. They explained that American Indians are the only group the federal government has explicitly stated a responsibility for educating yet the legacy of education structures as symbols of pain, oppression, and violence have left many feeling wary of its intentions. For this reason, universities are not always immediately thought of as spaces or places to drive American Indian sovereign interests or promote self-determination. However, as Roger Geertz González (2008) has explained, this does not mean that Indigenous peoples do not value or prioritize education. Although education for American Indians in the U.S. was historically used for Christianization, assimilation, and cultural termination this has not deterred some American Indian tribes from promoting college education (González, 2008).

Furthermore, the activists went on to point out mascots obfuscate the very traditions Indigenous communities, as sovereign peoples, have fought the federal government to retain. This includes the right to sacred and spiritual practices and items that get trivialized or mocked by fans of sports teams that utilize Indigenous names and iconography. The practice of trivializing sacred Indigenous practices and items creates the social-cultural foundation for non-Indigenous peoples to create deep pain for one of the most marginalized and oppressed groups in the U.S.

As Indigenous blogger of *Cultural Appropriations*, Adrienne Keene (2012), has pointed out, until the passage of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, Native peoples could be arrested for practicing traditional spirituality yet non-Indians

have taken sacred American Indian rituals and objects and, through their performances, transformed them into commodified objects for their own personal entertainment. The desecration of spiritual symbols can be explicitly seen in the rampant use of fans donning war bonnets and feather headbands. These behaviors desecrate the meaning of the eagle feather, a sacred ceremonial item for many Indigenous peoples considered “similar to the Congressional Medal of Honor” as it is “the highest honor which Native people bestow on other individuals” (Banks, 1993, p. 8). As the activists in this study explained, these items have specific cultural and spiritual value and are off limits to the general public. For example, feathers are earned one at a time and are typically not for sale nor are they worn to garner attention. Rather, feathers are worn under strict observation of protocol and usually bestowed by a respected elder or religious or tribal leader. They are intended to be treated with pride and dignity. Heseeo’o goes on to explain that the headdress is a sacred symbol not unlike how Mormons might view and treat their religious garments and should be respected. Ultimately, the use of inaccurate racial/racist mascots make a mockery of Native peoples, and their cultures (Means, 1993), opening the door for prejudicial (mis)treatment by the dominant culture against, not just American Indian nations, but all other ethnic minority groups (APA, 2005; Steinfeldt, Foltz, LaFollette, White, Wong & Steinfeldt, 2012).

The right to attend institutions to feel safe and not hostile to their presence.

A fourth right endorsed by the students’ includes the right to attend institutions that feel safe and not hostile to their presence. As I have stated before, students of color experience racial campus climate differently from White students. For the students in this

study, the mascot was just one more contributing source of aggravation. This was largely because of the university's inconsistency of enforcing respectful use of Native symbols and usage. Tony, who was an undergraduate student during his time of activism, shared a tale of seeing students burn or hang Native effigies when MSU played a neighboring university whose mascot was the Cowboys. While these incidents occurred off-campus and are thus not the responsibility of MSU to intercede or disrupt, Tony believes MSU's lack of educating its fans in appropriate fan behaviors contributes to actions such as these. Furthermore, MSU actively participates in the promotion of stereotypes for its own material benefit. The students pointed to the ethnic studies advertising campaign that relied on stereotypes of communities of color to attract the attention of potential students as an example of this.

The choice to utilize offensive and negative depictions of particular racial/ethnic groups in its advertising campaign (for a refresher on what this campaign entailed, please refer back to chapter one) angered students of color, who united and composed a letter outlining the problematic nature of the posters. They provided a copy of the letter to the interim director of the Ethnic Studies program and to the university's AVP for Diversity.

Dear [Professor],

We are writing to express our concern over the recent posters advertising Ethnic Studies courses. While we acknowledge the attempt to parody stereotypes by telling students to correct misconceptions by enrolling in Ethnic Studies courses, we feel that the joke has been had at the expense of students of color. These posters reduce and essentialize communities down to stereotypical food or

pop cultural icons yet no attempt is made to problematize these depictions in the poster. While the courses would deconstruct these stereotypes, even to the point of disempowering them in the student's minds, the poster itself serves only to reify hurtful assumptions. Students who look at these ads are left with their original stereotypical assumptions and no other means of taking them apart. Such stereotypes are later taken up in larger classrooms by white students who are left to think it's appropriate to connect members of racialized groups in ways similar to how they are portrayed in these posters.

Largely, the problem comes in the way this parody is delivered. The design of these posters does not lend itself toward a deeper cultural understanding, but instead is akin to the [university student government's recent] attempt to market [an event parodying the 7 deadly sins by associating each sin with minority groups]. By emphasizing specific images such as food, pop culture and casinos, [these ads] play upon these same "sins." Associating Asian American and Chicano cultures solely to food or Indigenous cultures with casinos implicitly connects these cultures to gluttony, greed and addiction.

While the posters may intend to identify negative stereotypes, the design itself magnifies the image of the act, such as the food or the casino. At a glance the Asian American poster looks more like an ad for [the popular chain restaurant] Panda Express than a collegiate course. Similarly the African American poster looks more like a concert or CD release promotion, rather than a serious examination of cultural issues.

Overall the explanation/debriefing of the advertisement comes as too little, too late. Literally, the font sizes that ask students to enroll in ethnic studies courses to remove such stereotypes are the smallest pieces of text on the poster, de-emphasizing the deconstruction while emphasizing the stereotypes. Students rushing between classes have little chance of noticing the entirety of the poster's message and will only pick up the largest images and text.

[Professor], we value the ethnic studies department and understand that many of our peers of color enroll and participate in these courses. The critical awareness fostered by such courses is exactly why we find these posters so problematic. These classes ask students to be critical thinkers and develop cultural awareness, yet we feel that as a department you have not done that in these posters. We ask that these posters be taken down and the department's marketing strategy be changed.

Unfortunately, student concerns regarding the posters were flippantly dismissed. The AVP for Diversity assured students he would look into the issue while jokingly inviting them to “give me something hard to work on.” Later, students received a letter from the director of ethnic studies outlining how costly it was to run the campaign and explaining to students that the campaign was scheduled to end very soon and would thus phase itself out soon enough (Document on file with author). This decision indicated for many that the leadership at MSU places money above the well-being and safety of its students. For the students in this study, the AVP's insensitivity and director of ethnic studies' remarks represented the university's lack of interest and understanding of how

institution-sanctioned programs and initiatives promote racism, hostility, and abuse against students of color, including American Indians. While the AVP promised that the offensive posters would be removed immediately (Document on file), the posters remained displayed across the university's sprawling 1,534-acre campus in buildings and on the sides of university buses and webpages for approximately two more months. Such actions left the students feeling the university was not a place where change could happen as its actions were not consistent with its rhetoric of supporting diversity. Instead it sent the opposite or conflicting message. These types of university-sanctioned decisions, they reasoned, are what inspire students to think hosting a pep rally-esque event to the theme of "Cowboys & Indians" in the residence halls is not only appropriate but encouraged.

The right to be seen as viable, present, "modern" human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects.

The fifth and final right espoused by the students is the right to be seen as viable, present, "modern" human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects. The students believed they had a right to attend an institution that doesn't utilize peoples as mascots not as symbols or nicknames that trivialize Native people's by perpetuating them as monolithic, unrefined/unchanged peoples. Although American Indian participation in collegiate sports has a unique history wherein the stereotype of Indigenous peoples as combative, savage players has been thoroughly exploited; the use of mascots transform institutions of education into spaces where Indian students must struggle daily against the paradox of seeing Indigenous imagery, symbols and peoples depicted in offensive contexts that desecrate traditional beliefs and peoples

while fighting to access/protect their treaty-granted educational rights (King, 2001).

According to King and Springwood (2001):

Native American mascots perpetuate inappropriate, inaccurate, and harmful understandings of living people, their cultures, and their histories... Through fragments thought to be Indian – a headdress, tomahawk, war paint, or buckskin – Native American mascots reduce them to a series of well-worn clichés, sideshow props, and racist stereotypes, masking, if not erasing, the complexities of Native American experiences and identities. Halftime performance, fan antics, and mass merchandizing transform somber and reverent artifacts and activities into trivial, shallow, and lifeless forms. (p. 7)

Ultimately the students didn't want to have to fall prey to recruitment/advertising campaigns that exploit stereotypes associated with American Indians as a cheap gimmick to be sensational and with the end goal of benefitting the university's – or anybody else's – bottom line. They were frustrated with seeing themselves reduced to stereotypes presented on t-shirts and other items. Returning to the example of the Blackout game in which the shirts with the horned frog were sold. At first glance, the depiction of a stereotypical "brave" might have served as an indicator, not that the vendors, who were MSU students themselves, intended to purposefully express racist viewpoints by oppressing or exploiting the image of American Indians, but as an indication that they have limited knowledge of the local Indigenous peoples or of American Indians. It may even serve as an indicator that they lack education regarding the American Indian traditional beliefs and practices. As Brayboy (2005) has explained,

the everyday experiences of American Indians, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of U.S. society. These viable images have instead been replaced with fixed images from the past of what American Indians once were. (p. 431)

Staurowsky (1999) adds that few Americans have had the opportunity to acquire the depth of knowledge or understanding about this nation's history relative to American Indians that allows for responsible consideration of the issue of the continued use of American Indian symbols and imagery in sports and educational settings.

However without actively forcing its students to learn about American Indians or at the very least, the school's tribal namesake people, and by terminating programs and losing important allies that provide this information the university fosters an environment in which the knowledge of American Indian peoples and customs of many non-Natives are left to be based off myth and stereotype. On the one hand, MSU requires undergraduate students to fulfill a "diversity requirement" in order to graduate. Over 89 courses, from various departments, are offered to fulfill this requirement and range from focusing on gender to intercultural musical influences. On the other hand, the effort to educate students falls painfully short when only one American Indian (history) course is actively offered to fulfill the requirement. Unfortunately during the time of the students' activism this class was not taught by an American Indian Ph.D. and offered a cursory introduction to American Indian issues without focusing specifically on any one tribe. Without this knowledge, non-Native students, staff, faculty and fans may not

immediately understand the importance for using the tribal namesake and image in a respectful manner.

To add insult to injury, the students felt that diversity and Natives, in particular, appeared to be good only when they can benefit the university (usually by generating revenue by their enrollment or through the use of symbols associated with their communities) but become undesirable when their presence requires the university to invest material and other resources into them. For example, Tony recalled a story of interacting with his scholarship advisor (a man of Pacific Islander heritage) who, unfortunately, seemed unaware of the important cultural expectations and context facing American Indian students that require them to leave the university to return home for important ceremony when significant tragedies or events occur (such as a death in the family). Such departures can be unexpected and may interrupt course progress. Rather than work with the student, and serve as an advocate for him with his professors, in order to help him fulfill the requirements of his courses while respecting his need to return home, the advisor chastised him for his stop/start approach to his degree program.

I remember the conversation started with how much time I've been up there at the university. It's probably been about five years. And what my overall progress was [slower than he expected] and where I'm supposed to be. But I know for a good two years I didn't have no advisors to show me what to do and how to go about it. So it was very confusing because that's when he brought up the numbers [of the total cost the scholarship had paid for my education expenses]. I'm trying to figure out why he would show me this stuff and how it's supposed to motivate me,

*especially looking at the number [he had written down] and how much money was spent to my education and even then, I'm not even done and the way it was like: "Well, if it gets to the point where you are gonna need more money, we're gonna have trouble trying to get that money for you." So that's when—then the following year that's when I lost it. When I was told that the amount of money that was spent was already too much compared to what it's supposed to be. That's when it was kind of like: "Well, I'm not anywhere. Like I don't know what to do;" [I felt] frustration and anger just about the whole situation. It **did** hurt. It just hurt, generally.*

Tony's experience highlights the institutions conceptualization of cost and support. The university's rhetoric, described in chapter one, was ostensibly student oriented and student serving yet when Tony, one of the few American Indian students at the university, needed more support from the institution, focus was redirected from the person to the financial cost of attendance. The students of NTPP felt that Tony was treated similar to their program: when the university felt the cost of educating Natives was too high, it worked hard to push them out or get them to become responsible for educating themselves.

Concluding Thoughts

While the students in this study were advocating for what they felt were basic education rights, what is most striking is their willingness to question power and their ability to look out for, as Heseeo'o put it, seven generations forward. In other words, many of them engaged in activism not out of a desire to promote their own individual

interests (though many were, indeed, personally affected by the decisions they were protesting), they were largely concerned about protecting rights and opportunities for all Native students – those currently enrolled and for all future generations. Working against what they felt made the campus unwelcome and hostile; they sought to collaborate with campus leaders to address their concerns. Unfortunately the interests and concerns of the students and the institution did not always align. As what was at stake for the students – the education and well-being of their communities and children – was not the same for MSU. The next chapter examines the clash in communication and conflict-resolution styles between MSU and its Native students. Later chapters will address more fully what was at stake for MSU. That is, its personal interest in placating, not the Native students, but its donors and supporters, the NCAA, and preserving its financial/material concerns.

Chapter 3 – Making the invisible visible

A desire for conflict resolution and intercultural communication

The first two chapters outlined the racial campus climate at Mountain State University and the series of incidents that led several Native students to protest various university decisions and actions. The students protested MSU's exploitation of Native peoples as caricatures and mascots while simultaneously whittling away important services that promote the academic and personal achievement of its real-life Native students. The loss of important allies and treaty-protected programs inspired them to work directly with administrators in hopes of educating them about their political rights. By working collaboratively they hoped to resolve what they perceived to be a conflict between university material interests and the real-life harmful effects of university practices on Native peoples. The students believed it was important to work together *with* administrators to address their concerns and ameliorate what they believed was an increasingly hostile and unsupportive campus climate for Native student achievement. They hoped that by voicing their struggles in a particular manner, they could help administrators understand their concerns weren't limited to their own individual ability to achieve. Rather they were concerned about the well-being of existing and future generations of MSU students. This chapter explores the communication and conflict resolution styles utilized by the Native students and how those styles contrasted with the approach employed by Western university administrators.

When examining Native American student resistance it is important to remember that, unlike other so-called races, because of their political and racialized identities,

American Indians have not necessarily been fighting for inclusion into mainstream society but rather for the right to remain recognized and respected as distinct, sovereign, and tribal peoples (Brayboy, 2005; Deloria, 1969; Wilkins, 2002). In addition to political sovereignty, tribal peoples may seek to assert cultural sovereignty or the right to exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. believed that the relationship between cultural and political sovereignty may necessitate a “return to Native ceremonies and traditions” in order to formulate a framework to exert sovereignty (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 196). The actions of the Native students in this study sought to promote group based thinking and practices. Their actions and expectations for dialogue, problem solving/conflict resolution, and effective political activism were often based upon their traditional cultural values and practices with the ultimate goal of supporting and/or promoting, not their individual interests or desires, but solutions to the needs and challenges facing present and future Indigenous peoples on campus. Unfortunately such an orientation can present a challenge if university administrators are not culturally competent. If university leaders do not have a basic understanding of Native peoples and their needs/desires, or if they are not very well versed in intercultural forms of dialogue and conflict management, this can hinder activist efforts and serve to push out students who are actively seeking to advance change.

Before continuing, it is important to note what I mean by “cultural competence.” Extant research has examined the importance of cultural sensitivity when working with/for American Indian peoples (American Indian Health Services of Chicago, 2009;

Bennett, 1998; Bielefeldt, 2008; Clay, 2009; Jordan Insitute for Families, 1997; Lidot, Orrantia, & Allen, n.d.; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers training materials, 2007).

However, developing competence is different from advocating for the development of cultural sensitivity. Competence is not merely an awareness of cultural differences, as cultural sensitivity suggests, but an ability to respect a peoples/community's cultural context and act accordingly. Such an approach places the onus of gathering and applying appropriate knowledge to improve the relationship onto the shoulders of the individual and is especially critical for those who act in a professional leadership capacity. Cultural competence entails the ability to effectively interact with people from diverse cultures by recognizing the importance of cultural differences and respecting, rather than simply tolerating, those differences (Albert, Hurd, & King, 2009; Bennett, 1998; Bielefeldt, 2008; Claymore, 2002; Weaver, 2004). This form of competence necessitates self-awareness, awareness of cultural norms and differences, and thoughtful reflection about the implications of these differences.

Cultural competency is especially important for university administrators and leaders in ensuring they are effective in working on teams with fellow peers, faculty, students, university partners and neighboring communities. It is also critical to understanding the needs and expectations of students, staff, and faculty who seek to promote the mission of their communities and/or the university. Without an understanding of cultural protocols and of cultural issues, it can be especially challenging for administrators and leaders to propose appropriate solutions to the problems they are asked to solve. This study suggests there was a lack of cultural competence on the part of

university leaders. This, unfortunately, exacerbated the pain and frustration experienced by students.

The activism demonstrated by the students in this study suggests they assumed MSU administrators and leadership possessed a basic understanding of cultural competency when working with American Indians. That is, the student activists expected MSU leaders to understand that Native peoples are political peoples who maintain distinct rights and have diverse nationalities, as several hundred ratified treaties with the U.S. and other powers demonstrate, although they are also sometimes classified as a racial group. Because Native peoples are so diverse, the activists argued it was important to maintain allies and services that recognized that diversity and could help meet student needs. As Gabby explained,

[We thought they would understand that] we needed support that was geared toward meeting our needs that other people couldn't meet. I know that they said that we have other counselors in the office; you shouldn't feel like you should only have to go to the Native American counselor here but it's not the same. It's not to the same degree. And I think that that's one big thing that we were trying to get across to them. That we needed that support to help us, to help us run a powwow, to help us figure out our classes, and just to go to someone.

Furthermore, they explained, while some Indigenous peoples may embrace a pan-Indian racial classification label and may consider themselves included in terms such as Native Americans, American Indians, Indians, Indigenous people and First Nations peoples, they hoped their university leadership understood they each have individual

tribal affiliations. As members of their distinct tribes they were committed to promoting and upholding their tribal sovereignty; although, how tribal sovereignty is pursued and asserted varies by individual tribes.

Additionally, they hoped their university leaders understood that although there are some shared values and beliefs among Indigenous peoples, that each tribal nation has their own distinct histories, cultures, languages, religions/spiritual practices, values, attitudes, and beliefs. They believed all of these points essential to developing a sense of respect and understanding, both of which the students considered crucial to effective communication and problem-solving. They understood there are a wide variety of viewpoints among Native peoples and no individual can be an expert on every aspect of Indian culture. Yet they believed building competency and educating oneself about different culture(s) and people(s) goes a long way in strengthening and improving *respectful* working relationships. According to Tony, one of the things that inspired his desire to collaborate with administrators (and later to protest against the university) was his surprise in learning the leadership correlated the ability to perform one's job to genetic makeup. One comment in particular, made to a female American Indian staff member, caught the entire group by surprise and served as a motivating factor to question university leadership on its ability to exercise cultural (in)competency.

[T]he real main event that got to me was the incident [involving two female Native staff members] where they were trying to talk to [university leaders] and there was a comment made, like under the breath, and you could barely hear the comment, but after that moment that's when it solidified everything. [They were

told they weren't] genetically engineered [to do their job...to balance a budget!].

That's what really solidified the whole activist, in me.

Reducing the staff member(s) to racist and sexist expectations not only served as the catalyst for Tony to become involved, it reminded the entire group that sometimes the discriminatory behavior exhibited by university administrators was intersectional in nature. As Heseo'o later pointed out, if the university was seeking to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples, as its literature and administrators appeared to suggest, then it was important to respect and understand what Indigenous people want from higher education, how they communicate, and what they expect from university leadership rather than reducing them to simple stereotypes.

What Indigenous Students Wanted from Higher Education, How They Communicated, and What they Expected from University Leadership

Although cultural differences can sometimes be subtle, they can feel vast in intercultural and cross-cultural settings. Cultural competence, according to this study, entails recognizing students' diverse cultural experiences, how those experiences inform how they interpret the academic/university context, and how the university interprets its students' needs and context. Demonstrating cultural competence requires the institution to promote culturally respectful behaviors as well as culturally congruent services. A culturally competent leader must respect diversity, emphasize professional and personal self-awareness, and be able to integrate that knowledge and values/attitudes with practical skills. The students in this study, similar to findings in Weaver's (2004) survey of Native American helping professionals, identified knowledge, skills, and values/attitudes as

important and critical to facilitating culturally competent dialogue and understanding. Knowledge refers to a demonstrated understanding of culture, diversity, history and the contemporary realities of Native communities. Skills refer to generic communication abilities as well as culture specific behaviors. Values/attitudes refers to the practice of exhibiting open-mindedness, valuing diversity, having security with one's own individual culture, a willingness to learn, demonstrating humility, personal integrity, and having knowledge of social justice as it applies to Native communities (Weaver, 2004). The remainder of this section offers a basic overview of the students' expectations. In the following chapter sections, I offer specific examples of how/why students believed these traits were not only desirable but necessary for effective communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution.

Knowledge.

Knowledge of culture includes having a basic awareness of Indigenous values, beliefs, spirituality, traditions, and family structures as well as structures of clans, bands, and tribes (Weaver, 2004). These criteria were believed to be crucial in understanding social interactions and go a long way in developing strong relationships. For example, understanding that some tribal peoples are matriarchal,³¹ may place a heavy emphasis on balance and responsibility to self and others, and may be less comfortable with resources and relationships being treated as disposable is important. Additionally, a basic

³¹ Although the hope is that administrators treat women of all social, racial and ethnic backgrounds as egalitarian and with the respect they would extend to their peers, it is especially important to note that in matriarchal societies women may be highly respected as healers, leaders, decision-makers, and advocates.

knowledge of spirituality, how time is perceived among some tribal peoples, and the four R's (relationships, reciprocity, responsibility, and respect) were considered critical because they are believed to affect all parts of life – including the professional and academic setting. For the students, time is not always linear and decisions are not made as quickly as administrators are accustomed.

As several students pointed out, relationships are important. For many of them, all things are considered connected: the environment, people, plants, animals, and the ethereal. Thus great emphasis was placed on establishing, maintaining and sustaining relationships. Moreover with relationships comes an increased sense of responsibility, reciprocity, respect and accountability in all decisions. Every decision a person makes is believed to affect relationships beyond the immediate individual including the lives and relationships with other people as well as the outlying community. Relationships were seen as the basic building block of life and power viewed as a shared resource. Thus decision-making involves consultation of many people and sometimes requires consensus, as decisions made in the present should be expected to benefit seven generations forward. To this end, the students emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of the community, rather than the individual, in decision-making.

Skills.

Similar to Weaver's (2004) findings, the activists expected university leaders to possess certain basic skills including the ability to engage in effective communication, the ability to deal with resistance, employ anger management, promote conflict-resolution, demonstrate reflective listening, possess tolerance of difference, support

efforts for consensus building, have personal skills in 1-1 communication, and exercise patience with individual, group, and community concerns and actions (p. 27).

Additionally, they expected leaders to have basic containment/listening skills, to use patience and refrain from speaking or interrupting when someone is talking, to sit and listen, and not feel like talking constantly (Weaver, 2004, p. 27). Most importantly, administrators were expected to be able to tolerate silence.

Students also expected administrators to demonstrate respect through their verbal and non-verbal behaviors. This included understanding that silence is neither always bad, nor is it always a sign of assent. For many of them, silence is highly appreciated in their home communities and is respected as a sign of learning. Because great insights are possible through it, silence can be indicative of thinking or of considering a proposition. Therefore it is sometimes seen as necessary to be patient and to give others time to reflect on what is being said in order that they might absorb the information being presented.

Values/Attitudes.

As Heseo'o pointed out, Indigenous peoples have a long and contentious history of outsiders coming to them or into their communities and telling them what to do or how to live their lives. Such an approach assumes Indigenous peoples are not capable of knowing what they need to be successful or viable which is demeaning and patronizing. The students were not interested in being forcibly told what is best for them; nor did they want administrators to impose their own values or a Eurocentric perspective or tell them what they should value and what they should consider to be respectful (e.g. accepting the tribal athletic nickname as evidence of honoring Native peoples). Rather they wanted

administrators to embody the university's stated mission of valuing diversity by listening to their concerns, trusting that students had solutions, and collaborating with the students to uncover productive ways to address the situation. Such an approach would have demonstrated respect for the concerns of both the students and their supporters.

Students believed demonstrating cultural competency and respect is embodied by a willingness to learn and exhibit humility. They hoped their university leaders would show an openness to student concerns (rather than immediate dismissiveness), to new ideas, and new ways of approaching problems. They also hoped that administrators would value the knowledge of students and their communities. And, finally, students wanted their leaders to have a basic knowledge of social justice as it applies to American Indian communities. As the students explained, social justice begins with an acknowledgement that oppression, prejudice, and discrimination are practiced by others. They hoped that university leaders would see themselves as agents of change, not as agents of control, and that they would respect Native peoples' desire for education and commitment to sovereignty and self-determination. They hoped their leaders had a basic awareness of how the colonial process, and their own class status, has affected their own values and beliefs. Unfortunately the leadership at MSU was not prepared to do any of this. Gabby recalls a meeting early in spring of 2007 whereby the students' experienced an immediate clash between their expectations for cultural competence and the university leadership's inability/unwillingness to enact it. That example follows.

Putting Administrators to the Test

Pursuing Student Desire for Intercultural Competency and Problem Solving

Example 1.

During spring 2007 Gabby was the president of the Inter Tribal Student Association (ITSA), a popular campus-wide American Indian student group. As a result of this, she was responsible for helping to plan and host the university's 35th annual powwow. Unfortunately the American Indian Program Coordinator (AIPC), who had resigned the previous semester, had not been replaced. This left Gabby and the other students who were helping plan the powwow, without important guidance and advocacy necessary to access institutional funding and planning resources. Gabby had met with the director of the Center for Minority Student Services (a Chicano man) to discuss the students' frustrations with the perceived lack of university support for the event. She emphasized how important the event was to the Native community and how hard the students had been working to plan it. She explained that, although they had already hosted a number of fundraisers to raise money to sponsor the event, without an AIPC and financial and institutional support from the university, which MSU had provided in the past, students were worried the event would not happen. Finally, she expressed concern that the students were struggling with feelings of being overworked and overwhelmed and admitted she was worried this labor was affecting their academic performance. While the director was sympathetic to her concerns, promising to help with some minor issues, he indicated he could do nothing to speed up the process of appointing an AIPC and that

his ability to help address the remainder of their larger concerns was beyond the scope of his position.

After the meeting, Gabby emailed her fellow students to inform them of how the meeting had gone and what she expected as its outcome. Several days passed and when they received no follow-up from the director, they decided to call a student group meeting to discuss their concerns in person. At the meeting several students shared their growing frustration not only with the lack of support for the powwow, but also with the delay in appointing a new AIPC and overall campus climate toward Native peoples. They decided if the director of the Center for Minority Student Services could not help them, then it was time to take their concerns to a higher administrator: the associate vice president (AVP) for diversity. Gabby agreed to arrange a meeting with him.

On the day of the meeting, a group of approximately 15 students arrived at the central administrative building to offer their support and to voice their concerns. They waited outside the office of the AVP, in the lounge area of the building's main hall, quietly visiting and occasionally joking or teasing one another. Some stood off to the side, some sat on the floor, and some leaned against the walls, as there was not an adequate amount of chairs to accommodate them. Although the waiting area felt a bit cramped, the students did not mind.

[It was important to us that we all be there because w]e were frustrated. We all were, it wasn't just me, it wasn't just: "I'm the only person here suffering, somebody help me!" All of us were having trouble with not having somebody replace [the AIPC] and we needed it. So that's why we wanted to include

everybody, we wanted everybody to be there because the other student organizations seemed to be doing it [too]. I sent the e-mail out [...] and I didn't send it out saying: "Here we go. Get ready!" It was just like: "Hey, we're meeting with [the AVP] at this time. If you can come to represent, to just show that you are as concerned as we are, we'd love to have you." It was not in any way at all an attempt to be threatening.

Together they waited patiently to be invited into the AVP's office. As they waited, a few high ranking administrators walked by and saw the students waiting. None stopped to greet them, to inquire why they were there, or to ask how they were doing. When the meeting time arrived the AVP walked out into the hallway and appeared startled to see the size of the group. He informed Gabby his office was not large enough to accommodate them all and indicated she was the only one welcome to meet with him. Gabby was dumbfounded. And, in her interview for this study, explained:

We had seen the Latin[o/a] students get together and rile together and make a change, for good, for them and they did it together as a group. We had seen [this!] I mean [our group also advocated] like other organizations when they did things. [When they had issues and would meet with administrators] they did [it] together as a group. And this was our turn...Everyone was [waiting to speak with him]. [Waiting and] just talking [amongst ourselves] about what we were doing there and why we were there and then he comes out and you could tell that he was shocked; that he was surprised. Shocked that all of us were all there. After that he was like: "Well, I don't have enough room in my office for all of these students."

And, “I didn't know they were all coming. So why don't you just come in with me?”

Surprised he did not address or greet the group, and at his disinterest in offering an alternative meeting space that could accommodate them all, Gabby asked her peers what they wanted to do. They decided it would be best if she and Leah, her vice president, attended the meeting.

I didn't want to be alone because it wasn't just me, it wasn't just my concern. I didn't – who am I to just go and say, “I'm representing everybody?”...So both of us enter his office...[And I'm looking around at] his huge office, which could easily have fit every single person in the hall... and the director of the American Indian Resource Center [enters with us] ... which we have no idea how she even heard about this meeting because the students didn't tell her about it. [So we sit down] and we told them [the AVP and the AIRC director]: “We need somebody to replace [the AIPC].” And, [Leah] remembers this better, [but we felt so uncomfortable and threatened by] his body language and his gestures. The way he was so intimidating with the way he addressed us and talked to us.

In this example Gabby expresses her surprise at the administrator's cultural incompetence. The administrator erroneously appears to believe it is appropriate to treat leadership among Native peoples in an individual manner and ask one or two students to speak for the collective rather than recognize the importance of group struggle and respect the voices and experiences of all those who had showed up to speak with him. Importantly, the administrator lied about the space and, as a representative of the

institution, created the context to suppress the student voices when they became too great in number or concern. All of this was ironic given his institutional position was specifically designed with the intent of serving diverse student populations.

Leah went on to explain how his non-verbal behaviors further illustrated that not only were they unwelcome, but that he grew tired and exasperated with having to listen to their concerns. This message was sent early when he did not reach out to shake their hands or greet them personally as they entered his space. During the meeting he balled his fists and leaned in toward her in what felt a menacing manner. Gabby continued, noting:

The big thing of the meeting was when he leaned forward, right into our space, and was trying to get his point across to us like he was so important. He was aggressive and defensive [and] it wasn't like he was making a lot of effort to say: "I'm really sorry that this is the way it is. I'm sorry that we don't have somebody in this position right now. I feel bad for you and all of your other peers who are going through this." No, there wasn't anything like: "We'll work on it. We'll do it right away." I think that at one point he was like: "Well, we'll do what we can." But it wasn't like: "Wow! I'm so sorry you guys. It's my responsibility this happened." There wasn't any accountability or sympathy or anything else and I think that anything he may have said of like: "We'll get started on it," [wasn't there]. [For us] it was more like: "Really? Okay. Thanks. See you later." Not like: "Oh wow, you're so great for helping us out." It wasn't like that at all. It wasn't a good meeting, it didn't solve anything.

This interaction highlights the epistemic conflict in how students think about leadership and the ways it is enacted by the AVP. Native students, in this instance, believe that leaders who are culturally competent and committed to the welfare of the students would behave less aggressively and more relationally. The students' frustrating experiences with leaders like the AVP would eventually lead them to engage in more overt forms of activism. Gabby explains that, as the meeting progressed and they shared the group's concerns, the AVP appeared to become frustrated and angry. Perhaps in response to his frustration, Leah began raising her voice and speaking more passionately, a decision that led the AVP to label her behavior as "disrespectful" which caused him to call the meeting to end and promptly invite them to leave his office. Both Gabby and Leah explained they left feeling "unheard and intimidated."

[It was like he thought]: "Who are we to come into this office and tell him that we're having a problem?" [And I began to ask myself] who am I to come in and make a complaint? [We] also felt a little bit nervous about who he was going to talk to next because it seemed like he was more angry about the situation than he was anxious to solve it. And that was something; I remember leaving thinking: "Who is this going to be unleashed on? Is somebody else going to get in trouble because we are making these concerns? Is he going to be mad at somebody else because they're not doing something?" I don't know.

Gabby went on to explain that things did happen after that. She recalls being called in for a meeting the director for the Center for Minority Student Services, and

other people who were on the committee to appoint a new AIPC, where they began discussions anew about who would fill the position.

This example illustrates how the students' actions and orientation to university leaders was based on familiar forms of dialogue and conflict resolution from their personal backgrounds. Their approach was informed by their experiences as members of their tribal societies. They assumed everyone who was affected by the issues being discussed was considered a stakeholder and would be invited to the table to begin discussions intended to identify potential solutions. This was what they considered to be a basic awareness of Indigenous cultural norms and practices in communication. Unfortunately they quickly realized their expectations differed from the institution's orientation to meetings as well as its preferred mode of conflict resolution.

What the previous example did not highlight was the additional tendency of administrators to emphasize the material interests of the university as justification for institutional inaction or slowness in addressing student concerns. Unfortunately this tactic became painfully obvious when another group of students met with administrators to discuss their concerns with the department of ethnic studies' guerilla marketing campaign. Taken together, both meetings illustrate how MSU's preoccupation with fiscal matters, meeting etiquette, and university protocol serve to ignore student concerns and continue to uphold the conditions for what feels like a hostile climate.

Example 2.

In chapter two I discussed how the Ethnic Studies advertising campaign, which associated particular stereotypes with individual ethnic groups, inspired students to

submit a letter to the interim director of ethnic studies detailing their concerns. Upon receiving the letter, students were invited to meet with the university personnel responsible for commissioning and creating the campaign. Present at the meeting were various members of the ethnic studies program, including the program's interim director, members of the university's marketing department, and the AVP for diversity. The student group was diverse and represented an intercultural student alliance. Students hailed from a variety of academic and personal backgrounds. Several days prior to the meeting, the group had gathered to prepare an agenda emphasizing the importance of ethnic studies in promoting social justice. Since many of them had taken courses from the department, it was easy for them to see the connections between the two.

The student group arrived excited and prepared to collaborate with administrators and armed with suggestions on how to ameliorate the situation. Unfortunately they had barely made it through their introductions before the university leaders took over. The interim director of ethnic studies explained that, although he appreciated their concerns, the campaign had been very costly and was undertaken with the permission of the leaders of each faction of the program (i.e. the representative for Asian American studies had signed off on the Asian American poster, as had the representative for Chicano/a studies, and so on). He then provided the students with a double-sided printed document of the financial breakdown and rationale for the campaign. As he talked through the document, he enthusiastically explained that "this is a great time for this campus [as] very exciting changes are scheduled to happen." What he, and all the other university leaders present meant by this was that the posters were simply the first part of an expensive three-phase

initiative. The meeting concluded with university leaders telling the students they needn't concern themselves with asking for the removal of the posters since they were scheduled to "phase themselves out" soon. At no point during the meeting did the administrators address the pain or stress the students had experienced from having to be faced with the stereotypical posters on a daily basis.

For the students, the meeting served as yet another example of how the institution "solves" student concerns by hosting a meeting, allowing students to speak briefly, and inviting them to leave when they start questioning the institutions decisions too deeply. By using fiscal concerns to defend its actions, the administrators effectively sought to avoid concerns that it is sanctioning actions that promote a hostile campus climate for students of color. The words and actions of those present at the meeting suggested that, although the university claimed to value diversity and appeared to welcome the feedback and concerns of its students, any opinions that questioned MSU's commitment to diversity would be met with eventual dismissiveness. This reaffirmed to the students that the university's stated commitment to diversity was superficial and insincere. They noted how, during the meeting the AVP for diversity appeared to take copious notes as the students were speaking, informing them: "I've been at this job for five weeks [but] I'm writing [your concerns] down...which means I'll follow up." However, as the meeting ended, he invited them to "come in anytime" saying he welcomed their thoughts and feedback then qualified his statement by telling them he was really busy and that they should "email" him if they had concerns. The meeting concluded with students feeling

steam-rolled, confused and embarrassed; as though they had been merely “humored” by administrators and not taken seriously.

These two examples suggest the students’ hopes and intentions for dialogue and meeting protocol did not always match the corporate approach promoted by their educational institution. Table 2 outlines some of the Native students’ underlying assumptions to problem solving and conflict resolution as well as those embodied by the institution (measured through the actions of its leadership). The chart is not necessarily intended to read as a binary but to demonstrate the differences in philosophies, goals, and practices.

Table 2. Student and Institutional Models of Conflict Resolution

	Student Model	MSU Model
Decision-Making Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize group needs/desires • Age or role within group is important but does not give unilateral power to speak or make decisions • Can involve whole group • Everyone is viewed as a stakeholder • Importance of consensus • Silence viewed as a sign of deep thought and reflection • Decisions may take time as elders, spiritual, and other community leaders may need to be consulted • Stresses the importance of patience • Focus on making decisions that will benefit seven generations forward while being respectful to the concerns and experiences of seven generations back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize material and property interests of the institution and individuals • Professional title or rank within university important and can allow for unilateral power in decision-making • May involve only key personnel or stakeholders • Highest ranking individual assumed to represent interests of the group • Prioritizes the voices, thoughts, and opinions of high-ranking individuals • Consensus not needed to determine solution to problem • Emphasize immediacy in decision-making • Focus on institutional benefit for present students, current alumni and their children
Definition of Accomplishment and Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual accomplishments are encouraged and celebrated but prioritize group rights/needs • Focus on promoting community well-being by addressing collective needs, health, and success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellence and success individually defined • Focus on personal needs, health, and success
Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin when everyone is ready • Everyone has space and opportunity to speak, regardless of title, position, or rank • One person may speak at a time, but is not assumed to speak for the entire group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin at a set time • Institutional, individual, or hierarchical control over conversation and agenda • Take-charge/take-control tendencies minimize silence and seek to take and keep control of “the floor” during meetings

	Student Model	MSU Model
Expression of Ideas and Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal or through actions • May include stories, art, dance, ceremony, symbols • Emphasize listening skills • Modesty in speech and presentation of self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal • May include stories, personal metaphors or formal speech • Emphasize verbal skills • Self-attention in speech and presentation of self
Resource Allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving, sharing of personal and group resources to advance collective needs and well-being • Work and education may be focused on meeting the needs of the family and community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking, saving of personal and group resources to advance institutional needs (determined by fiscal standpoint and high-ranking institutional leaders) • Work and education may be focused on getting ahead or benefitting the “bottom line”
Aggression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived as appropriate during certain times, when stakes are high, to benefit group needs/interests • Indication of passion, ferocity, and vigor (regardless of gender) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived as appropriate and even rewarded when demonstrated by leaders to promote individual and/or institutional interest • Can be perceived as negative and punished when demonstrated by females (regardless of rank)
Religion/Spirituality and Family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A way of life; views the spiritual as always present and relevant • Family life includes extended family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A segment/part of life; emphasizes separation of religion/spirituality (often linked to church) and state • Family life generally limited to nuclear family
Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems must be reviewed in its entirety, inclusive of all affected individuals • Emphasizes corrective approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviors are viewed as isolated acts • Limited participation • Punitive approach

Table 2³² highlights the epistemological, ontological, and axiological clashes in communication and conflict resolution styles between the students and their university. The students' expectation of conflict-resolution and decision-making practices reflect particular ontological, epistemological, and axiological commitments. Ontology refers to ways of being in the world. For many of the students in this study, this includes a commitment to the 4 R's and recognition of interrelationships with all living entities including recognition of a spiritual realm that is interconnected with the physical realm (Meyer, 2001). Epistemology refers to "the philosophy of knowledge" and its relationship with language as the means for interpreting and communicating ideas" (Kovach, 2005, p. 26). Epistemology is the process of how we come to acquire our worldviews or how we come to know what we know. For the students, epistemology centers on the transmission of knowledge through stories. Knowledge within this context is experiential and derived from teachings transferred intergenerationally as well as the understanding that sometimes important cultural and community stories are told in traditional languages (most of which are verb-based as opposed to noun-based English) (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2005) while other knowledge might be "garnered through dreams and visions" (Hart, 2010, p. 8) making it intuitive and introspective. This type of epistemology emphasizes the interconnections between the human world, the spirit, and inanimate entities. Knowledge and understanding is understood to be subjective and

³² Information provided in this table is derived, in part, from the work of Albert, Hurd, & King, 2009; Clay, 2009; Claymore, 2002; Lidot, Orrantia, & Allen, n.d.; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers training materials, 2007; Watts, 2006; Weaver, 2004.

situated within a larger collective of Indigenous experiences, stories, and knowledges. Additionally, Elders, spiritual leaders, and other community leaders play a key role in the transmission and understanding of knowledge as well as the amelioration of particular harms. Axiology refers to the personal and collective values, ethics, and principles of a people and may include a commitment to the following principles: a respect for individuals and community, commitment and understanding of reciprocity and responsibility, attention to respect and safety of Indigenous peoples and lands, deep listening and hearing with more than the ears, reflective non-judgment, demonstrated intention to honor what is shared, an awareness and connection between the logic of the mind and the feelings of the heart, self-awareness, and subjectivity (Hart, 2010). The students wanted to employ an approach to justice that promotes peace, heals the network of relationships, and eradicates political, spiritual, and emotional injustices (Gray & Lauderdale, 2007). Such an approach centers relationships, reciprocity, solidarity, and process, as opposed to hierarchy (Mirsky, 2004; Zion, 1998). The emphasis on community and reciprocity represents a unifying belief that individuals are not responsible to and for themselves but rather to and for others in order to maintain a functioning society.

Mountain State University leaders emphasized a perspective that prioritized the property, material, and individual rights and interests of the organization and its leadership. This approach promoted a linear, one-way relational model of communication and problem-solving. It upheld the notion that power is hierarchically concentrated which promotes a top-down approach to problem-solving and conflict-resolution. In this model,

a problem is expected to be presented by a recognized leader/individual considered responsible for a representing a particular group or overseeing a certain unit (this can be either by title or appointment). This person is expected to take the issue to the corresponding person responsible for overseeing, or supervising, the success of that particular group. The supervisor is expected then to either take the problem to *their* superior and/or to consult existing precedent or policy. The consultation of policies and procedures is intended to help identify a solution or used to justify the present state. When the supervisor determines the solution (sometimes with input from their superior, sometimes not) s/he is expected to take the appropriate steps to implement it immediately. As soon as this has happened, the problem is assumed to be resolved.

The students' model, on the other hand, prioritizes relationships and the rights and interests of the affected group. Their model suggests a path to communication and problem-solving that is not quite so linear and suggests power is shared, and not assumed. Although the students relied on older students who had experience in activism to help lead their efforts and discussions, this did not mean they de-emphasized the opinions, skills, and talents of the younger or inexperienced ones. Their model sought to promote balance and harmony by including the voices of all stakeholders and assumed finding appropriate solutions to each concern identified was the responsibility everyone involved. In this model, the collective, which included individuals who possessed varying degrees of power and titles within the institution, gathered to reflect on and discuss the current state of affairs. They invited anyone interested in the topic of discussion to participate and identify problem(s) or issues of concern. Through this discussion, they determined

how best to present/frame the issue. The initial gathering was used to identify and determine additional stakeholders, identifying all those who may be affected by the issues/concerns being raised, with the intention of including them in future meetings. From there, the group moved to invite all stakeholders to discuss the identified concerns/issues (an action that emphasized their desire for collaboration) where they brainstormed proposed solutions. Next, they separated and took time for reflection/deliberation (which for some required consultation with elders and/or other respected community leaders who may not have been present at the meeting). The group later reconvened to discuss and agree on which solution(s) to implement. The final step was to implement the solution(s) – however, this did not suggest the matter was closed or that the conflict was automatically resolved as reflection/continued oversight must occur to ensure the implemented solution appropriately alleviates and addresses the initial concern(s).

The experience of Leah and Gabby, with the student group, reflected this complex collaborative process. The students expected university leaders to engage in a similar model and were frustrated when the leaders were unwilling, uninterested or simply unfamiliar with their preferred model. As a result of the administrative insistence in employing an impersonal, formal, and corporate model of communication and conflict management, the institutional leadership violated a number of student expectations. These violations caused fissures in the relationship students had with leaders and the university and compounded over time ultimately causing them to feel further marginalized and pushed out.

Incorporating the Medicine Wheel

As the number of meetings between the students and administrators grew, the behavior and protocols demonstrated by administrators during each meeting came to serve as an indicator for the students' as to what the expected outcome of the meeting would be. The presence and type of salutation, introduction, and tone of voice utilized by university leaders influenced how welcome students felt and illustrated an important difference in cultural orientation to relationships. For example, when the students were asked to introduce themselves, they used a place-based introduction and began with identifying the name(s) of their tribes, clans, who their family/people are, and/or the location of their traditional or family homeland. Usually this information was followed with their role within the institution as well as what area and level of study they are/were in. Such an introduction was intended to offer important insight about who a person is and was considered a first step to developing a meaningful relationship. Although they did not expect university leaders to reciprocate the same type of introduction style, they often noted administrators immediately introduced themselves by stating their name and title or position only. Additionally, students expected to be greeted with a general salutation and a handshake. The typical handshake for the students was to extend the hand and gently touch the other person's hand, as opposed to the strong grasping handshake administrators may be accustomed to (this varies slightly depending on the age and personal attitude of the individual student). A (gentle) handshake was often seen as a sign of respect, not weakness. However the consistent lack of this simple gesture left many feeling unwelcome and uncomfortable.

Perhaps one of the most egregious and frustrating differences for the students was the administrative focus on controlling and dominating the conversation as this was counter to their desire for effective dialogue. After experiencing several instances where this happened, the students set out to preempt this from occurring in future meetings. After Gabby and Leah's meeting, one activist, who had been left in the hallway and who was participating in a national fellowship program that semester, reached out to the student coalition. She suggested that as they prepared for future meetings that they focus their dialogue and conflict resolution efforts on promoting health and well-being in Indian communities and circulated information she had been provided on how the medicine wheel might be used to guide them.³³ She reasoned that the students' experiences on campus was causing them great distress and affecting their health and well-being and suggested they ask administrators to consider solutions that would restore health, balance and harmony to the students and their communities. She explained that, just as the medicine wheel drew from the strength of the four sacred directions, that dialogue and conflict resolution was a multi-step process and must be engaged with great care and respect.

According to this model, and as the student explained, the east is where deep listening occurs; it is the beginning and is initiated by listening to members of the affected community as they identify the issues they most care about. The next direction,

³³ The information she provided was drawn from the Healthy Native Communities Fellowship program (<http://www.anthc.org/chs/epicenter/upload/healthynativecommunitiesfellowship.pdf>) as well as information provided by the Navajo Foundation of Education (<http://www.odclc.navajo.org/books.htm>).

the south, is where group dialogue begins. She urged the group to express their emotions and to “analyze root causes of community [health] problems.” At this point, it is important to identify and understand challenging group dynamics, become creative, and to identify capabilities and possibilities. The west symbolizes action and stresses responsibility, knowing community values and principles, and knowing appropriate behaviors and acceptable attitude. This direction also includes developing and implementing community wellness actions and events and involves facilitating group action planning. It can also include implementing strategies to manage conflict resolution and group dynamics. And, finally, the north direction involved reflection, reviewing, revising, and implementation.

The proposed approach is multi-tiered, focused on understanding different leadership styles, promoting new wellness policies at the local level, understanding the Tribal/Federal policy process, strengthening collaborative/ethical leadership practices, and developing new resources with the ultimate goal of promoting spiritual wholeness (www.hncpartners.org). The student concluded by suggesting:

If we can use these traditional tools with our case against [MSU], we can be united on how we want to address our concerns with [the AVP for Diversity] in [our upcoming meetings].

The students welcomed the model and agreed to incorporate as much as they could into their efforts. This example suggests the students returned to their cultural understandings of how to engage the world both as a defense to the slights and aggressions at the hands of the institution and as a way to respond directly to the

institution. It was this place of cultural understanding that would provide strength in the coming months as the aggressions and instances of disrespect continued to grow.

Although their previous meetings with administrators had offered small gains (e.g. as a result of Gabby and Leah's meeting with the AVP, some funding and support was restored for the pow wow and efforts to replace the AIPC began anew), they continued to experience difficulties on campus and knew they would have to continue to work with administrators to address their concerns. The students hoped that by drawing from this medicine wheel model, they would be able to advance solutions that addressed the root causes of their concerns and ultimately restore balance and well-being for the students on campus. Unfortunately as time passed, the rates of hostile and racist instances experienced on campus continued to increase. The next section focuses on the justice-based principles and models the students sought to promote to university administrators after they experienced racist and hostile moments as a result of the school's athletic nickname.

Promoting Justice and Conflict-Resolution from an Indigenous Student Perspective

The previous examples shared in this chapter indicate MSU was ill equipped in the strategies and worldviews motivating the students' activist efforts. The administrators' inability to comprehend student intent meant university leadership responded in ways that increased the students' feelings of marginalization. For instance, the AVP for Diversity's insistence that only one student enter and speak for the group forcibly sought to (re)frame their leadership efforts from a group orientation to an individual-based one. This signified a lack of institutional understanding that collective

struggles necessitate the presence of collective voices. His mandate prevented students' from engaging in much desired dialogue.

As I have already stated, the group-based structure of tribal societies leads to a conception of sovereignty that is “oriented primarily toward the existence and continuance of the group” (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 197). This basic premise suggests that American Indian peoples and communities have an inherent right to author themselves and the right to determine how they want to be portrayed, and treated, in larger society (Womack, 1999). Indigenous scholar Craig Womack (1999) believes such a standpoint calls for active, collaborative efforts in which the definition and impression of American Indians is driven by American Indians themselves as,

The construction of such an [collective and Indian-driven] identity reaffirms the real truth about American Indians' place in history – [American Indians] are not mere victims but active agents in history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of thinking and being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact (p. 6).

Rather than assimilate and accept the institutional expectation and portrayal of Indigenous peoples, the activists chose to reframe and (re)author, not only the symbolic way(s) in which Natives were portrayed, but the literal conditions under which they are/were expected to be engaged and exist. Leveraging their postsecondary education to serve as not just a platform to acquire the knowledge and skills desired to serve their communities but as an important space to advocate for policies and actions that would preempt future students from having to face the same hostile and unwelcoming climate

they faced. In many ways, had the institution been willing to collaborate with the students, their resulting efforts could have served to further advance the mission of the university to better serve and address the needs and concerns of real-life, contemporary Native peoples.

The Role of the Educational Institution in Promoting Colonial Justice Practices

In 1918 Seneca intellectual Arthur C. Parker penned a thoughtful essay on the systematic ways institutions attack the thought processes and values of Indigenous peoples. Using the Dawes Act of 1887 as an example, he questioned the meaning and intended consequence the colonial mandate would have on the thoughts and lives of its intended population. On the one hand, the Act was expected to facilitate absorption, or assimilation, since American Indians were, under certain restrictions, to be made U.S. citizens. On the other hand, without thoughtfully reflecting on what such a decision would have, considering the current state of affairs of Indian peoples as a result of U.S. policies and laws, such an Act would do little in addressing the much larger epistemological, ontological and existential challenges facing its new citizenry. Not to mention the Act neither considered whether Indigenous peoples desired U.S. citizenship nor what the relevance such citizenship would have in addressing the complex social, spiritual, and intellectual struggles they currently faced. Parker asked how it was that peoples who believed themselves “robbed and without a court of justice, who were confused, blind, and broken in spirit” (p. 252) were expected to become citizens of the very nation responsible for this? What could citizenship mean to them? The sentiment of Parker’s work is not all that dissimilar from the context thrust upon Indigenous students

at MSU ninety years after he penned the essay. Having had no say in the conditions under which the university chose to incorporate American Indians on campus, they were faced with policies and practices they had no prior control in authoring but that assumed this was what was best for Native peoples. The university context forced them to deal daily with the challenge of understanding what it means to be an American Indian student at an institution that promotes particular definitions, depictions, and expectations of Indigenous peoples. This authoring of practices and policies is not unlike the concept of rhetorical imperialism introduced by Scott Lyons (2000) who argues that institutions seek to control the terms of the debate in order to maintain power and control over Indigenous peoples.

I mentioned earlier that the history of Indian schooling is rife with examples of how education structures, laws, and imposed political structures have been aggressively implemented to strip Indigenous peoples of their cultural identity, their languages, their ceremony, and other cultural values and practices needed to maintain healthy societies (Anaya, 2003; Coffey & Tsosie, 2001; Gray & Lauderdale, 2007; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). The schooling process alone was designed to promote individualism since this was believed to be a critical component to the democratic ideal. “Civilizing” the Indian, then, became necessary in order to eradicate a communal sense of being and thinking and integrate him/her as an individual into modern society. This legacy of schooling raises important questions about the conditions under which American Indians can reasonably expect to find justice. As Vicenti (1995), Chief Judge to the Jicarilla Apache Tribe, points out,

It is not surprising that in [U.S.] American society the question of justice is relegated to one institution, and all other things are left to a marketplace of religion and culture that prospers or fails depending upon how *individuals* choose to exercise the liberty given to them under [U.S.] American law. By stark contrast, the Indian concept of the human being is one in which all aspects of the person and his or her society are integrated. Every action in daily life is read to have meaning and implication to the individual and guides how he or she interacts with tribal society or fulfills obligations imposed by society, law, and religion (p. 135, emphasis mine).

Vicenti is careful to make a distinction between how differing conceptions of culture influence how justice is understood in Indigenous communities and how it is understood among non-Indigenous peoples. She notes that for Native Americans culture is pervasive, encircling, and all-inclusive. Unfortunately colonizing practices have sought to impose notions of justice based on supporting a democratic ideal that privileges individual agency. Justice, then, comes to center on individual rights and property. This does not always work well with Indigenous conceptions of justice which tend to be based on notions of community and kinship. Rather than holding individual agency and property rights as the ideal, Indigenous notions of justice are likely to be grounded in group/collective agency and responsibility. Unfortunately the mission of Western schooling practices to “modernize” the Indian continues with non-Indigenous leaders often failing to recognize this distinction and instead, attempting to substitute Western notions of justice for Indigenous ones. A decision that not only serves to conflate distinct

ideologies but that also seeks to advance another form of annihilation of Indigenous cultural presence/practice.

The desire for justice promoted by the students in this study was focused on the interdependency and interconnectedness between preventative justice and restorative justice. Such a notion suggests that restoring justice requires a communal approach (Gray & Lauderdale, 2007). According to this position, restitution is not the same as restorative justice because it is not focused on the same founding principle. Restorative justice is inherently about maintaining community which is counter to restitution, which seeks to offer a short-term material or symbolic gesture for the individual perceived to have been immediately wronged by an individual act. The students' sense of justice was not related to the idea of restitution as it did not seek a short-term (material) gain or gesture but, rather, called for restorative mechanisms and preemptive practices throughout the university community. They centered healing and called for justice for all community members who have been wronged, not just for immediate victims.

Understanding Indigenous justice: The importance of epistemology, ontology and axiology.

For the students in this study, the concept of justice prioritizes healing over punishment. They championed conflict resolution strategies that center group/collective responsibilities as well as healing and relationships. Such an approach must necessarily be guided by a commitment to the 4 R's (relationships, responsibility, respect, and reciprocity/accountability) and suggests individuals are responsible for acting in ways that are respectful of these relationships and must engage in behaviors that would not

shame, hurt, destroy, or otherwise damage these relationships (Archibald, 2008; Brayboy et al., 2012; Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996; Hart, 2010; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Meyer, 2001; Steinhauer, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). An individual's actions, then, are expected to reflect a sense of respect and reciprocity for life and to one another.

At the foundation of the institutional and student model of justice, similar to their communication and decision-making approaches, is a clash in epistemological, ontological and axiological differences. On the one hand, the university system of justice views transgressions from an individual perspective and holds the individual responsible for correcting behavior or accepting social consequences. This is why the final letter sent by the interim director of ethnic studies, indicating the advertisements would not be taken down since they were expected to phase themselves out, was considered an official resolution and closure to the incident. This approach views the consequence of the act from an individual view of the victim and assumes resolution has occurred once the person responsible for the act has taken action, however arbitrary, to mitigate the act that caused harm. On the other hand, the student justice worldview perceives the responsibility of the individual to engage in actions that promote justice and well-being as the responsibility of the group. Therefore when the individual deviates from appropriate social behavior, it is the group's responsibility to work together with the individual to restore balance and justice in the community (Zion, 1998).

In the context of MSU, when transgressions occurred, the students expressed their collective desire for peace making by calling for a meeting with the appropriate administrator and seeking to engage in dialogue. The medicine wheel model they used is

similar to peace making as a form of dispute resolution. Peace making is a leading example of restorative justice that seeks to restore harmony and balance between the “peace way” and “war way” (Benally, 1997). The Navajo peace making model is one example of this. According to this model, leadership depends on respect and persuasion and not a position of power and authority. Just like the students’ approach to dialogue and decision-making, the conflict resolution process is multifaceted and involves recognition of protocol and ceremony. The relatives of immediate disputants, including those who are related by clan affiliation as well as by blood, may be included in the process. Next comes “talking it out” which allows the affected parties to relate not only what happened but also its effects. “Talking it over” is believed to be the way to “straighten out troubles” (Zion, 1998). The offender has an opportunity to listen to the charges and the impact of conduct on the affected parties.

Since peace making centers on the notion that people are responsible for creating and defining values and policies that guide social behaviors, the talking out process also allows the group to determine appropriate expectations. This conversation involves an interactive discussion of the problem and what the group feels about how it should be resolved and allows the individual who has committed the transgression to offer his/her reasons for acting in the way that s/he did. The final stage is that of reconciliation. Parties work together to reach consensus on what should be done to resolve the problem. The primary consensus is about relationships with the ultimate goal being for people to stand together at the end of the process (an indication that peace has been restored) (Zion, 1998). Although there may be consensus about restitution or reparation to a victim, this

can be symbolic or tangible in form such as providing material resources or payment fees to offset the cost of any further ceremony that may be needed (e.g. the cost of services to see a spiritual healer). Or it may require further action to address what needs to be done to correct past bad actions in the future.

Vicenti (1995) explains that in U.S. American society, restitution constitutes a very admirable traditional Indian practice but the traditional Apache restitutorial gesture has little to do with economic value.

The item or items used to provide restitution are symbolic of the remorse shown by the perpetrator. In the act of offering restitution, there is a transfer of power from the perpetrator to the victim. In offering restitution the perpetrator demonstrates the degree of remorse for having committed the intentional harm. The victim, after witnessing the gesture, has the power to determine whether the remorse was genuine. The determination depends on the degree to which the item or items involved in the restitutorial gesture constitute a harm or loss to the perpetrator. If the offered restitution is without remorse, the victim can reject the restitution, and thereafter, the perpetrator is disreputed until he or she comes forward with true remorse (p. 138).

This final process can mean that the group commits to watch over the offender to make certain that person keeps his or her promises or it can mean that the offender commits to actively seeking healing whether by ceremony or by some other action. At the heart of the process is the importance of listening, healing and maintaining balance in the community. The peace making model serves as a critical reminder of the complex

relationship of listening, dialogue, and healing including physical, emotional as well as spiritual well-being in attaining justice and restoring balance in relationships.

Initiating the peace making model: What happens when administrators are unfamiliar with student desires?

In order to better understand the desire for implementing the peace making process, let us return to two incidents offered by the students as prime examples that called for it. Recall that in November 2007 MSU's women's volleyball team played a rival institution during which a fan held up two signs with messages reminiscent of the violent and hostile experiences American Indians have experienced at the hands of the U.S. government (see chapter one). American Indian students organized and circulated a petition asking the rival university to address the incident but were promptly dismissed by the rival university. This petition was signed by their community leaders, elders, and other advocates. The following year MSU granted a small team of non-Indian, male university students a vendor license to sell merchandise for the upcoming blackout football game against the "horned toads" of another rival university. The shirts depicted the profile of a seated hook nosed Indian man, wearing nothing but a headdress and buckskin pants, roasting a skewered horned toad over a campfire. American Indian students approached the vendors, introduced themselves, explained the shirts were offensive, and asked them to stop selling the shirts but their request was ultimately ignored.

Although these incidents occurred a little over a year apart, the Native students on campus had been working quietly, behind the scenes, to address their growing concerns

about the challenges they were experiencing on campus. They began by first taking their concerns to the few American Indian staff members at the university. Unfortunately, the staff indicated in various ways they were not able to address their concerns and that they should speak directly with senior administrators. Much like their peers at other institutions, the students became their own spokespersons (Gilmore, Smith & Kairaiuak, 1997). They then organized meetings, wrote letters to the appropriate university officials, and drafted position papers. Finally, they requested to meet directly with senior administrators. By this time, their concerns were no longer limited to events that transpired at athletic events but also included events and actions that jeopardized the annual American Indian pow wow, the termination and subsequent lack of replacing American Indian staff and the dismantling of the highly successful NTPP. The AVP for Diversity agreed to meet with them, a meeting that did not end well.

According to the students, the purpose of this initial meeting was to explore possible actions that would restore balance in the relationship between the university and its American Indian students. Each student had prepared talking points that addressed their concerns about how each incident (for a refresher on their list of issues, please refer to the timeline in chapter one) impacted them personally and how it made them feel. Recognizing the cultural differences between the senior administrators (none were American Indian and the only man of color, the AVP for Diversity, identified as Chicano), they prepared to “talk out” their concerns and even share some of their traditional beliefs so that the administrators could better understand why they felt the university, with its pattern of inaction, was fostering a hostile and unjust environment.

However, when the group students showed up to the meeting, the administrator informed them he would not be able to accommodate all of them in his office and allowed only two individuals to enter and represent their collective concerns. Gabby and Leah gathered the list of concerns each student had prepared, identified eight central unifying themes and entered the administrator's office. As they began to make their way through the second concern on the list, twenty minutes into the meeting, the AVP interrupted and chastised them for the tone in their voice. He then thanked them for their time and invited them to leave. Frustrated and upset, the women left the office. While the administrator initially led the students to believe he was interested in the group's stories, his decision to terminate the meeting abruptly and subsequent decision to not follow up with them demonstrates the common clash between the university's and student's definition of justice.

The AVP's actions demonstrate the tensions that exist between the culture of the university and that of the students. For the students, this experience served as a reminder that women and Indigenous peoples are often viewed as emotive, reactive, and unreasoned (Doxtater, 2004). Furthermore, because the university had no existing policy enforcing the respectful usage of the mascot, the mascot related incidents presented by the students did not reflect the committing of either a crime or a violation of institutional policy. Thus the administrator was not required to respond to them or engage in peacemaking efforts. In his view, no consideration for restitution, restorative justice, or any other kind of justice was needed since no law had been violated. Remembering how the university often appealed to fiscal arguments to support their action (e.g. shutting

down NTPP) and inaction (e.g. allowing the ethnic studies advertising campaign to continue) they later wondered if the university would have ignored them if they had had fiscal power or a particular form of political power to leverage. If, for example, they belonged to the school's tribal namesake band or they had been the children of wealthy donors. Regardless, the administrator's quick dismissal illustrated the hypocrisy of the university's claim of maintaining a respectful and honorable relationship and commitment to American Indians. His actions violated the very principles of justice the students were relying on to find a solution to their concerns. Ultimately the university administrator failed to listen and by failing to listen, automatically rejected the cultural model of justice they were hoping to initiate.

Serving as the foundation to the clash between the university and the Indigenous students was a difference in how the concept of relationship is understood. Predominantly Western institutional conceptualizations of the social structure stipulate that self, relationship and culture are distinct social units (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). However, the students' understanding of relationship did not conceptualize culture or self as discrete units from any relationship. Rather than asking Indigenous students to adapt to university culture, the student's hoped MSU would understand First Nations values (Marker, 2004). That fundamental to every relationship is the act of listening. Yet even this presented a challenge as listening takes on a different purpose when understood from an Indigenous perspective.

Listening involves a serious ability to make connections between "traditional" community values and those of larger societal institutions like courts or schools

(Brayboy, 2005). There is a difference between listening to stories and hearing them. Listening is part of going through the motions of acting engaged and allowing individuals to talk. Hearing stories means that value is attributed to them and both the authority and the nuance of stories are understood. When stories are heard, they lead the hearer to explore the range and variation of possibilities of what can happen and has happened (Basso, 1996; Battiste, 2002, Burkhart, 2004; Medicine, 2001). Stories often are the guardians of cumulative knowledges that hold a place in the psyches of the group members, memories of tradition, and reflections on power (Brayboy, 2005). Hearers ultimately understand the nuances in stories and recognize that the onus for hearing is placed on the hearer rather than the speaker for delivering a clearly articulated message. Additionally, one must be able to feel the stories. You tell them, hear them, and feel them—establishing a strong place for empathy and for “getting it.” Thus in order for relationships with Indigenous peoples, as well as Indigenous models of justice, such as peace keeping, to be successful, the listener must not only know how to listen but *hear*.

Not surprisingly, the ability to listen in order to hear heavily influences one’s ability to dialogue or “talk it out.” Listening plays a critical role in improving education. If the university administrator had allowed all of the students interested in speaking to engage in a dialogue, he might have come to realize they came prepared with suggested solutions for how to preserve the relationship between the university and its Native students. However, by dismissing them and refusing to hear their concerns, the university implicitly sent the message that Indigenous experiences, struggles, and models of justice do not matter. Once it decided to retire some of its offensive mascot related

practices and images, and additionally received renewed permission from the tribal namesake band to continue using its athletic nickname, the university believed it had fulfilled its obligation to maintain a respectful and honorable relationship with American Indians.

While students were demoralized after this meeting, a second group tried the following semester to meet with this same administrator, as well as the dean of the college of education and other university and state leaders, to express their concerns with the termination of NTPP. The results were the same. The university's largely ambivalent reaction ultimately served as a primary example of White institutional privilege.

Administrators sent inconsistent messages that they were interested in student concerns while simultaneously discounting, discrediting and/or ignoring their experiences. Such actions demonstrate just a few of the techniques an institution might marshal to resist diversity and maintain its status quo. By completely missing, misunderstanding, and ultimately ignoring the responses, concerns, and actions of an aggrieved minority population it can continue to impose its own institutional perceptions and interpretations of events (Gilmore, Smith & Kairaiuak, 1997). Unfortunately not interrupting public racist discourse meant the university failed to protect the educational lives, achievements, and reputations of its Native student population (Gilmore, Smith & Kairaiuak, 1997).

George Lipsitz (2006) argues that public policy and private prejudice work together to create a "possessive investment in whiteness" (p. vii). This investment is believed to be responsible for the racialized hierarchies in society and creates the conditions to generate social and material advantages for those who are interested in

promoting and upholding the interests of Whiteness (which is upheld as the status quo). I have stated that restorative justice depends on foundational preventative structures and practices to work together and create justice while seeking to preempt injustice. These include: listening (with the ultimate goal of hearing), dialogue, action and reflection (reconciliation). Focusing on the restorative aspects of justice without incorporating the preventative mechanisms creates injustice and leaves individuals and the community without the necessary foundation to heal and prevent social transgressions.

Understanding justice from MSU’s perspective: The role of power, deviance, and material interests.

The relationship between power and deviance is important in order to understand how the administrator’s actions were based upon preserving the material and economic interests of the university. The decisions and actions of MSU’s leadership suggest that a primary influencing factor in determining their response to student concerns lies in how deviance, power, and the U.S. economic structure affects the institution. Deviance has been defined as a departure from social norms or as a violation of norms and expectations. Emile Durkheim suggested in the late 1800s “that increases in the consolidation of power in society will lead to proportional increases in the repressive sanctioning of people who are defined as the most deviant” (Lauderdale, 2009).

Determining what falls into the classification of deviance is intricately tied to notions of power. Any discussion of deviance that ignores the role of power relations in society in creating, maintaining, and adjusting the moral boundaries of deviant behavior runs the risk of presenting an incomplete or even inaccurate picture of the processes by which

certain conduct is defined as deviant and the implicit or explicit agendas of social control agents (from individuals to institutions) in propounding such definitions or categorizations (Lauderdale & Amster, 2007). A power and deviance approach specifies and then seeks to elaborate the conditions under which amorphous behavior becomes defined as deviant, or behavior that was once characterized as deviant becomes redefined as some kind of non-deviant conduct or attribute.

Whereas in the past the university retired some offensive American Indian imagery and practices, as the university president indicated in his letter of appeal to the NCAA (see chapter one), once the university received exception from the NCAA to continue using the tribal name, it reduced its interest in monitoring fan actions. With the reduction in patrolling the usage of the athletic nickname, the university indicated it was now less concerned about preserving the honorable relationship between itself and the American Indian community. Thus actions that, in the past would have been addressed by university administrators and/or by the implementation of new university policies went from being considered deviant to non-deviant. This shift can largely be placed within the realm of economics; the rush to maintain the mascot/symbol was one primarily borne from economics, although it had been couched in “tradition and honor.” Nevertheless, the shift from deviant to non-deviant can be directly tied to the lifting of the threat to the overall use of the Native mascot/symbol.

In both instances where students claimed the tribal name was being (ab)used to levy racist messages, the role of intent became important. Since intent is typically understood to be socially negotiated, the intent of the actor is a central ingredient in the

construction of deviant definitions. Recall that MSU does not consistently educate staff or fans about its tribal namesake's history or proper conduct nor does it require students to learn it.³⁴ Thus the actions of students and fans cannot be judged solely by the actor's intent since the institution also holds the power to influence decisions and policies that students are then subjected to. Limiting the definition of deviance to an individual phenomenon would create a myopia that obfuscates how institutional policies and practices have the power to influence and affect individual behavior. Locating deviance within the individual removes the onus of responsibility and action from the institution.

From this discussion we can see that processes of power are important in understanding and influencing understandings of deviance. Power is central to any analysis of deviance since all forms of deviance have a political dimension. This relationship can also be used to illustrate how power and the economy are interconnected and how this interconnectedness, in turn, influences the construction and implementation of law and policy.

The importance of material and economic forces.

The U.S. system of justice is based on democratic principles that increasingly promote individual, material and property interest. Capitalism and market forces have

³⁴ In chapter two I explained that Mountain State University requires undergraduate students to fulfill a "diversity requirement" in order to graduate. Over 89 courses, from various departments, are offered to fulfill this requirement and range from focusing on gender to intercultural musical influences. During the time frame covered in this study, only one American Indian (history) course was actively offered to fulfill the requirement. Additionally the class was not taught by an American Indian Ph.D. and the concentrated on American Indian issues generally without focusing specifically on any one tribe.

become intertwined with U.S. democracy such that those in control of labor and production now hold power. Consequently it is those with a heavy stake in the market (i.e. those in control of labor and production) that have the power to influence how deviance is construed. Such a system means that university policy is not immune from the material conditions of life.

According to Karl Marx the mode of production consists of the following components: forces and relations. Relations of production give rise to “noneconomic” superstructures of society including politics, religion, law and policy. The superstructure does not simply reflect the relations of production but also exercises its own influence over the relations and forces of production. This capitalist mode of production, on the one hand, consists of the bourgeois and the wage worker as economic actors where the bourgeois owns the labor power, the means of production (through investments and resources) and controls the labor power of others. On the other hand, the wage worker may own their own labor power but s/he does not own the means of production nor does s/he have the ability to control the labor power of others and is thus subject to abiding by the rules set by those who do. In the case of MSU, the AVP can be considered wage worker for even though he holds a position in central administration, his “power” is limited as his position does not afford him the luxury of owning the mode of production and thus setting the terms by which the system will operate. His job centers only on his

ability to carry out the mission of the institution by promoting and serving the needs of the bourgeois. He is, essentially, an agent for hegemonic control.³⁵

Viewing deviance as unrelated to power cannot be considered solely the result of the machinations of the “ruling class” but rather as denoting a situation in which the ruling class is aware of its interests while the working class remains ignorant of its conflicting interests (Lauderdale & Amster, 2007). Those in power, university administrators, serve as symbols and representatives of the hegemonic order. They are focused primarily on market concerns. These workers are thus primarily concerned with preserving the economy and economic viability of the university. Keeping in mind that any situation that could potentially lead to the NCAA banning the school from hosting post-season events would deliver a significant financial blow to the institution, it then becomes clear that the university administrators’ decisions, in terms of how to address student concerns, will always be influenced by this economic agenda.

So although the students were calling for the university to reverse some of its decisions or rethink its policies, effectively causing a change in the superstructure, such a change would only succeed if the underlying economic base is compatible. In other words, because the university is still using a tribal name as its athletic nickname, this usage plays a central role in its economic existence. The university is therefore unlikely to be interested in jeopardizing its continued usage of the term. To admit there is a

³⁵ Hegemony, in this case, refers to the dominance of a shared system of ideas, values, and ethics within a society or community during a particular historical period (Lauderdale, 2009).

problem with its use is to admit the university is not doing the job it promised the NCAA it was doing. Therefore the mission of the administrator and, more generally, of the university, becomes finding a way to silence the student dissenters and/or to publicly discredit their concerns so that they either lose interest in their cause or they lose credibility among the larger community. How university administrators collaborated with media to “flip the script,” so to speak, and ultimately framed the Native student activists as deviant is the topic of the next chapter. For now it is important to simply note the conditions in which power and deviance become manifest, and the degree to which it is related to economic forces, in order to understand how structures respond to the people and processes they seek to control.

I have suggested that (individual) deviance is understood as a violation of social norms and expectations. Accordingly, resistance efforts can be rendered as deviant. Labeling particular acts as deviant is one method of suppressing the resistance of those who threaten power arrangements. This is important as “increases in the consolidation of power in society will lead to proportional increases in the repressive sanctioning of people who are defined as the most deviant” (Lauderdale & Amster citing Durkheim, 2007, p. 123). In other words, engaging in acts of resistance rendered deviant can present serious consequences for the individual(s) engaged in resistance.

Power in Western social practices and economic structures, is often used to refer to individuals or ruling class groups with the capacity to influence and create policy, decisions and law. However the concept of power takes on a different meaning when applied to marginalized peoples. Brayboy (2005) defines power for marginalized peoples

as the “ability to survive rooted in the capacity to adapt and adjust to changing landscapes, times, ideas, circumstances, and situations” (p. 435). Such a definition carries a transformational aspect suggesting individuals and communities can transform their personal and community economic, educational, political, and cultural situations by exercising agency. Like Brayboy, Gray and Lauderdale (2007) argue for understanding the relationship between power and colonization in current understandings of justice and conflict resolution. While MSU’s approach to justice was based on protecting democratic principles that forefront the interest and property of the institution and the individual, the students’ notions were based on practices that serve to promote the voices, needs, and interests of the community. These differing orientations to justice influence how justice is pursued and how conflict is addressed.

For the students, the emphasis on community and reciprocity represented a unifying belief that in order to maintain a functioning society, individuals must be responsible to and for themselves as well as responsible to and for others. Because the American Indian students were not driven by market concerns but by a sense of mutual obligations and the continuation of the Indigenous community (Lauderdale, 2009), the survival of the Indigenous community becomes more important than any individual. This focus on preserving collective Indigenous rights (e.g. the right to attend an institution that is not hostile) immediately places students in a role of deviant since, in the system of capitalism, it is the needs of the market and a desire for financial profit as well as individual rights that take precedent.

The situation at MSU raises an important question: who benefits from the designation of certain forms of harmful (or harmless) behavior as deviant when other forms of behavior are treated as normal? As we have seen earlier, defining particular acts as deviance is one method of suppressing the resistance of those who threaten power arrangements. What the university failed to recognize in its dismissal of student concerns is that Native students are sovereign students possessing political power that other students do not possess. Therefore, the freedom to think and act in ways governed by individual will that is promoted by some particular epistemologies is not applicable in this context for it would allow one to conceive of reality in whatever way a person finds beneficial. Honoring individual will and interest, by dismissing offensive acts as freedom of speech, can lead to a person disregarding others and becoming blind to the repercussions of her thoughts and actions on those around her. Community-based epistemologies, on the other hand, require individuals to be concerned for the welfare of other people whereas those rooted in and tied to the individual only call for a concern for the self.

While material wealth and access to resources can certainly impact the health of the community, there are other, equally important factors which are not driven by the market and which have deep effects on the health of a community's families, institutions, and relationships with each other, with land, and with the spiritual (Brayboy, Castagno & Maughan, 2008). Preventing students from affirming their sovereignty by engaging in self-determination (utilizing an Indigenous justice system model) becomes a necessary act to, again, maintain the hegemonic order. Additionally invalidating or ignoring the

concerns of the students continues to serve the colonial process of insisting that the Indigenous cultural essence must exist separate from society or be annihilated completely through assimilation and the adoption of Western communication and justice practices. Colonialism then becomes a trap. For in order to enact change and attain the respect the students are calling for, Native peoples must become a part of the capitalistic system and must come to own the modes of production and take over the role of oppressing some while sanctioning the acts of others by defining and redefining them as deviant. Such actions are so antithetical to traditional Indigenous culture, adopting them would ensure the annihilation of the Indigenous practices will be complete.

Concluding Thoughts

It has been said that Indigenous students experience education as a good journey when they feel themselves gaining a deeper understanding of their own experience in the framework of a genuinely respectful comparative cross-cultural encounter that carefully considers advanced tribal knowledge alongside traditional academic knowledge (Marker, 2004). This, however, necessitates recognition that during certain times, a Western institutional model of justice is appropriate and serves a particular purpose while other times an Indigenous student model of justice is appropriate. This is especially important when the relationship between an Indigenous and non-Indigenous group is at stake. Ultimately, deciding which model is most appropriate to incorporate involves the need for communication and listening between both parties. But what happens when dialogue and conflict resolution fails/stalls?

The students in this study recounted that several hours after they reported the horned frog t-shirt incident to university administrators, representatives from the university approached the vendors and asked them to cease selling the merchandise. A few days later a meeting was called in which the Native students on campus were invited to speak with institutional leaders about their concerns with the harm(s) they experienced during the time the t-shirts were sold. Present at the meeting were several American Indian staff members as well as the AVP for Diversity, representatives from the Center for Minority Student Services, and the director of the AIRC. During the meeting, one of the university staff members opened up a discussion about why the image was disrespectful and sang part of a traditional song from a southwest tribe that explained the role of the frog/toad. Unfortunately the institutional representative did not attend to the necessary protocol when singing the song, causing the students even greater distress. Since the song was sung out of season and only in one portion (violating two important spiritual and cultural aspects), the students were concerned they had been exposed to another harm. This incident suggests that even when the institution attempt to address concerns of the students, its responses can be inappropriate and create more – rather than less – harm to those it was charged with protecting.

I have previously stated that storytelling is considered to be interconnected with theory-building and survival. Therefore understanding the conditions and protocols around soliciting stories is important. “Each Aboriginal nation has particular traditions, protocols, and rules concerning stories and the way stories are to be told for teaching and learning purposes” (Archibald, 2008, p. 227). Some stories and/or songs are sacred and

may only be shared with/among community members; these types of stories might not be available for recording or sharing with outsiders or in areas away from a particular land. Other stories might only be told at certain times of the year, may require certain ceremonies or rituals to be performed prior to their telling, or may only be told by particular person(s) (Archibald, 2008; Tafoya, 1995). There are many different story genres, purposes, and protocols and knowing how to read, listen, and interpret them is important. Additionally, the ability to understand a story relies on one's multisensory ability to listen and learn, as well as self-awareness of the listeners own subject-position, and an understanding that stories are holistic and not the sum of its parts (Cushman, 2008). Therefore some storytellers avoid sharing stories in parts. Although "there is much need in western culture to try to discover how we can make things better and more effective, and more efficient, which means removing them from the context and trying to find out what is the one item that really works" (Tafoya, 1995, p. 26), this practices is ill-advised during times of dialogue and conflict-resolution.

Surely the university staff person responsible for causing this harm with her song did not do it intentionally. She was likely seeking to validate the students' concerns by illustrating why the t-shirts caused so much pain and distress. However well intentioned, the fact remains her efforts resulted in further perpetuating harm and discomfort to some students. As one activist explained, students now had to return to their community to see a healer and undergo ceremony to remove the improper aspects of culture they had been exposed to in order to prevent or reduce the harm done. However such a corrective measure requires a significant investment in time and travel as students would have to

return to their home community and find a healer who is available to do this. Second, it could require a significant financial commitment as they would need to pay not only for the cost of travel but for the cost of receiving treatment. All of this could deplete potentially limited financial and spiritual resources and would also require them to take time away from their studies (and make arrangements with professors who may not be willing to work with them). In this instance, the university's intention to address the incident created even greater spiritual and psychic distress and weighed on the students throughout the remainder of the semester. Such solutions to conflict escalate the initial harm and further interfere with academic and personal progress. They illustrate that not only can the university fail in its attempt to engage intercultural dialogue but even its efforts to promote intra-cultural communication can cause tensions to escalate. For although the t-shirt incident led the university to revise its protocol in awarding vendor licenses so that incidents like this might be avoided (another modest victory for the students), such a reactive approach to student concerns further symbolizes ways in which the university creates problem for students in terms of their day-to-day experiences as well as the overall campus climate.

Part II

“The allegations of disrespect and dishonor that several students say they’re experiencing are completely absurd!”: How university leadership and media responded to and (re)framed student dissent

Chapter 4 – Mountain State’s Response

Wielding media as a tool to dominate discourse

If they are to meet their stated goal of supporting diversity and promoting Native student academic achievement, postsecondary institutions must develop cultural competency and listen to the experiences of their Native students. The previous chapter suggested there can exist a disconnect between the epistemological, ontological, and axiological worldviews of Native students and Western education institutions. These differences can stymie attempts at conflict resolution if both parties are not aware or interested in rectifying the conditions for the factors leading to a communication impasse and can ultimately contribute to attrition among an already small student demographic. This is because the low number of American Indian students enrolled in postsecondary education can exacerbate feelings of isolation, loneliness, or not belonging (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012). Such feelings can lead students to exit an institution before they have completed their degree if they feel their needs and experiences are unimportant or irrelevant to university administrators. The experiences of the students in this study suggest feelings of isolation, loneliness, and not belonging become pervasive for those enrolled in institutions utilizing Indigenous mascots, nicknames, or imagery. Rather than exit the university, the students in this study chose to voice their concerns to university administrators in hopes of ameliorating the feelings of isolation, being unwanted and symbolic violence they were experiencing.

This study suggests that although MSU’s tribal athletic nickname has increased the presence of Native symbols on the predominantly White campus, institutional

policies, as well as administrative attitudes and behaviors, can exacerbate difficult conditions for real-life students to navigate their daily experiences and ultimately push them away. Moreover the presence of the tribal nickname does not necessarily correlate with a growing presence in Native student enrollment. What's more, as described in chapter one, although MSU has sought to change their Indian mascot and related iconography to a manner they deem respectful, it has not actively sought to educate the public about the accurate history, experiences, struggles, concerns and beliefs of real-life American Indian peoples.

The previous chapter addressed some of the struggles the students faced when seeking to call institutional attention to their everyday struggles and experiences. Unfortunately they experienced limited to no success during those closed door meetings and were unable to address their concerns with the hostile campus climate and the dearth of Indian-serving programs, staff, and faculty in any meaningful way. This inspired the students to formally organize and engage in actions that called *public* attention to the events transpiring at the university. They hoped that, through engaging in public protest, the surrounding community would join them in pressuring the university to address their concerns in a more direct and timely manner. While their publicly directed efforts were successful in garnering modest media attention, the attention received was not always positive and ended up causing even more personal harm. This chapter focuses on the ways in which the media framed and reported the struggles faced by the students at Mountain State University. Like university administrators, non-Native media outlets seemed to be unfamiliar with the diverse history, needs, and desires of Native peoples in

postsecondary institutions. On the other hand, Native media outlets understood these factors but did not appear to have a large enough circulation and readership base to garner the type of support the university would have responded to.

Expanding Their Efforts: Identifying the Need for Public Awareness and Support

Chapters one and two introduced several incidents in which the presence of a tribal athletic nickname or mascot inspires university students and fans to promote imagery and behaviors that are stereotypical, aggressive, racist, offensive, and ignorant (King, 2005; Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 1994). The student activists in this study believe MSU's lackluster promotion of education on American Indian peoples and enforcement of respectful practices related to its athletic nickname played a role in fostering the conditions for some of the heinous acts they faced on campus. These included but were not limited to displays of hostile signs at sporting events, the hanging/burning of American Indian effigies, the sale of racist merchandise, as well as advertisements promoting "cowboys and Indians" themed events in the campus residence halls. This was concerning to students since they recognized that non-Native students and administrators at MSU, like many U.S. American people, are more likely to base their knowledge of American Indians on assumptions and mass media than direct personal experience with American Indians (Harjo, 2006). They worried that a limited understanding of accurate or comprehensive information of the issues and challenges facing American Indian peoples can leave American Indian students, and their programs, vulnerable to the material and political interests of institutional leaders. Though they did not know this at the time, the behaviors of uninformed or poorly informed fans and

administrators would not only serve to uphold a racially hostile campus environment; it would ultimately impact the retention of minoritized students and push out several of the student activists before they completed their degrees.

The Native student activist at MSU used their real-life experiences and struggles to urge the public to consider how Native peoples are represented in college campuses and what happens when the iconography associated with them differs from their real-life experiences and concerns. They raised complex, uncomfortable, and controversial questions about the university's treatment of real-life Native peoples. As they worked personally with administrators to address their concerns, the students realized that their university leaders were not often willing to prioritize or entertain their concerns nor were they easily entertained by fans or supporters of these types of practices. Yet they continued to raise them anyway because they believed them pertinent and invited the public to consider the implications they might have for justice and American Indian education.

Initially the students engaged in quiet, behind the scenes activism, reaching out to various staff members to address their issues. However, as illustrated in the previous chapter, attempts to garner institutional support were met by staff members informing students they simply could not help them and by administrators refusing to listen or inviting them to leave their offices when the conversation became too uncomfortable. The students noted an important pattern: when students, staff, or faculty questioned campus climate or the various initiatives and decisions the university made that limited the scope of opportunities available to Native peoples on campus, the university response

tended to be either ambivalent or punitive. Rarely were concerns met with genuine empathy, a constructive response, or an active desire to collaborate in brainstorming solutions that would preserve the programs, resources, and advocates available to students. This concerned the students because they knew that as “a minority group, which is directly affected by a policy” they did not have the strength in numbers to influence their own destiny (Hofmann, 2005). Thus the students realized that they needed to expand their efforts for support and establish allies who could help them pressure university administrators to better their efforts.

On November 26, 2008, and again on December 4, 2008, the American Indian students who had started a coalition for the protection and promotion of American Indian education rights, and their supporters, held a rally at the American Indian Resource Center. Explaining their frustrations with MSU and why they felt it was time to publicly protest against the decisions of university leadership, they invited passers-by to join them in their march to the Park building,³⁶ where they planned to stage a protest (Berry, 2009; Gardiner, 2008; Leonard, 2008; Native Village Youth and Education News, 2009; Yurth, 2008). The purpose of the protest was to raise awareness of the university’s attempts to silence the American Indian students, staff, and faculty who had protested policies they believed alienate and divide American Indian communities.

The group carried signs with examples of how MSU’s American Indian athletic nickname and image has been misused by sports fans at university events. Other signs

³⁶ Located at the heart of campus, this is where the offices of central administration are housed.

reinforced the argument that Native students should be better supported if the institution is going to improve their enrollment and graduation rates of Native students. Protest representatives distributed handouts that outlined the injustices referenced by the American Indian student activists in hopes of generating support from members of the surrounding community for an investigation on the referenced university decisions and practices.

Several days prior to the protest the students had issued a media press release with information about purpose of their march with the stated mission:³⁷

Our march through campus will showcase our urge for institutional support from [Mountain State University] for American Indian Educational Equity. While the university states that its mission is to...

- Enrich the educational experiences of the campus community
- Enable individuals to progress, thrive and succeed without barriers, and
- Encourage and invite everyone to join in their effort

The actions of the university over the last year and a half, demonstrates that the university has not upheld this mission when working with American Indian peoples. In fact, it has continually violated the rights and sovereignty of American Indians in multiple ways. Anytime an American Indian leader, student or support has resisted or voiced concern/opposition toward university policies—they have been met with hostility and alienation. This tension has built up so much that

³⁷ This information was also printed on the handouts distributed during the march.

critical university leaders, faculty, and staff have been forced to leave the institution by both termination and choice.

By marching together we hope to:

- Raise awareness of the university's attempts to silence American Indian students, staff, and faculty who protest university policies that ultimately alienate, divide and destroy American Indian communities.
- Urge the University to uphold its commitment to Native communities by creating scholarships and programs that exist, in reality, to support Native students.
- Gain community support to lend a voice to these issues and to call for an investigation into the treatment of Native peoples at [Mountain State University]. (Document on file with author)

The student protests were successful in garnering much needed media attention; however media outlets varied widely in how they reported and framed the story. Native-owned and/or operated newspapers and media outlets validated the students' struggles by providing a platform that interrogated the concerns and issues presented by the students. These stories balanced the voices and concerns of university leadership with those of the students. On the other hand, mainstream newspapers and media outlets privileged the voices and perspectives of university leaders by devoting more space in their articles to them. This ultimately allowed university leaders to use media as a tool to perpetuate their colonial desires and subsequently became another way to minimize the students' concerns. The remainder of this chapter looks at the public impact of the student

struggles through the lens of the media, to see how the students' stories were communicated to the public and how media, as a filter and facilitator of information, (re)interpreted the students' activism.

Triangulating Agenda Setting Theory, Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit

Before proceeding to a discussion of the particular ways various media reported student struggles, it is important to understand how media can function to influence public opinion and thoughts about particular topics. CRT and TribalCrit provide promising practices in analyzing the experiences of Indigenous peoples. I stated earlier the creation of race as a sociohistorical concept has enabled the promotion of inaccurate and disrespectful racist beliefs. Some of these beliefs have been transformed into racial stereotypes. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) note, "stereotypes can be placed into at least three general categories: (1) intelligence and educational stereotypes; (2) personality or character stereotypes; and (3) physical appearance stereotypes" (p. 4). Stereotypes do not just influence law and education policy, they are often reflected in media. Indigenous scholars often argue that research, law, and policies about American Indians and Alaska Natives not only serve to uphold inequitable conditions based on racist stereotypes and assumptions—they may be driven by the inaccurate, disrespectful, and hurtful images promoted in media. As Brayboy (2005) explains,

The everyday experiences of American Indians, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of U.S. society. These viable images have instead been replaced with fixed images from the past of what American Indians once were (p. 431).

While American Indians/Alaska Natives do not receive much media attention or representation outside of Native-owned media outlets, when they are represented it is often through stereotypical representations.³⁸

In national media, American Indians are most popularly represented as school mascots, as war bonnet and loin cloth wearing “primitives,” and/or as hostile peoples who want nothing more than to impede the self- perceived “right” of non-Natives to hunt, fish or dig for oil wherever they like. When Native peoples seek to assert their sovereign and treaty-protected rights to important cultural and spiritual resources (including land or access to practices and areas necessary for subsistence), “American Indians have historically been dehumanized and characterized as ‘savages,’ ‘militants,’ and ‘enemies’ rather than as social activists” (Harjo, 2006, p. 62). News outlets, popular media, Hollywood, as well as the fashion and music industry are all powerful mediums that create platforms to further perpetuate images that simultaneously racialize, fetishize, sexualize and demonize Native bodies. For example, the 2012 Victoria’s Secret Angels fashion show featured scantily clad supermodels parading about in a hodgepodge of Indigenous regalia including turquoise jewelry, war bonnet, fringed panties, and faux moccasins (McCarthy, 2012). That same fall popular band *No Doubt* released a music video to their song “Looking Hot” that featured a clash between “Indian” outlaws and

³⁸ Recall in chapter one I noted that over the past five years, from 2009-2014, news stories about Native peoples published in the two most widely distributed newspapers in the state fell under the following five categories: stories of cultural and economic deficit; stories of the offbeat or cultural interest; stories of land and mineral resource management; stories of violence, assault, and crime; and, stories of (mis)representation.

“cowboy” law enforcement officials. Lead singer Gwen Stefani was featured gyrating her hips seductively in a tipi, with a wolf in the background, while fellow band mates, dressed as Indian men, rode around on horses, throwing tomahawks (Gower & Straus, 2012; Stent, 2012). Such depictions of Indigenous peoples are not limited to popular media and harken back to the early days of colonization. “As press was developing in the colonies, Native Peoples were reported as Indians or ‘noble savages’ if they made treaties and joined the colonists in warfare against others, but as ‘savages’ or ‘savage Indians’ if they were enemies” (Harjo, 2006, p. 62).

The majority of Native representations in popular media are not only offensive; they can serve to limit the views, self-perception, and options Native peoples have of themselves (Fryberg, 2002; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). This is one reason why students protested against the depictions and treatment of Native peoples on campus. They were concerned the effects stereotypical representations of Natives on non-Natives could stymie conversations and/or collaborations intended to promote justice and respectful interracial and cross-cultural relations. Considering that they comprise less than two percent of the total U.S. population and may reside in rural or reservation communities away from non-Natives, the students worried many non-Native peoples on campus may derive their knowledge about Native peoples based solely on what they see in newspapers and popular media.

According to McCombs & Bell (1996),

Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors focus attention and influence the public’s perceptions of what are the

most important issues of the day. Our attention is further focused—and our pictures of the world shaped and refined—by the way journalists frame their news stories (p. 93).

The resulting attitudes or opinions formed by non-Indigenous peoples can influence whether they support important legal reform or propositions that affect Native communities. Such preconceived biases can present adverse effects on larger goals of sovereignty and self-determination for Natives as non-Natives may not see them as “real” and may be unwilling/unable to understand their needs. Combining TribalCrit with a media theory such as Agenda Setting Theory (AST) may help understand why, how, and for what purposes stereotypical, inaccurate, hurtful and/or racist depictions of American Indians in research, education, and the media persist.

Understanding the Agenda Setting Function Of Media.

The concept of agenda setting was originally presented as a tool for research analysis to help understand the effects of news reporting on political dialogue. Over the years the theory has been expanded to understand the role of the media, not just in political dialogue, but in social and cultural dialogue as well. The theory is attributed to Walter Lippmann (1922) who argued that the mass media serve to influence viewer’s perceptions of news media events. Lippmann believed that since the mass media create images of events in our minds, policy makers should be cognizant of those pictures in people’s heads (McCombs & Bell, 1996). Thus agenda setting theory, or AST, as a theory is relatively straightforward. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda setting is the process whereby the news media lead the public in assigning relative

importance to various public issues. AST presents the idea that media does not necessarily shape attitudes about issues, rather, it shapes perceptions about what issues are important (Miller, 2002). In other words, the media does not tell viewers what to think but rather what to think about and how to think about it (Shaw, 1979; McCombs & Shaw, 1993).

Research focused on racial disparities in media production and media reporting are admittedly rare, however, McCombs and Shaw (1972) were among the first media scholars to point out the existence of immediate racial disparities in who has access to and control of setting the media agenda. According to them, it is the media elite, comprised of administrators, owners and other central figures occupying leadership positions (such as news editors), who function as the guardians and/or “gatekeepers” of social dialogue. The key decision makers are undeniably part of a “media elite that doesn’t represent a cross-section of U.S. citizens” but that, rather, is comprised almost exclusively of “middle-aged Caucasian males who attend the same conferences, banquets, and parties” (Griffin, 2003, p. 394).

Agenda setting, however, does not mean people are passive vessels waiting to be “programmed” by the media (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Instead viewers are selective in the kinds of media they consume (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). And while media may be suggestive when it comes to what are considered to be important issues, it is also equally important to consider whether, and to what degree, media deliberately makes certain issues more salient over others. According to David H. Weaver (2007), there are two levels of AST. The first level of agenda setting is focused on the relative salience

(generally defined as “perceived importance”) of issues or subjects. The second level examines the relative salience of attributes of issues (Weaver, 2007). This second level is more concerned with how “priming” and a “media frame” is created and what it is used for. For instance, priming refers to “the impact agenda-setting can have on the way individuals evaluate public officials by influencing the thematic areas or issues that individuals use to form these evaluations” (Scheufele, 2000). A media frame is “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss & Ghanem, 1991; Weaver, 2007, p. 143). For the purposes of this study, it is important to note the exclusionary function of a media frame given the small American Indian population, and the media under-reporting on issues affecting this community, relative to that of other populations. “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993; Weaver, 2007, p. 143). It is the use of “framing” that completes the process of connecting concepts such that viewers associate specific meanings and importance with particular issues and/or stories. In other words, framing entails selecting aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient by promoting a particular definition of a problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation (Griffin, 2003).

Much public attention has been given to the notion that what is presented in media has the power to influence people’s perceptions about what issues are pressing as well as

general perception(s) of the current political and social climate. Framing can serve dual purposes. First, it can serve to elicit some sort of reaction or behavior from media viewers. Second, it is usually utilized to intentionally call attention to a perceived social problem. Spector and Kitsuse (1977) define “social problem” as “the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims to organizations, agencies, and institutions about some putative conditions” (p. 146). The emergence of a social problem is contingent on the organization of group activities with reference to defining some putative condition as well as the assumption that the group will assert the need for eradicating, ameliorating, or otherwise changing that condition. The existence of a group is critical and important to understand as “social problems activity commences with the collective attempts to remedy a condition that some group perceives and judges offensive and undesirable” (Spector & Kitsuse, 1977, p. 148).

Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) extend the work of Spector and Kitsuse by pointing out the socially constructed nature of social problems. They believe context is important in terms of understanding the conditions from which social problems arise. For them, “social problems do not exist objectively; they are constructed by the human mind, called into being or constituted by the definitional process...[These ‘problems’] derive from or are produced by specific sociocultural circumstances, groups and categories, social structures and societies, historical eras, individuals, and/or classes” (p. 149). Additionally, Goode and Ben-Yehuda believe the reality of social problems can be measured or manifested in some of the following ways: (1) organized collective action or campaigns on the part of some of the members of a society to do something about, call

attention to, protest, or change (or prevent change in) a given condition; (2) the introduction of bills in legislatures to criminalize or otherwise deal with, the behavior and the individuals supposedly causing the condition; (3) the ranking of a condition or an issue in the public's hierarchy of the most serious problems facing the country; and, (4) public discussion of an issue in the media in the form of magazine and newspaper articles and television news stories, commentaries, documentaries, and dramas. An example of a "social problem" that has received some media coverage includes the debate on American Indian mascots. Fans and stakeholders who profit from the continued use of these types of mascots often appeal to the media to promote their opinions and fight for the right to maintain American Indian mascots while Indigenous protestors and allies appeal to the media with arguments for why the practice must be eradicated. Since public opinion is often formed by story framing and frequency of media reporting, thus media producers come to serve an important function in influencing public opinion and policy on the subject.

AST research has led researchers to consider the manifestation of social problems and of moral panics. Moral panics are generally defined by at least five crucial elements: First, there must be a heightened level of concern over the behavior of a certain group or category and the consequences the behavior presents for the rest of society. Second, there must be an increased level of hostility toward the category of people seen as engaging in the threatening behavior. Third, there must be a certain minimal measure of consensus in the society as a whole or in designated segments that the threat is real, serious and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behavior. Fourth, there is an implicit

assumption in the use of the term moral panic that the concern is out of proportion to the nature of the threat, that it is greater than that which a sober empirical evaluation could support. Thus generating and disseminating numbers is important—deaths, crimes, victims, injuries, total cost—and more of the figures cited by moral panic claims makers are wildly exaggerated. Finally, moral panics are volatile—they erupt fairly suddenly and, nearly as suddenly, subside (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). The insistence of MSU administrators to rationalize their actions and decisions by reiterating how much money has already been invested into particular diversity-serving initiatives or by highlighting that the resignation of Native peoples has led to a dearth in providing necessary services is an example of how the university seeks to position themselves in the role of victim and Native peoples, themselves, in the role of deviant or instigators of moral panic. As I will demonstrate in a later section, referring to the collective concerns of Native students as the concerns of a few “individual” students allows MSU to neutralize or minimize the sense of moral panic initiated by student protest and mitigating the impression that MSU is in any way threatening or endangering the rights and interests of Native peoples. By placing itself in the role of victim, MSU can appeal to public sympathy and redirect the discussion in a manner that suggests the only thing to fear is students who are ill-informed about university practices yet seek to make public statements against the institution and, in essence, insult the good work of its administrators.

Victims, this sense, are an important part of the “problem” frame and critical for the promotion of fear. Victimization (or victimhood) as a status relies on pervasive fear because this is what makes victimization meaningful and plausible to audiences. In this

context, fear becomes the impetus for longstanding efforts to regulate and control particular individuals or behaviors. At the heart of this, “panic functions as a definition of social and political reality that preserves the interests of the powerful and forces the capital state to shed its façade of neutrality and independence from special interests and assume total social authority over the subordinate classes” (Hall, Crichter, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978, pp. 216-217). This argument suggests that the “ruling elite orchestrates hegemony by convincing the rest of the society—the press, the general public, the courts, law enforcement—that the real enemy is not the crisis in capitalism, nor capitalism itself, but the [individual] and the lax way things have been dealt with in the past” (Goode & Ben-Yehuda, 1994). This tactic is not unlike what many majoritarian stories seek to do and is why it is important for MSU administrators to silence or ignore Native students when they question the institution’s investment in its tribal mascot and its treatment of Native peoples. Within an AST framework, concepts such as fear and moral panic come to reflect the media/economic/political agendas of the ruling elite and their self-serving functions.

AST, like CRT in its original iteration, is not intended to be a methodology—it is an analytical lens. As mentioned earlier, the theory has largely been used to study the effects of media agenda setting on public opinion and government policy (Weaver, 2007). Yet present in CRT, TribalCrit, and AST is the importance of storytelling. Storytelling, “remains a powerful direct means of grasping and exposing dominant realities and sharing subordinated ones” (MacKinnon, 2002, p. 72). While CRT seeks counterstories or testimonies in order to understand the effects of law and policy on the lives of

marginalized peoples, AST places its focus on understanding how media stories are presented, what values or associations are being promoted, and critically unpacking the associations promoted by media producers. Together, these theories can serve to advance an understanding of the powerful ways in which the media influences the issues facing marginalized communities as well as how power functions to promote the needs, rights, and interests of certain groups over others.

Applying AST in order to understand how the stories were framed.

To support their claims, the students chose to focus their public protest efforts on the following incidents in Table 3.

Table 3. Timeline of events leading to student resistance.

Spring 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guerilla-style marketing advertising campaign for Ethnic Studies program that associated American Indians with casino gaming • Resignation of the Native professor of American Indian Education and director of the Native Teacher Preparation Program (NTPP) • Resignation of the American Indian Program Coordinator (AIPC)
Summer 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lauding of \$2.1 million awarded in federal grant monies to recruit and train two additional cohorts of students (approx. 20 students total) through NTPP even as talks to return the monies begin almost immediately after accepting the award • AIPC advising position remains open/unfilled
Fall 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs referencing painful moments of American Indian history displayed at NCAA-sanctioned volleyball game by rival fan; neither MSU nor rival university ask fan to desist • AIPC advising position remains unfilled
Spring 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University returns over \$2.1 million of recently awarded federal grant monies and dismantles nationally recognized NTPP • MSU hires director for the American Indian Resource Center (AIRC); the first since 1996
Fall 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MSU awards vendor license to independent merchant selling stereotypical and culturally/spiritually offensive t-shirts for NCAA-sanctioned Blackout football game • Director for AIRC forced to resign seven months after being appointed

To review, during the spring of 2007 the American Indian Program Coordinator (AIPC) in the Center for Minority Student Services and the director of the Native Teacher Preparation Program (NTPP), who was also a professor of American Indian education in the College of Education, resigned. That semester MSU’s ethnic studies program launched an advertising campaign to promote its courses. The poster campaign was based on depictions of negative stereotypes of communities of color. For example, the posters for the Chicano Studies and Asian Studies associated these communities with stereotypical foods; African Americans were associated with hip hop singer Jay-Z and American Indians with casinos and gaming. Hurt, students of color submitted a letter

outlining the problematic nature of the posters to the interim director of the Ethnic Studies program. They also met with the school's associate vice president (AVP) for diversity to share their concerns. The AVP assured them this would be an easy issue to address and promised to personally look into the issue. He ended the meeting by jokingly inviting them to "give [him] something hard to work on." A few days later the students were invited to meet with the director of ethnic studies, the AVP, and various other institutional representatives responsible for commissioning, creating, and otherwise approving the campaign. During this meeting students were interrupted by university leaders, reminded of the high cost of running the campaign, and told that several people affiliated with ethnic studies had signed off on the project. After the meeting the students received a letter from the director of ethnic studies reiterating how costly it was to run the campaign and explaining it was scheduled to end very soon and would thus phase itself out (Document on file with author). However, this was not true. Posters remained displayed across the university's sprawling 1,534-acre campus in buildings and on the sides of buses and webpages for approximately two more months.

The summer began and ended without a replacement for the AIPC. Additionally, during that time, MSU received \$2 million in federal grant monies from the Office of Indian Education (OIE) (Berry, 2009). These monies, originating from Title VII grant monies, were specifically designated to prepare American Indian undergraduate students to become instructors in the disciplines of math, science and reading. The award would continue the university's successful NTPP within the College of Education (CoE), a program that had been created for Indigenous peoples to serve Indigenous peoples

(Bulkeley, 2008). At the time, NTPP was considered a national success and had been identified as a “model program” by the OIE (Document on file with author). According to the Dean of the CoE, by 2007, 33 students had already graduated from the program as teachers with another nine set to graduate in the spring of 2008 (Bulkeley, 2008). These numbers were particularly impressive given the graduation records of the university’s CoE. From its inception in 1979 up to 2002 (a span of 26 years), university records indicate only 14 American Indians had graduated from the department compared to the 42 expected to graduate in the six years since NTPP had been in operation. The university was excited to announce its award. The dean touted it as an example of the university’s commitment to supporting the program and announced, “The College of Education is fully committed to, and excited about, these new programs. We look forward to collaborating with the U.S. Office of Indian Education to ensure [NTPP’s] legacy of success.”

In November of 2007, MSU’s women’s volleyball team played a rival team at a NCAA-sponsored conference game that took place at the rival campus. Photos, printed in MSU’s student newspaper on November 12, revealed a rival fan attending the game and displayed messages the following messages: “Back to the reservation for [MSU]” and “Trail of Tears Part II.” Both statements referred to issues that are highly sensitive for many Indigenous people including the Cherokee, Seminole, Chickasaw, Choctaw and Creek who were forcibly removed from their homelands to reservation lands west of the Mississippi river, migrating by foot. The Cherokees call this walk “The Trail Where They Cried” because of the experience endured on the walk (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). The signs

were also particularly poignant for the university's tribal namesake since various tribes and bands had been forcibly relocated to reservations as a result of various acts of legislation.

During the game the fan was neither approached by university personnel to cease displaying her messages nor asked to leave the game. Outraged, Native students circulated a petition calling for the rival school to address this act which they perceived as hostile and abusive toward American Indian communities. As one Native activist explained to media reporters, "Although [MSU] no longer endorses the [tribal] name as a mascot but rather as a nickname for its athletic teams, unfortunately with the continued use of the [tribal] name, many fans of rival university's take up the name an[d] use it in a racist, hostile and abusive context" (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). A total of 653 signatures were collected; 550 from the university's tribal namesake band alone! This was significant given how few members of the namesake tribal band there are.³⁹ Even 1964 Olympic gold medalist Billy Mills (Oglala Lakota) signed it and spoke about his own experiences with racism as a college athlete (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). Signatures were collected from Indigenous peoples living in the city *and* in reservation communities. Additionally many non-Indian community members and MSU administrators signed the petition, including MSU's associate vice president for diversity. Unfortunately while MSU administrators expressed their outrage with the incident, none made an attempt to directly help the

³⁹ In 2013, there were just over 3,000 enrolled members (Berry, 2013).

students nor did they choose to address the incident themselves (Petition on file with author).

Furthermore, when the athletic director for the rival university was reached for comment he responded by saying, “The comments of this *single* fan certainly do not represent the views of the [university] athletic department, nor of the university” (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008, emphasis mine). Still, he went on, he would apologize for the distress that her remarks, “displayed *however briefly*,” caused students (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008, emphasis mine). When asked for his thoughts regarding the petition he responded with, “I immediately mailed an apology to the people who contacted me regarding this issue. I had not heard of the incident until I received the letter” (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). He admitted having no prior knowledge of the incident but, like any good administrator, went on to apologize and defend his institution saying, “We wholeheartedly agree with [the] petitioners that these particular remarks were inappropriate and offensive – that is why our staff intervened as soon as they saw them and told the fan they must be erased” (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). To this day, no witnesses have emerged to support the administrator’s claim that the student was approached and asked to take down her signs.

The following spring 2008, seven months after receiving millions of dollars to continue its successful NTPP program, MSU decided to dismantle it. In early April 2008, the university announced its decision to return the grants – an act previously unheard of at the university (Bulkeley, 2008; Florez, 2008; Norlen, 2008). When university administrators were questioned about their decision to rescind the grants, reasons ranged from a lack of finances to a lack of personnel (Berry, 2008; Bulkeley, 2008, Yurth, 2008).

The dean offered two reasons: first was a lack of funding from the university to implement the program. Second was that the loss of two key staff members, including Dr. Joseph, who created and oversaw the program, the program was no longer viable (Bulkeley, 2008). The dean indicated the university would be partnering with the AIRC to outline a vision for supporting the students. This claim was particularly strategic since it highlighted the fact that the university had recently hired a director for the Center, after allowing the position to remain vacant for 12 years. Unfortunately this partnership was short-lived as the newly appointed director was promptly dismissed almost seven months later when she began to question the decisions of the university's leadership.

Later that year, in the fall, a group of university students applied for and were awarded a vendor license to sell t-shirts for an upcoming football game. In an attempt to "make some extra money," one of the vendors explained that his group had created a design based on the respective mascots of the schools (Totten, 2008). The image depicted the profile of a shirtless, hook-nosed Indian man (representative of MSU's mascot) wearing a headdress and buckskin pants sitting atop a boulder. In his left hand is a skewered horned frog (the rival team's mascot) hung, rotisserie style, over a large fire. Upon seeing the image, a Native student – who happened to be the sole student from the university's namesake tribe that semester – quickly texted others to report the incident. A short while later a small group of Native students approached the vendors, introduced themselves, explained that the shirts were offensive and asked the men to stop selling them (Totten, 2008; Yurth, 2008). While the vendors apologized for offending them, they did not stop selling their merchandise; as one vendor explained, they had already sold

150 shirts (Totten, 2008). Rather than risk losing profit from their merchandise, they chose to move their booth from one campus location to another (Totten, 2008).

Disappointed, the Native students expressed to university officials that they would like to “see some disciplinary action [taken on the part of] the school” (Totten, 2008). When the university met with the students to address the issue, the students were exposed to another cultural and spiritual harm when a well-meaning staff member sang part of a traditional song, intended to explain the significance of the horned frog, without observing the appropriate protocol.

What News Sources Covered the Protests?⁴⁰

The protests and issues raised by the students received modest media attention from locally owned and operated news media. Stories were featured in the city’s two oldest and most popular periodicals. These newspapers, which have the longest-running publication history in the valley, are widely distributed to local residents. For this reason I refer to them as “local,” “popular,” or “mainstream” media. It is important to note who owns and controls these publications. Both publications have roots with the Christian/religious group that settled in the state. However one publication, originally

⁴⁰ In order to analyze this phenomenon I collected media articles published and/or aired on television related to the issues presented by the protestors from January 2007 through December 2008. I compiled news stories published in the largest state circulated newspapers as well as stories published in Native-owned and/or operated news sources including local tribal papers as well as national news outlets such as *Indian Country Today* and *Native Village Youth and Education News*. I also collected stories from MSU’s student newspaper. There was only one news story that aired on the local ABC television news channel. Using an AST analytical approach I coded for media frames paying particular attention to what was being said/done in the story, how it was being said/done, and what the expected outcomes were (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). From this I was able to generate themes that led to the completion of a content analysis.

founded by a group of Christian businessmen, was later purchased and is now owned by a Denver-based company. The other periodical maintains its relationship with the largest church in the state and closely follows the teachings of the church – locals know it for continually monitoring its advertisements and overlooking or downplaying news that does not reflect its values. Among locals, the second periodical is known as a conservative publication while the first tends to be viewed as a less conservative version of the latter. Given the foundations of AST, it is important to note that since both publications have the same religious/faith-based roots, a denomination which in 2004 comprised 62.4% of the state population (Canham, 2005) and in which 91% of those who identify as members of the faith also identify as White and middle-class (Walker, 2011), news stories tends to privilege issues of interest to that particular demographic.

Such mainstream publications became essential for disseminating the position of university administrators and privileged a majoritarian story. In chapter two I defined majoritarian story as a story designed to remind the majority population of its identity in relation to outgroups and provides a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural (Delgado, 1989). The majoritarian story suggests the power to (re)tell/(re)frame a story lies in those that hold positions of power at the university and provides considerable control over the subsequent discourse used to convey the story.

An overreliance on majoritarian storytelling can serve as a tactic to destroy the counterstories told by people of color. In the case of MSU, the majoritarian stories told by administrators often revolved around four main themes: denial, defense, minimization, and shifting accountability through victim-blaming and scapegoating. What follows is a

contrast of the ways local sources of media became a platform for university power holders to silence or invalidate the counterstories of American Indians. On the other hand, Native- and, to a much smaller extent student-owned and/or operated sources of media served as tools for racial emancipation by educating readers on the history and importance of the issues presented. These stories centered on the themes of: accountability, emphasis on understanding how university actions impact the experiences students, and an overall understanding that the stories shared by the students are a collective, rather than individual, concern for tribal communities. Rather than overrelying on university power holders to rationalize the experiences and concerns of Native peoples, these media sources presented both student and administrator arguments while also providing important context for why these struggles are important.

Local news media.

The stories reported in local news media revealed several tactics used to recenter the majoritarian story. The first was minimization. Much like the sentiment reflected in “give me something hard to do,” these stories tended to frame student allegations as “absurd” and downplayed the severity of what happened. They also emphasize a belief that when it comes to validating claims of oppression or mistreatment, numbers matter not experiences. Moreover, this tactic sought to promote the belief that accurate and reliable information of the issues, and thus how seriously they should be taken, is centrally located in university power holders. Such stories reflected an overwhelming paternalistic depiction of the university as a benevolent and dedicated caretaker of American Indians who were, in turn, portrayed as ungrateful and militant against the

institution. State and university officials contested the experiences of oppression voiced by American Indians by consistently repeating that the number of American Indians that were concerned with these issues were “very few” and that students who were protesting were speaking for themselves and not for the group. Nowhere did these types of news reports mention the number of enrolled American Indian students at the university is low to begin with (at the time, approximately 200 of the 33,000 students enrolled at the university identified as American Indian). This rhetoric of few peoples who feel oppressed served to discount the 600+ signatories (most of whom were from American Indian) that had voiced their discontent with the volleyball fan messages.

The administrators’ desire to minimize student concern is an age-old colonial exercise of power intended to promote rhetorical imperialism. According to Lyons (2000) rhetorical sovereignty refers to the “inherent right and ability of *peoples* to determine their own communicative needs and desires” (p. 450, emphasis in original). As Watanabe (2012) has explained, those who criticize sovereignty fear what it allows American Indians to pursue. That is, existence on their own terms, both within Indigenous communities and “in the presence of others” (Lyons, 2000, p. 457). Watanabe goes on to explain that “those who downplay the importance of sovereignty in educational venues (self-determination through self-education) obstruct and curtail Native ‘possibilities’ and power” (p. 9). This can lead to what Lyons refers to as rhetorical imperialism. Rhetorical imperialism is rhetorical sovereignty’s opposite and suggests that those who establish the terms set the limits for interaction or communication. Often such actions are accompanied by assuming a position of “political paternalism” over Indian peoples

(Lyons, 2000, p. 452). While the students sought to protect and advocate for the sovereignty and rights of Native peoples, as a whole, to access an educational environment that is welcoming and equipped to support their needs (recall the student bill of rights outlined in chapter two), the university was working actively to negate and minimize that sense of collective sovereignty by individualizing their achievement and concerns.

A second theme was defense. Defense seeks to dismiss concerns (as opposed to minimizing or denying them); as a tactic, it recognizes something has happened but doesn't see it as a "problem" (e.g. emphasizing the brevity of the signs displayed at the volleyball game). Defense was often used as a method of deflecting the conversation to (re)focus on the university's "commitment" to Native peoples, and not on its shortcomings. University officials told their own stories in response to the counterstories offered by protestors, absolving themselves of responsibility to American Indian students. For example, when asked about the inappropriate, hurtful and offensive comments levied at American Indians at the volleyball game, the director of athletics for the rival team responded by superficially apologizing, saying that "the comments of this *single* fan certainly do not represent the views of [our] athletic department, nor of the university. I apologize for the distress that her remarks, *displayed however briefly*, have caused you and any others..." (emphasis mine, Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). His insistence that the comment was displayed briefly suggests that the concern over this issue is being over magnified and also places the individual student, not the university, in the role of deviant for promoting the conditions that fostered a hostile environment (see chapter three). He

points to the singular nature of the event and offers a qualification to his apology that seems to suggest the amount of distress experienced should be in proportion to the brevity in which the comments were displayed. Ultimately his reaction serves as both a tactic of defense as well as to minimize the concern the institution has for Native students. These microaggressions, and in some instances macroaggressions, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, eat away at those who must face them and actually contradict the “minor” and “brief” effects arguments made by university administrators.

When asked to comment on the protest and specific instances of injustice outlined by Native students at the protest, MSU administrators also moved quickly to minimize the validity of their claims by pointing to the low number of students in attendance at the protest. The AVP responded by affirming that the group’s actions caught him by surprise, claiming that he worked *individually* with many of them to alleviate their concerns yet never offered examples of the steps that were taken to alleviate those concerns (Leonard, 2008, emphasis mine). His response downplays the collective nature of the students concerns. In the same interview he claims, “the allegations of disrespect and dishonor that several students say they're experiencing, however, ‘are completely absurd’” (Leonard, 2008) – a comment that deftly dismisses the pain endured by students and never acknowledges concern for their well-being. However an article in a tribally owned and operated newspaper contests this claim. According to the student/activist interviewed, MSU’s university president refused to meet with the students, electing to pass them on to the AVP who refused to meet with the entire group. Instead, he permitted

only two students to enter his office, listened to their grievances for a short while and ultimately kicked them out after accusing them of having “a bad attitude” and raising their voices (Yurth, 2008).

The attempts to defend the institution, and its leadership, by shifting accountability and subverting and silencing the voices and experiences of Native students continued. Administrators chose to disregard the issues brought up by students and, instead, continued to systematically attack the former university leaders who had been pushed out. They also targeted one of the (female) Native students they believed was leading the student protest efforts and used her as a scapegoat to dismiss the group’s concerns. The student, who had consistently been interviewed for a number of news articles openly questioned the university and its leadership and collaborated with news reporters to provide information on the group’s claims. The AVP countered her claims by accusing her of spreading “misinformation” and stating that “several Native students” had told him she represents only herself (Yurth, 2008). This response sought, again, to minimize the collective student concerns and implied her experiences and the experiences and concerns of the collective, did not matter since the number of dissenters was so low. It also erases the humanity of the pain by making it about a small number of people. In this instance, the concern for justice disappears and is replaced with the need to assert and perpetuate hegemony and colonialism. The response was also ahistorical and ignored how many other people signed the petition.

The student countered by pointing out that the problem did not lie in the number of students attempting to air their concerns, since so few are present on campus or

allowed to speak to begin with. She asked: how can the number of concerned Native students ever reflect a critical mass if the university continues to terminate programs that make their on-campus presence viable? The problem, she pointed out, was about a larger climate of racism that permeates the campus and allows for the continued mistreatment of Native students. Her response was poignant as she explained, “Students come to [the AVP] with grievances, and he basically calls us liars...both the [the rival school] and [MSU incidents] are symptomatic of an American educational system that disregards the rights and sensitivities of Native students” (Yurth, 2008).

Denial, as a tactic, refuses to acknowledge that, even if something has happened, no harm was caused. The perceived absence of harm (from a legal or university policy perspective) allows administrators to present the issue of concern as a non-issue from the university’s perspective and thus dismiss it from their purview. When they weren’t pointing to the low number of Native students concerned with the current state of American Indians at the university, administrators responded to the students’ concerns by contradicting, diminishing and nullifying them. One of the most popular methods of accomplishing this was by offering the illusion of assumed institutional responsibility over actual institutional inaction. As demonstrated with the volleyball incident, the director of athletics explained that the rival school agreed with Native students that the remarks displayed by the fan were inappropriate and offensive and claimed his staff intervened as soon as they saw them – telling the fan they must be erased (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008). The veracity of this statement remains questionable as the fan was photographed displaying not one but *two* offensive signs during the event. His statements create a

mixed message. He first claims to have had no knowledge of the incident prior to receiving the petition and letter from the students. Then he points out the brevity in which the signs were displayed. Finally, he states that the staff did, in fact, intervene.

Here the story changes from a story of personal and institutional unawareness (“I/we didn’t know about this”) to a story of minimization of the importance of the act (“the signs were displayed briefly”) to a story of assumed institutional responsibility (“the staff intervened”). By suggesting the student was reprimanded and/or asked to erase her messages, he constructs a story of institutional accountability that the school really *does* care about maintaining a respectful atmosphere – especially as it relates to American Indians. However his statement emphasizing the brevity of the display and his subsequent reminder that he would have been “happy” to explain to Natives how the university responded *before* they initiated a petition drive serves to drive home the point that it is administrators, not students, who are in possession of the full story. In this instance, and others, the institution controls the terms of the debate, using popular media to do so. It is rhetorical imperialism at its best and AST allows for us to be able to name and address it.

Finally, shifting accountability was directly accomplished through victim-blaming and scapegoating. This tactic not only framed Native peoples as lone dissenters but as responsible for their own problems and the decline in services available to them. Discrediting student experiences and concerns by shifting the public’s attention to the university’s current good deeds was rampant throughout the news stories. For example, on February 23, 2008, the dean sent a letter to the remaining staff of NTPP explaining the

leadership's decision to return the grants, suggesting this decision ushered in a "new era" for American Indian education at the school.

A meeting was held with [the senior vice president of academic affairs] to carefully address the difficult choices facing the university regarding the continuation of the OIE-funded [NTPP] grant [program]. In doing so, I want to emphasize that we are all in agreement regarding the critical importance of continuing and expanding the legacy of [NTPP] as a very successful program in preparing American Indian students for careers in education. Building off the success of the [NTPP] federal grants, I can assure you that everyone involved at every level is strongly committed to the continuing recruitment and support of American Indian students at [MSU]. To move us to this new era of support for our students, the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of Diversity, College of Education, and the American Indian Resource Center are coming together with key stakeholders, including tribal community leaders, state leaders, [MSU] administrators, faculty, and students to plan together to institutionalize the University's commitment to the education of American Indian students now and in the future.⁴¹ This commitment has begun with the current search that is underway for a tenure-track faculty member in [education] whose primary teaching and research responsibilities will be to American Indian Education at the undergraduate and graduate level.

According to the dean, returning the grants was necessary for two reason: (1) there was a lack of matching funding from the university to implement the program and

⁴¹ To date, no new program, like NTPP, exists.

(2) the loss of two key staff members who oversaw the program made it difficult to keep the program viable (Bulkeley, 2008). Even the AVP chimed in and directly blamed Dr. Joseph for this decision. “It’s true the College of Education turned away the \$2 million grant for the teacher [preparation] program but only because the professor that applied for the grant had moved away and the dean was concerned about some audit findings” (Yurth, 2008). Later the state’s director of Indian affairs echoed this refrain. “I was angry too when I heard federal grants were being turned down, but after talking with the administration, I hold the faculty member who applied for the grants responsible. He did not work through university channels and the university was unaware it would have to come up with matching funds” (Yurth, 2008). Unfortunately, in this instance, all of these claims were in direct contradiction with official university documents. In 2007, MSU central administrators, through the vice president for academic affairs, not only acknowledged no audit findings of this nature existed but, at the time the grant proposals were submitted to OIE, had also committed to providing funding for NTPP student tuition and additional support for the program (Document on file with author). Senior administrators went on to indicate they were interested in starting a similar program, later down the line, that did not rely on federal funding. However, these statements were all later contested as, to date, no new program exists.

When Dr. Joseph and another former administrator was reached for comment, they disputed MSU’s attempts to promote rhetorical imperialism by providing evidence that negated the claims of university administrators about concerns with audit findings. These documents assert the grants had never been red-flagged nor found to violate any

federal or institutional policy. Furthermore, they pointed out the university knew it would have to provide some matching funds when it submitted the applications yet it had agreed to submit the applications, with the consent of central administrators, anyway (Documents on file with author). Moreover, given the university had been implementing these types of grants since 2002, it is questionable that news of having to provide matching funds would be surprising to the university by this point. As Dr. Joseph explained,

Prior to submitting the grant applications to the OIE, [the staff and directors of NTPP had] met with the dean of the CoE for approval of the grant budget, and the Dean had approved it. Later, the federal gov't cut the budget. [The Dean] insisted on asking for more money. A [better] move (so as not to lose the funding that was sent back...) would have been to re-write the goals of the grant (e.g. ask to fund only 7 students, instead of 10, because of the cut in funding). This keeps the grant in place, upholds the MOA...between the College of Education (signed by [the Dean]) and [one of the university's tribal namesake bands] to serve the [tribal] nation. The solution of re-framing the goals (perfectly legal and understandable, given the lack of funds) would have been a much wiser choice for [MSU]. As it currently appears, [MSU] was not interested in problem-solving. (Document on file with author)

Perhaps most importantly, as Dr. Joseph pointed out, returning the grants meant the university would no longer honor its promise to the neighboring tribal nation who had submitted a Memorandum of Agreement, required to apply for the grants, to partner with

and support the program. Regrettably news of the intention to return the grants was not announced to the partnering tribes nor did the university undertake this decision by consulting with them, an action that suggests the university not only lacked cultural competence (as outlined in chapter three) but that its administrators are unfamiliar with working with tribal nations.

The irony of administrators claiming commitment to Native peoples while rescinding grants did not escape the attention of news reporters. After its decision to return the grants became public, the university quickly moved to rededicate the Indian Resource Center; which was dedicated and remained without a director since 1996 (Florez, 2009; Florez, 2008; Norlen, 2008). During the ceremony in April 2008 the university formally introduced the newest American Indian staff member to assume the directorship of the Center. And although MSU's president did not attend the ceremony, his office later released a statement claiming that the rededication represented a "commitment" to enhance the success of American Indian students, faculty and staff (Bulkeley, 2008). However once media attention died down some seven months later, the university again deviated from fulfilling its commitment to serve Native students, staff and faculty by firing the director (Florez, 2009), leaving the students who sought academic guidance from the director without support between the transition from the winter to spring semester. This exercise of power went largely unnoticed by the press. Moreover the university would not appoint a new director until December 2010.

Native- and Student-Driven Media

While local, mainstream news media became a space for university administrators to draw attention away from the counterstories of Native students and promote rhetorical imperialism, Native-owned and student-led news sources reported stories that did not seek to minimize the experiences of the students. Instead of privileging the voices and opinions of university power holders by allowing quotes from these individuals to dominate their news stories, these news sources presented their own research findings alongside the stories and experiences of university administrators and Native students. Native and student-led news sources questioned the commitment of the institution by pointing to specific instances in which the university had either sanctioned or allowed for the racist and/or hostile treatment of Native communities. They also presented the arguments of university administrators as they rationalized various institutional policies and choices. The stories reported in Native and student-led media suggested an overall concern with promoting justice and racial emancipation by educating readers on the history and importance of the issues presented. These stories emphasized the experiences of students with an overall understanding that the stories shared by the students are a collective, not individual, concern for their tribal communities and an assertion that the university is an entity that should be continually monitored and held accountable for its statements and actions.

Rather than relying on university power holders to rationalize the treatment of Natives, Native and student-led media sources presented both student and administrator arguments alongside their own research findings on the continued usage of American

Indian names and imagery. Furthermore Native publications offered readers the viewpoints of administrators and students while also weaving information that combined traditional teachings, Native viewpoints, and contextual and historical details. This led to the creation of news stories that offered a fuller understanding of the importance and implications of the issues as they relate to Indian country. For example, rather than simply reporting on the offensive signs displayed at the volleyball game, articles in *Indian Country Today* and the tribally owned and operated publications explained the historical context of the messages and why the messages were offensive and hurtful for American Indians in general (Cohoe-Tebe, 2008, Berry 2008). For example, one story explained the significance of the signs displayed at the volleyball game as it relates to the concept of the reservation system and the “trail of tears.” Other stories contested the statements provided by university administrators. For example, one news story suggested that because the university was accusing Dr. Joseph’s departure for shutting down NTPP this suggests the university was not prepared to provide the necessary personnel to run the program. “Because he was the administrator of the OIE grant and there was ‘no one to run the program’ [...] It was not a question of withholding matching funds as some contended” (Berry, 2008), rather it was a question of whether and why (not) the university was prepared to find someone to run the grants.⁴²

⁴² Even this question is problematic as, upon his departure, Dr. Joseph had named Heseeo’o as his successor as Principal Investigator and Director of the NTPP grants. Heseeo’o saw all existing grants to their completion and was forced to resign, as a result of incessant interference from staff and leaders in the CoE which prevented her from performing her job duties, a few months shy of when the last remaining grant was scheduled to end (Documents on file with author).

In addition to providing historical and institutional context, these media sources also included the voices of other Native community members as they responded to the various issues presented. For example, stories published in one tribally owned periodical mentioned the reactions and support for the students' efforts from tribal leaders and members of the Native community. By including details such as the number of signatures collected for the petition regarding the volleyball incident, which Native communities had signed the petition, and which leaders were supporting the student-led initiatives, Native journalists did the opposite of what appeared in local media news stories. Rather than minimize the experiences and voices of Native peoples, Native-owned media news sources sought to provide a holistic understanding that, although many of the signatories were not students at MSU, these issues unite Native communities because the comments affect and implicate them all. Pain and suffering was thus not limited to one, sole, student leader, as university administrators and mainstream publications would have the public believe. Rather, they are a shared experience for all Native communities.

Additionally Native-owned media did not shy away from outlining the importance of students' experiences. Rather than relying on the rationalizations of administrators, Native media presented the experiences of students as legitimate concerns that need to be addressed in their own light. One media source, reporting on the collective student protest, provided their own findings that appeared to coincide with the concerns protestors raised about how the American Indian trademark invites ridicule and disrespect from fellow students and breeds mockery and racism at athletic events. The *Native Village Youth and Education News* (2009) explained that “[t]he many-faceted sense of

outrage appears to center only in part on the tribal name as used by the university.” They offer examples, not provided by the students, which demonstrate the ways in which the university benefits financially from the exploitation of American Indian imagery and suggest the (ab)use of the tribal name implicates and impacts *all* Native peoples. Under this framework, perceived harm is not limited to members of the tribal namesake. For example, their story is published alongside an image of fan merchandise of a clown doll (figure that features the trademark “drum and feather” university logo on its chest, redface/face paint, and what could be considered a “mohawk” hairstyle. For this news reporting source, this served as an example of how the university was sanctioning and profiting from the use of caricatures featuring sacred cultural and spiritual symbols.



Figure 7. Image featured in news story about trademark.

Differences in Framing and Creating “Moral Panic”

Although Native media honored the stories and experiences of students while also offering the perspectives of university administrators, the circulation of this media is not widely distributed among the state’s residents. Therefore the fact remains that most residents were led to draw their own opinions and conclusions about the issues based on

the stories published in local, mainstream news sources. Since local, mainstream news sources centered their stories on the rationalizations and responses of university administrators, the voices and experiences of Native protestors were easily lost. Local news stories rarely outlined the longstanding history of university inaction that led to exploitation, stereotyping and the continued violation of cultural beliefs of Native students and their communities. Rarely did administrators or news reporters consider what the institution could have done to preempt the protest. By addressing or preempting the incidents brought up by the protestors, university administrators could have begun to restore its “commitment” to its students. Instead the university chose to grant a vendor license to a group of individuals hawking racist images, profiting off the continued exploitation of Native communities and their symbols. Administrators chose to momentarily support a student petition to address the racist, hostile and abusive messages written about Native communities at an NCAA-sanctioned event while permanently distancing themselves from their students and leaving Native students alone to deal with rival university leadership. When university-sanctioned stereotyping in its advertising initiatives was called to the attention of administrators, university representatives chose to disregard the concerns of its students in favor of allowing racist ethnic studies posters to phase themselves out. Finally, rather than fulfilling its promise to its tribal namesake that the university would provide opportunities and support for Native students to enroll and thrive at the university, the university chose to send back millions of dollars in federal grant monies that would have prepared much-needed Native teachers to teach in Native communities. Despite the multiple opportunities for the university to substantially or

genuinely address the needs of students, it instead chose to be passive; allowing racism to continue as students struggled with a series of harmful events. Ultimately MSU facilitated the marginalization of student concerns by targeting their complaints to dead ends – either faculty and staff that lacked the institutional clout to make the changes students demanded or those who were simply no longer at the institution – attempting to remove structural accountability by emphasizing isolated, individual culpability.

University officials were so preoccupied with absolving themselves from responsibility when called to account for their actions, they had little time to actually listen and work toward brainstorming solutions with the student activists. When claiming no prior knowledge of particular incidents or ignoring them was no longer an option, they chose to scapegoat Native faculty and students in order to shift attention away from their own implication in actions that suggest non-commitment to Native communities. As for why they had returned the grants, several university administrators blamed the Dr. Joseph for resigning in the first place. A statement that conveniently ignored the real reason he left: bullying by senior faculty who were lobbying to take NTPP away from him and otherwise engaging in actions that were interfering with his work. To say nothing of the overall inability/unwillingness of university administrators, including the college dean and university vice president for academic affairs, to address this. When the media began to pay attention to the other incidents protestors brought up; university administrators opted to scapegoat an individual female Native student by presenting her as a self-interested and someone who represented nobody other than herself. In order to rationalize its inability to fulfill its commitment to Native communities, university officials relied on

a rhetoric of discrediting Native staff, faculty and students by suggesting that knowledge and, thereby, credibility lies in the hands of university power holders.

By refusing to acknowledge their responsibility in any of the aforementioned incidents, the university (re)shifted the blame onto the shoulders of American Indians and the administrator, faculty, and staff that had resigned. This suggested that even American Indians (i.e. protestors) cannot get it right when it comes to figuring out who is responsible for the university's inability to fulfill its commitment to Natives – it was the fault of Natives themselves!

As the dean of the College of Education put it, problems with implementing the grant included the loss of “key” staff members who oversaw the program (Bulkeley, 2008). Additional news reports framed Natives as incompetent and responsible for their own doom, since NTPP was run for Natives by Natives. The AVP explained, “It’s true [we] turned away the \$2 million grant [...] but only because the professor that applied for the grant had moved away and the dean was concerned about some audit findings” (Yurth, 2008). This statement not only implicates Dr. Joseph but the Native staff member who was responsible for managing the fiscal operations of the grant. Finally, even the director of the state’s Division of Indian Affairs was invited to jump on board and promote the university’s rhetoric, “I was angry too when I heard federal grants were being turned down, but after talking with the administration, I hold the faculty member who applied for the grants responsible. He did not work through university channels and the university was unaware it would have to come up with matching funds” (Yurth, 2008). This statement not only serves to position one Native person against another, but

individualizes blame and insulates the institution. Rather than a structural, or institutional failing (either of MSU or universities generally), an individual's failure to "work through university channels" absolves the institution of accountability since these proper "channels" implied would have presumably corrected the funding issue. However the professionals sacrificed as scapegoats did not take these attacks lightly and directly reached out to senior administrators to set the record straight. In a letter sent to the senior vice president for academic affairs, one former administrator wrote,

I have been informed by multiple individuals that both [the Dean of the CoE] and his budget person have publicly commented that "three key people" mismanaged the grant's funds. Of course it is quite interesting that those "three key people" are not around to respond making these allegations rather convenient and the "three key people" silent targets. In addition, I understand that [the remaining] students in the [NTPP] have been told that the same "three key people" abandoned them by leaving [MSU] ...

For what I hope is the first and last time, let me set the record straight for you. As you know, the budget for this grant was audited annually by the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, we had the skillful assistance of [the Director of Budget Analysis and another financial staff person, both of whom] are above reproach. Surely, had anything improper been going on, one of the three would have called attention to the problem... To suggest that "three key people," who are conveniently no longer around, misused funds and then abandoned students is beyond disingenuous. It ignores the fact that the three of us, [...], had

reached a point where it was clear we were no longer welcome at the University...As long as these “three key people” were at [MSU], we did nothing but work as hard as possible to create programs that benefitted diverse populations and generated much good will and positive press for [the university]. In short, we worked our butts off to make [MSU] a better place and deserve better than we are getting. (Document on file with author)

As the author of this letter so deftly points out, and playing on the assimilationist motto of the Carlisle Indian School, the strategy of Mountain State appeared to be “Blame the Indians, Save the Institution.” Rather than deal with critiques of institutional structure or failures, individual Native faculty and staff, as well as their allies, become the objects of blame and scorn, while the institution remains in control, with minimal blame.

MSU as victim.

Dixson & Rousseau (2005) argue that it is not enough to simply tell the stories of people of color. Rather, the educational experiences revealed through those stories must then be subject to deeper analysis using the CRT lens with the ultimate goal of promoting activist efforts to advance social change. Stories must move us to action and the qualitative and material improvement of the educational experiences of people of color (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). This is especially important as we consider the larger implications of the decisions made by the university. In the case of rescinding millions of dollars intended to support American Indians to attend the university, administrators created a situation in which the stories, experiences and presence of American Indians are becoming extinct. For example, during the six years of the federally funded NTPP, over

40 American Indian students graduated. These rates have not been the same since; for example, by 2008 there had been no Native American teacher graduates (Florez, 2009). Without the presence of American Indian students on campus, how can the university claim to be advancing its mission to support diversity? Furthermore, by terminating a program that meaningfully improved the enrollment and graduation rates of American Indians on campus, how did the university expect to maintain or preserve this level of achievement without a contingency plan? These questions are particularly applicable as we consider what happened to Native enrollment rates after the termination of NTPP. The following charts show fall enrollment of American Indian/Alaska Native students five years prior to the inception of NTPP, during the time of NTPP, and five years after NTPP was terminated.

Table 4. MSU Enrollment.

YEAR*	NUMBER OF AI/AN STUDENTS ENROLLED (UNIVERSITY WIDE)**	TOTAL STUDENT ENROLLMENT (UNIVERSITY WIDE)	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION
1997	167	25210	0.66%
1998	189	24528	0.77%
1999	125	25209	0.50%
2000	148	25630	0.58%
2001	157	27203	0.58%
<i>2002</i>	<i>164</i>	<i>28016</i>	<i>0.59%</i>
<i>2003</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>28437</i>	<i>0.65%</i>
<i>2004</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>28933</i>	<i>0.67%</i>
<i>2005</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>29012</i>	<i>0.61%</i>
<i>2006</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>28619</i>	<i>0.70%</i>
<i>2007</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>28025</i>	<i>0.71%</i>
2008	188	28211	0.67%
2009	187	29284	0.64%
2010	182	30819	0.59%
2011	180	31660	0.57%
2012	171	32388	0.53%
2013	145	30858	0.47%

**Figures reflect total student FALL enrollment (undergraduate and graduate enrollment combined)*

*** Figures obtained from the Office of Budget & Institutional Analysis*

Italics indicate years in which NTTP was in effect

Table 5. MSU College of Education (COE) Enrollment

YEAR**	NUMBER OF AI/AN STUDENTS ENROLLED COE*	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED COE	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION
1997	11	1232	0.89%
1998	7	1026	0.68%
1999	5	1026	0.49%
2000	9	1262	0.71%
2001	7	1260	0.56%
<i>2002</i>	8	<i>1395</i>	<i>0.57%</i>
<i>2003</i>	22	<i>1445</i>	<i>1.50%</i>
<i>2004</i>	22	<i>1485</i>	<i>1.50%</i>
<i>2005</i>	27	<i>1589</i>	<i>1.70%</i>
<i>2006</i>	28	<i>1523</i>	<i>1.80%</i>
<i>2007</i>	20	<i>1366</i>	<i>1.50%</i>
2008	15	1295	1.20%
2009	7	1329	0.53%
2010	10	1377	0.73%
2011	12	1196	1%
2012	11	1151	1%
2013	8	989	0.81%

** Figures reflect total student fall enrollment (undergraduate and graduate enrollment combined)*

*** figures obtained from the office of budget & institutional analysis*

Italics indicate years in which NTTP was in effect

Tables 4 and 5 suggest the total number of students enrolled has never reached over 200 (at a university with 30,000+ students). Native students account for less than 1% of the total student population. Unsurprisingly, enrollment in the CoE peaked during

the time NTPP was in effect from 2002-2008. The numbers indicate that although programs like NTPP, from provides much needed funding and from which several of the student leaders emerged, made significant improvement in enrollment (especially at the College of Education level). Terminating successful programs like this (as well as poor administrative attitudes, which I discuss in chapter six) may end up pushing out existing Native students' and causing enrollment numbers to decline. Although enrollment numbers after NTPP was terminated are slowly beginning to rise, they have not yet reached the levels they were at when the program was in effect. Moreover it is unclear what accounts for the increase in Native student enrollment after the program was terminated. The rise in enrollment may not necessarily be reflective of anything the university is actively doing (e.g. recruiting more students, offering enrollment incentives, etc.) but rather may be reflective of a growing national trend suggesting an overall increase of American Indian/Alaska Native college students over the past five years.

Mountain State University's AVP rationalized the decision to rescind the grants as an example of "responsible stewardship." Other administrators echoed that statement and indicated the university did not (would not?) have the funds needed to provide the additional support to continue operating the program (Bulkeley, 2008; Florez, 2008; Norlen, 2008). However, during her interview Heseeo'o explained these claims were not entirely truthful.

Even though I was the PI of that grant by then, I was not a part of that decision at all. The reasons that they [gave for sending them back were based on lies and half-truths]. They sort of tricked us. After we had been awarded the \$2.1 in grants

the dean of the CoE and other university administrators asked us to write out a budget and said: "Sky's the limit." They acted like they were being generous. They acted like they were going to give us any additional money that we might need to do some special things for our students and so we were given the impression that the university really wanted to support these programs. That they wanted to help our students have, you know, a great experience at the university. [This budget was supposed to be] in addition to what we already had been awarded. So there was some need here and there for some extra funding [and] we sat down and we put together this budget, as they had asked us to do. They [had] said, [write in] "anything that your students might need." And so we sat down and kind of thought: "You know? This is what we're gonna need for supplies." And then: "Hey! Why don't we do some field trips?" So we threw in these ideas and we presented it. But the real reason for the budget? That's—that's the golden question. I think they did it because they were trying to get us [Natives] out of there. They were trying to show that the university could not house the grant because it was going to be too expensive for the university to run the grant.

By combining this new (inflated) budget with the unexpected cut in funding from the federal government, university administrators were able to advance an argument that this particular grant situation was untenable, that it was necessary for MSU to rely less on federal grants because these monies were simply not enough. In order to make it viable, they would need to use the state monies they received to support the program which was not economically feasible. As the AVP put it, "Federally supported grants often go away

when the money dries up...we want to be working toward the institutionalization of those services...we are going to try to expand services and solicit additional grants” (Bulkeley, 2008). He suggested that rather than a program dependent on federal grants, the university intended to work toward creating a university-funded program that has a very central place in the College of Education (Yurth, 2008). In an internal message sent on April 19, 2008 to peoples affiliated with the College, the Dean explained,

It is essential that the College put into place the vision and resources needed to build and maintain the trust and confidence of American Indian communities and our current and future students at [MSU]. As a College, our initial step is to appoint a College Director of American Indian Teacher Education...The new Director [...] will coordinate College initiatives with the [MSU] Office of Diversity, the [MSU] American Indian Resource Center, as well as colleges and programs across the campus to recruit, support, and retain American Indian students. Together with the new Director and the Office of Diversity, our College will effectively use the resources within the University to support the education of American Indian students, while actively seeking additional federal, state, and private resources to fund new scholarships and stipends for American Indian students seeking careers in education. Ultimately, the true test of our commitment will be the success of American Indian students as graduates of this College. We will stand up to this test. (Document on file with author)

These statements bring to light an economic contradiction as administrators argue the university does not have enough money to match the federal funds yet it claims it

wants to fund a separate program that will accomplish something similar to the preparation program but mostly through private funding and university funds. Here the issue of supporting American Indian students is centered in terms of an economic argument of limited resources yet later rationalizations reveal the concern is not limited to funding programs to train students to become educators – rather the concern is that it simply costs too much to educate American Indians.

Administrators explained, “[Returning the grant] is not something that anyone at [MSU] wanted to do... We wanted to broaden the range of students assisted, and we couldn’t do that and commit to the additional [funds needed to run these grants]” (Norlen, 2008). According to the dean, the state funds needed to help implement the programs could *be better put toward other programs* at the university (emphasis mine, Norlen, 2008). Heseo’o recalls,

[The] Dean was [initially] trying to use [the grants] for other purposes. He had his own agenda within the college. I can’t remember the specific thing that he was going to use it for [but] he told us he was trying to use the money in different ways than what it was written out to be used. He actually proposed that to the Office of Indian Education [to use the monies on programs and services for non-Native students]. I was right there on the phone. He proposed that and they said: “Absolutely not! Send them back. If that’s what you’re going to do, then send them back. That’s not the purpose of these funds.”

Clearing out all of the obfuscating rhetoric used to justify returning the grants and shutting down NTPP, what the administrators might have said instead was, “we are not

interested in investing in Native students; their numbers are small and we'd rather invest our time and money on other students." These statements of dismantling beneficial Indian-serving programs under the guise of "broadening the range of students assisted" have direct implications to the university's stated commitment to American Indians. As one former director of NTPP put it, "there's a disconnect for me. They claim diversity and support it, yet they turned back \$2 million to train 20 students, teachers. And there's a teacher shortage" (Bulkeley, 2008). The MSU senior vice president said the university hated to give back federal money, "but we [could] not accept it if it is going to end up costing us a lot of our own state money" – a statement that directly contradicted official documents he had signed the year before committing money to support the program in the first place. This statement about the university's commitment was directly called into question by one journalist who pointed out: "If the university is not willing to put up the money to match its rhetoric, there is no commitment" (Florez, 2008).

Mountain State University's claims of honor and commitment to American Indians while sanctioning acts that are racist, hostile, and abusive, acts that lead to marginalization and an overall drop in enrollment among American Indians, illustrate the hypocrisy many American Indians are faced with. The rescinding of federal grant money that served to raise its already low enrollment figures for American Indians, not just in the College of Education but for the university as a whole, and that provided much-needed American Indian teachers to American Indian communities, further illuminates the lack of commitment the University has to American Indian peoples overall. As one Native advocate mentioned, one cannot help to reflect on the overall effect terminating

Indian-serving programs has for American Indian student enrollment at the university as well as the effect it has on the current national teacher shortage. Even the state director of Indian Affairs has pointed out the current state of education for Indian children is appalling: American Indians are consistently at the bottom of every standardized test given to the state's children and Indian student dropout rates in rural areas range from 60-80% statewide (Cuch, 2008). It was with the current teacher shortage, acutely felt in Indian communities, in mind that Dr. Joseph wrote the initial NTPP grant in 2002. The program was intended to address a shortage of American Indian teachers which, in turn, had the potential to boost students' achievement. "American Indian children are not doing well in school. Teachers who understand the kids' language and culture may be able to connect with them and therefore may have better success in terms of teaching them" (Bulkeley, 2008). However, the termination of the program by the university signifies a disregard for the education and success of American Indian students and communities.

The importance of context in protest.

Critical Race Theory reminds us that by considering the stories and experiences of people of color, we can learn about the role that race and racism play in the very construction of the foundations upon which our society rests. The struggles of American Indians at MSU raise important considerations as to when counterstorytelling can occur. The question of what conditions are necessary for counterstorytelling to be effective comes to light when the actions and responses of university officials are taken into consideration. Both CRT and TribalCrit, encourage us to turn to personal narratives and

stories as valid forms of evidence and thereby challenge a numbers only approach to documenting inequity or discrimination that tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than qualitative perspective (Dixson & Rousseau, 1999). Since so many administrators insisted on pointing to the low number of students attending the protest and/or voicing their concerns, the assumption was put forth that this is an individual problem affecting a very small number of students and thus not worthy of being taken seriously. University administrators would have us believe that numbers are more important than experiences. Thus they treated the number of counterstories as the single-most defining factor for determining the effectiveness of counterstorytelling. Under this logic, one might ask: exactly how many counterstories need to be acquired in order to establish a mass critical enough to warrant respect and attention? However, it would be misguided to entertain such a question as it is intended to serve a distracting purpose. Such a question shifts the focus from the real issues at hand. Instead, we should ask: when counterstories are shared, how exactly does one preserve the voices of people of color such that the voices of power holders are not immediately reintroduced and privileged?

Administrators pointed to the low attendance numbers of Natives at the protest in an attempt to minimize the significance of the concerns of the students which leads us to ask: what does immediately connecting physical presence with the legitimacy of concerns presented during moments of public dissent tell us about administrators? In the case of American Indians it seems university administrators were experiencing a case of what Bourdieu referred to as “genesis amnesia” or “forgetting the beginning” – literally

forgetting history to the extent that recent fabrications pass into the subconscious and make current practices and conditions seem natural and self-evident (Brayboy, personal correspondence). Administrators' lack of American Indian historical and social context was prevalent when they continually disregarded the support other Indigenous peoples had pledged to the students' through their petition signatures. These individuals had chosen to symbolically protest when they physically could not. Forgetting that American Indians have been forcibly removed from their homelands by the threat of annihilation, administrators overlooked the series of political agreements entered into by the federal government which made the acquisition of land (including the land the university is currently built upon) possible but that forced many tribes to relocate to reservations far away from where the current university stands.

Taking the historical and social context of American Indians into consideration, administrators might have remembered that many Native communities are currently among the most economically disenfranchised. In other words, although administrators insisted that the validity of student concerns stood in direct proportion to the number of bodies physically present at the protest, physically attending the protest for a large number of Natives residing on the reservation was simply out of the question. Not only might they be located in the outskirts of the city/state but they may have lacked the necessary resources to get there. This imposition of a requirement for legitimacy that cannot be met by American Indian communities perpetuates yet another violence onto an already marginalized community. Disregarding the distance that many Natives would have had to travel, the cost they would incur, and the fact that some may lack a mode of

transportation or the personal resources to do it (let alone the time!), administrators seemed to impose their own standards of protest onto a community that neither shares their history nor their socioeconomic positioning.

I began this chapter by describing the protests that took place on the MSU campus. Mountain State University's rhetoric regarding its commitment to honoring American Indians is difficult to believe given the examples listed above. In fact, the decisions the university made impacting American Indian community members cannot be viewed in isolation from the way it continues to profit from the use of American Indian imagery and symbols. These decisions, and the institution's subsequent treatment of Natives (in terms of its silencing, ignoring or dismissing of American Indian concerns and/or dissent), are what led Native students to protest the general treatment of Natives on campus *in relation to* the everyday use and exploitation of its American Indian nickname. At the time, protestors had come together to express a list of grievances against the university. They questioned the university's systematic removal of Indian-serving programs and leaders. They questioned the university's overwhelming inaction during instances in which the name of American Indians were taken up and used to wield racist and offensive attacks on Native communities. And, most importantly, they appealed to the rest of the outlying community for support in asking MSU for an explanation of its actions. While research has found that Native Americans experience more pronounced levels of racism in the form of economic and physical abuse than any other identified group (Staurowsky, 1999), the response of university administrators indicate that the abuse experienced by American Indian students will continue until either

the Native students cease voicing their opposition, or have been completely pushed out of the university, or the university is called to account for its actions by a group of people larger in size and/or power than the students themselves.

Concluding Thoughts

CRT treats race as a social construct. Understanding a group's historic and current social standing is essential to explaining racial inequity both collectively and individually (Donnor, 2005). The question of what CRT, and particularly TribalCrit, added to this analysis is especially relevant as I offer my concluding thoughts. Just as CRT inspires a call to action through its call to social activism so, too, did students attempt to meet that call. In protesting the unfair treatment of Natives on campus, students sought to raise awareness of the ways in which university policies, fan merchandise, and fan behavior at NCAA-sanctioned events reveal how policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain. By highlighting the unique relationship American Indians hold in relation to the federal government as a political group in addition to the status Native peoples hold as a racial group, students brought to light the struggles of peoples who occupy a liminal space in society. The organization and subsequent physical and symbolic participation in resistance efforts demonstrates the ways in which Indigenous peoples make clear their desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination and self-identification. While attempting to educate readers and vendors of Native history and beliefs, Native peoples embodied the point that concepts of culture, knowledge and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens. And finally, the dismissiveness and/or blatant

disregard for Native voices and experiences from university power holders and the subsequent insistence that the university is only interested in supporting programs that will serve more students (i.e. not be restricted to providing support for Indigenous peoples) illuminates the concept that governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.

In illuminating the social and educational implications of the current treatment of American Indians at MSU, I have said little of the legal implications of the aforementioned incidents. This is especially important to note as we remember the impetus or genesis of the social and historical context in which CRT was borne. Critical Race Theory originated in the field of law during a time in which scholars felt the law was not paying attention to the role of race and racism in creating and sustaining the social structures we have today. In the midst of the burgeoning CRT movement, both Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) warned critical race scholars in education against moving too quickly away from the foundation provided by the scholarship in legal studies. In fact, Tate (1999) argued that one of the criteria for CRT scholarship in education is that it should ‘build on and expand beyond the scholarship found in the critical race legal literature’ (Dixson & Rousseau, 1999, p. 268). I have chosen to focus on the social and educational ramifications of university decisions and policies, the limitations of this case study, including my own limited academic and professional background in law, do not allow me to explore, in detail, the legal implications of the aforementioned incidents. For example, it may be possible to argue, as some protestors

did, that these incidents may be in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title(s) II and VI. Title II addresses discrimination in places of public accommodation including sports facilities; Title VI addresses discrimination in educational settings.

For example, some may argue that the rival university incident is irrelevant to such an argument as it is a private institution and thus may not qualify as a “place of public accommodation.” However, as one activist pointed out, it is important to note its students are eligible to receive federal Pell money as well as federal research money. Moreover the university is a member of the NCAA, hosting big conference games, which could place the institution, alongside MSU, under the definition of offering public accommodation. More research is needed that explores the ways in which the use of Native American mascots and/or imagery denies American Indians a full and equal enjoyment of places of public accommodation, causing harm and intimidation leading to the exclusion or unequal access to stadia by “maintaining an intimidating environment” (Rosner, 2002, p. 266). Title VI, on the other hand, prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. By leaving uncorrected instances in which Native students had experienced racially hostile environments, MSU could be found in violation of the Title. This is especially the case if these environments have sufficiently interfered with students’ abilities to participate in or benefit from the services, activities, or privileges that it provides (Rosner, 2002).

I have previously mentioned MSU requires undergraduate students to fulfill a “diversity requirement” in order to graduate, offering over 89 courses, from various

departments. Unfortunately only one American Indian (history) course was actively offered to fulfill the requirement at the time. Additionally an American Indian Ph.D. did not teach this class and the class focuses on American Indian issues generally without focusing specifically on any one tribe. Without actively forcing its students to learn about American Indians or at the very least, its tribal namesake, the university fosters an environment in which the knowledge of American Indian peoples and customs of many non-Natives are left to be based off myth and stereotype. Without accurate knowledge, non-Native students, staff, faculty and fans may not immediately understand the importance of using the tribal namesake and its related iconography in a respectful manner. Since they are not systematically encouraged to recognize the humanity and plight of the actual group of people the university nickname is intended to honor, a space to inflict violence and terrorism upon an already marginalized and oppressed group is opened—all in the name of friendly team rivalry.

This is not a happy story. Instead, it points to the ways that the institution ignored the pain and suffering of many of its American Indian students. In some cases it minimizes those hurts and pains by arguing that they simply do not exist. It also points to the ways that the institution engaged in what Lyons (2000) calls rhetorical imperialism. The institution controlled the terms of the debate, engaged in un- and mis-truths, manipulated public perceptions, and contradicted itself in describing its responses to its Native students. Importantly, it did so all while failing to take responsibility for its failures and continuing to profit at the expense of the students it claims to serve, support, and honor.

Although the students were methodical and careful in crafting their approach and selecting their words when working with Mountain State, Mountain State heard none of it. It did not hear them when they were seated in the office of a higher administrator whose very job was to ensure the success of faculty, staff, and students of color on campus. Nor did it respond when students were peacefully protesting or when they tried to explain their position using mainstream media outlets. In fact, the administrative refusal to listen to students and engage their concerns corresponds with extant research findings. When American Indians profess an objection to racist university practices, institutions and their fans respond by defensively seeking asylum either by suggesting their actions are being misread – that they are really motivated by a sense and desire to honor Native peoples – or they simply make light of the objections (Banks, 1993; Berger, 2009; Castagno & Lee, 2007; Connolly, 2007; Pewewardy, 2001; Slowikowski, 1993; Staurowsky, 2004). This is precisely what happened to the students in this study. Many found themselves falling victim not only to the callous disregard of university administrators but to biased media reporting circulated by local mainstream publication outlets which favored the stance of the university, providing an ample platform for administrators to defend their actions while relegating the concerns and voices of the students to the margins. This type of administrative and media response has become the standard for many places and reflects a growing national trend to ignore and dismiss American Indian student dissent around similar issues. Such concerns are treated as unimportant, the sentiment of those who are too sensitive, or the perspectives of a select

few (Black, 2002; Davi-Delano, 2007; Farnell, 2004; Hofmann, 2005; Staurowsky, 1999).

Chapter 5 – University Context and Mascot Love

Deviance, power, and the commodification of peoples

This study is about the education struggles faced by American Indian students when attending a predominantly White institution that whittles away important support services, without having a contingency plan in place, does not replace the loss of American Indian-serving faculty and staff in a timely fashion, and sanctions the use of tribal peoples as athletic team nicknames. Although the students were primarily focused on the disappearing programs, peoples, and services conducive to Native student success, they did not fail to note how the (un)enforced (ab)use of the tribal athletic name also contributed to a hostile campus climate for American Indian students. This chapter explores how athletic mascots, nicknames, and team logos have become instrumental in teaching important lessons about the nature and role of American Indians in contemporary U.S. society, creating an essentialist portrayal of what it means to be an “Indian.”

It has been said that although American Indians may share some similarities in their beliefs and values, each group ultimately has its own history, culture and language, “defying easy generalization” (Brayboy, Castagno, Fann & Solyom, 2012, p. 11). The most recent census figures indicate there are approximately 566 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. and 400 non-federally recognized tribes (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). Despite this vast diversity, most U.S. Americans have little to no direct personal experience with American Indians leaving them as I pointed out in the previous chapter, placing them at higher likelihood to base their knowledge of

American Indians on what little has been reflected in popular culture, schools and books (King, 2005; Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 1994). The overall lack of accurate or holistic information has become systemic and institutionalized. It is reflected in U.S. systems of education, government, religion, criminal justice, health care, media, entertainment, advertising, and sport which all too often fail to fully comprehend the complex histories and lived experiences of American Indian peoples (Pewewardy, 1994). These fields instead continue to reduce American Indians to violent and inaccurate caricatures. Portraying these diverse societies as, “little more than a singular stereotype of a mythical be-feathered fighting Indian,” immortalized as uncivilized, violent, and/or “savage” (Staurowsky, 1999, p. 388). The remainder of this chapter explores the (mis)representation of American Indians in contemporary U.S. society, focusing specifically on the manner in which American Indians, and their associated iconography, have been incorporated into predominantly White collegiate educational and sports settings, including the MSU campus. I conclude by revisiting the impact of Indian mascots on the educational experiences of the students in this study.

American Indians as Mascots in Postsecondary Institutions

According to Indigenous scholar Tsianina Lomawaima (1995), “the history of American Indian education can be summarized up in three simple words: battle for power” (p. 2). The legacy of American Indian education in the United States is replete with examples of abuse(s) levied toward them in educational institutions as well as their subsequent struggle(s) to assert respect for Indigenous peoples and their communities – all of whom existed well before the establishment of the current nation-state. Indeed the

struggle for access to education that maintains dignity and respect toward Native peoples, ideals, worldviews, and practices has not been limited to matters of institutional pedagogy. These struggles also manifest in sports arenas where American Indians and their associated imagery, objects, and practices have regularly been used as caricatures, team mascots and/or athletic team nicknames.

Because they comprise such a small portion of the population, less than two percent of the total U.S. population with 22% residing in reservation communities, trust lands, or Alaska Native villages (U.S. Census, 2012), non-Indigenous U.S. Americans may not have much personal experience interacting with American Indian peoples. As I stated in the previous chapter, this means that, for the majority of Americans, knowledge and opinions about Indigenous peoples may be derived solely from the images, history, and messages received from media. Unfortunately such representations often uphold false and inaccurate portrayals steeped in stereotypes. Invented media images prevent millions of Americans from understanding the past and current authentic human experience of Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless it is important to understand the contemporary images, perceptions, and myths of Indigenous Peoples, not only for Indigenous Peoples, but also for mainstream America.

Media and Hollywood especially, have helped perpetuate the “frontier myth” image of Indigenous peoples. Such images have been burned into the global consciousness by over fifty years of mass media (Pewewardy, 2001). Depictions of Indigenous peoples as uncivilized Noble or angry “savages” have not been limited to media images; teachers, curriculum, and academic practices, including American Indian

mascots, have also played a key role in promoting inaccurate and harmful racial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples (Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 2004; Rosaldo, 1989; Staurowsky, 2004). As Ellen Staurowsky (1999), citing Veillex, has explained,

The purpose of a mascot in an athletic competition is to serve as a focal point or ‘target’ for competing teams and their fans to express allegiance to the home team or opposition to the visiting team. When the ‘target’ or mascot is representative of people such as American Indians, it becomes a racial issue (p. 7).

Stereotypical American Indian mascots empower a particular racial narrative that places White settler-colonists as “conquerors” and creates a disjunctive racial hierarchy in which the voices and experiences of Indigenous peoples are silenced, ignored, or relegated to the margins. The result is that “stereotyping and power [become] mutually reinforcing because stereotyping itself exerts control, maintaining and justifying the status quo” (Fiske, 1993). Assumptions of Whiteness circulate “undetected” throughout discussions and debates regarding the continued use of American Indian imagery. Rarely do educators preface discussions about the topic with an acknowledgement that these images are White inventions adopted by White power structures (Staurowsky, 1999).

The history of MSU’s athletic nickname is an example of how this power differential can manifest. Recall that during the early years of the 20th century, the school, much like its academic counterparts, sought to build an institution that was not only competitive in education but also in sports. It was around this time the university began to openly embrace and appropriate the peoples that had historically inhabited the lands on which the university was built and who had been removed by force or threat in

favor of U.S. military and elite academic interest. By the late 1920's the university's athletic players, including its football and basketball teams, began to be referred by two names. The first was the English name attributed to the Indigenous peoples who occupied vast parts of the state and the northern parts of the states bordering it. The second was the more generic "redskins."⁴³ From 1927 onward the school's student athletes were regularly referred to by both names (Mudrow, 2007). Thus was borne the paradox wherein the presence of American Indian symbols, imagery, made up "legends," and tribal name proliferated campus athletics and publications even though the physical presence of enrolled American Indian students did not.

These patterns continued unabated for fifty years until the 1970s when tribal members across the nation spoke out against the racist usage of Native American mascots. In response to mounting pressures from activist groups MSU officials elected to stop using the dual nickname in 1972, dropping the term "redskins" in favor of formally adopting the tribal name as the institution's sole and official nickname. This decision, however, did not minimize the university's continued exploitation of Indigenous symbols and imagery. This is why, in response to more pressure by American Indians at the national and local level, MSU officials were again pressured to officially change its

⁴³ Please note, as I mentioned in chapter one, this term has been classified as offensive, racist, and as a racial slur by numerous American Indian peoples and organizations. Although some argue the term was historically used, even by Indigenous peoples, as a harmless adjective to refer to the literal differences in skin color among various ethnic and social groups. Others point to the evolution of the term, and its more sinister legacy, in which various U.S. government agencies issued decrees and offered financial incentives for the racial and ethnic genocide of men, women, and children considered to be "redskin." I use the term here strictly to make the point that MSU fans and administrators have historically embraced the term for its athletic teams.

mascot. In 1996 MSU replaced its stereotypical mascot, a whooping, bow-and-arrow wielding Indian, with an animal but retained the tribal name as the school's official athletic nickname.

Without questioning or understanding the origins of how institutions came to adopt and embrace American Indians as mascots, fans and administrators run the risk of perpetuating a particular kind of genesis amnesia (I introduced this term in the previous chapter) that may lead them to believe these White inventions somehow accurately reflect the history, lives and characteristics of American Indians. Rose explained how fans of MSU's athletic nickname experienced a hard time separating myth/stereotypes from real-life Indians when the university retired its racist mascot.

It was ugly. It was very ugly. I carried it with me for so many years. I left [MSU] and said "I'm not carrying this anymore." In the school newspaper, they had interviews [trying to gauge out how people felt about retirement of the mascot as well as how they felt about potentially getting rid of the athletic nickname altogether] and this guy said: "Well you can take away the [Indian mascot] but if we want to act like Indians all we have to do is get up in the stadium and get drunk and throw beer bottles or war whoop." That was the kind of attitude that they had; people were indignant. There were [even] administrators who were very much [in favor of keeping the mascot] because they said "We've always been [Indians]. We are [tribal name]." They identify with that name but that's a whole other thing.

Rose's statement suggests that, for some, Indian mascots serve to sustain White supremacy and dominance by allowing non-Native administrators (who are usually comprised of older, middle class men) and fans to author a particular kind of presence and role for Indigenous peoples at their institution. With little consideration for the degree to which these roles are accurate or respectful of American Indian peoples, and their communities, exhibited, these images and roles can be promoted through the use of images and fan actions and don't necessitate the immediate presence of real-life American Indian peoples.

As the example of MSU demonstrates, Indigenous mascots at predominantly White institutions often deny the right of Native peoples to author themselves while serving to create and uphold shared spaces of membership for non-Natives who may bond over racist displays and actions. According to Brayboy (2014, personal communication) this type of behavior is reflective of the tension that exists between "authorial sovereignty" and "authorial imperialism." That is, who controls how people are authored. This concept is reflective not just of racist behavior but imperialist and colonial desire (Brayboy, 2014). MSU's insistence on preserving its Indian mascot roots through the use of its athletic nickname is what allows fans to take up the tribal name, and its related iconography, to continue to participate in racist behaviors described in chapter one. Fans display hostile signs at games (as demonstrated at the volleyball game), create racist apparel (e.g. the horned toad t-shirts), and even host cowboys and Indians themed events in the residence halls while rival universities take the mascot and hang/burn Native effigies in order to intimidate MSU fans. The lack of monitored use and

respectful enforcement of the tribal name and iconography additionally encourages fans to take up sacred symbols, like the drum and feather, or don face paint and war bonnets, all in the name of team spirit and athletic play. These items may be used in ways that are disrespectful and counter to Indigenous peoples but that fans and administrators believe is appropriate.

Moreover university sanctioned apparel and items authorized for sale have included shot glasses, toilet paper, and underwear featuring the iconic symbol of the sacred drum and feather. Thus the tribal nickname can come to represent important financial and economic interests for institutions. Because of its athletic nickname Mountain State University has been able to trademark sacred symbols like the circle and feather (or, as some describe it, a *drum* and feather). Such trademarks allow administrators to control the use of Native symbols while profiting from its selective promotion and reduce Native peoples to symbols representative of an athletic franchise or brand. These symbols are used to convey a particular type of physical aggression and prowess on the athletic field and makes Indigenous peoples and their associated iconography the legal property of a university who uses it/them to generate millions of dollars in revenue annually.

Although the drum and feather is brandished on everything from event tickets to sports apparel, it is important to remember these are sacred symbols – as is the face paint, war bonnets and headdresses sometimes donned by fans. As the activists in this study explained, these items have specific cultural and spiritual value and are generally off limits to the general public. Feathers are earned one at a time, usually by acts of

selflessness and/or demonstrations of great courage, and are generally reserved for (male) warriors and worn mostly by Plains Indians. Moreover, for Indigenous communities, these items are neither for sale nor worn to garner attention; rather, they are worn under strict observation of protocol and intended to be treated with pride and dignity. As Heseeo'o explained, the headdress is a sacred symbol not unlike how some denominations view their religious garb (e.g. the use of particular garments under clothing) or other paraphernalia and should be respected. Unfortunately without the appropriate education, university administrators and fans remain generally ignorant of this knowledge or may choose to willfully ignore it.

If a tribes says it's okay to use their name and symbols, what's the big deal?

Up until this point I have argued the presence of Indian mascots adds complexity to university contexts already struggling with hostile racial campus climate and influence attitudes toward American Indians and their role in education. This is because representations of American Indians as mascots have proliferated the mythical “noble savage” stereotype that contribute to racially hostile and offensive academic environments for minoritized peoples (Pewewardy, 1994). I have previously stated that although some universities have sought to depict their mascots in a respectful manner, fewer still have sought to educate the public of diverse real-life American Indian peoples. Because the majority of non-Indigenous peoples are at higher likelihood to base their knowledge on what they have learned in schools and books, this leaves American Indian students defenseless against the stereotypical, aggressive, racist, offensive, and ignorant

ways fans may take up race-based mascots (King, 2005; Merskin, 2001; Pewewardy, 1994).

American Indian leaders, advocates, and allies have produced myriad articles, interviews, videos, educational materials, and other resources in hopes of educating the public about the psychological, educational, and social dangers associated with this practice (American Psychological Association, 2005; Banks, 1993; Berger, 2009; Black, 2002; Chase, 1998; Connolly, 2000; Davis, 2002; Deloria, 1998; Fixico, 1995; Fryberg, 2002; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; George, 2006; Green, 1988; Hanson & Rouse, 1987; Harjo, 2006; Hofmann, 2005; King, 2005, 2008; King & Springwood, 2001; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Merskin, 2001; Nagel, 1995; National Congress of American Indians 2005, 2013; National Indian Education Association, 2005; Nihewan Foundation, 2002; Nuessel, 1994; Pewewardy, 1994, 2001, 2004; Reese, 2000; Rider, 2002; Rose, 2002; Rosenstein, 1996; Rosner, 2002; Staurowsky, 1999, 2004, 2007; Steinfeldt, Foltz, LaFollette, White, Wong & Steinfeldt, 2011; Strong, 2004; Teters, n.d.; Tovares, 2002; Williams, 2007). Included in their arguments are examples of how mascots promote inaccurate assumptions and stereotypes of a vast and heterogeneous group of people, that American Indian mascots often reduce Indigenous peoples and cultures to caricatures that are dehumanizing and desecrate important social and spiritual practices, and that these types of mascots promote inaccurate psychological, social, and behavioral expectations of American Indian men and women. Unfortunately, supporters of mascots and Indigenous iconography in sports settings often point to Indigenous peoples who embrace these mascots defend them, or who otherwise demonstrate apathy

toward these practices as evidence that mascots are harmless. However, as Cherokee blogger and academic, Adrienne Keene, pointed out in a statement posted on her Facebook page on March 27, 2014, this is often a misguided attempt to further divide already marginalized peoples who attack one another over the perceived unimportance of the issue:

I don't understand why we have to create the divide between “real Indians” who don't care about mascots and those of us who do. The reason why many of us off-reservations (which is over 60% of Indian Country) care deeply about representations is because we are forced to deal with them every day. Because we aren't in our communities we can't turn and see hundreds of counter-narratives and counter-representations in our aunties, cousins, our community events, or our ceremonies. What we see instead are the majority of Americans who think we're fantasy creatures or extinct. They don't know that our communities are full of joy and strength, because they don't think we're real.

Additionally, mascot issues, Halloween costumes, and themed frat parties are things that happen on college campuses, so it's often our Native students who are forced to confront them--and telling them that they're somehow “less Indian” or “less connected” for caring about how their peoples are represented is the last thing they need as they already struggle far from home. We already deal with feeling “less than” in our communities for going to college and grad school--we don't need our own people telling us that our fight to be treated with respect is not worthwhile. Not caring about mascots doesn't somehow make you more Indian, it

doesn't somehow make you stronger. I'll point again to this article about Stephanie Fryberg's work: <http://ndsmcobserver.com/2014/03/professor-affirms-effects-indian-mascots/>. These things matter. Even if you think they "don't". Fryberg found that those who say they support mascots actually have *lower* levels of community worth.

Much like depictions of American Indians in Hollywood, mascots have come to reduce American Indians to two stereotypes: as wild, aggressive violent, and brave bloodthirsty savages or as “noble savages” who are primitive/uncivilized, childlike, stoic and at one with the natural and spiritual world around them (Davis, 2002). These arguments have been presented before university administrators and fans that support the use of American Indian mascots, yet predominantly White institutions continue to assert their desire to preserve the American Indian mascots they consider to be an important part of their organization. Much like how MSU administrators responded to the students protesting the nickname’s use, too often opponents are dismissed through the rhetoric of “political correctness” while their concerns reduced as the superficial complaints of a disgruntled few (Strong, 2004). Unfortunately “people who live in cities with prominent Indian mascots seem least likely to understand the harms they cause. Not only are local sports fans emotionally attached to their specific Indian mascots, but they are also more likely to experience American Indian people as objects and others” (Jacobs, 2014, p. 25). Instead these supporters remain obstinate that their mascots are an important part of the institution’s history, intended to “honor” American Indians by celebrating their warrior strength and aggressiveness (Davis, 2002). As Jacobs (2014) explains, “fans see

American Indian protestors as a hindrance to their enjoyment of the game... What they do not see is that their beloved mascot is a hindrance to the overall quality of life of American Indian people” (p. 25).

What is important to note is that although White administrators, fans, and merchants make up the majority of those who support and/or defend the use of stereotypical American Indian mascots, they are not alone. People of color, including American Indians, as Keene points out, have defended, condoned, and celebrated stereotypical American Indian mascots irrespective of whether opposition has been expressed for such practices or whether they have been proven to be offensive and historically inaccurate (Rosenstein, 1996). This is exactly the case with MSU. Rose recalls how in the early 1990’s, after a series of protests which lead to the removal of the “savage” Indian as a mascot, MSU considered eradicating use of the tribal name entirely.

When they were doing the whole [select a new mascot] type thing we did have one meeting that took us months and months and months to prepare for. It was during our [Native American] awareness week. We brought in the whole council from the [namesake tribal band that gave MSU permission to use the name], including the chairwoman. Anyway, a lot of the students [from the tribal namesake] were there ... plus all the vice presidents, AVP’s, that kind of thing and [so was the MSU president]. We had, of course, workshops and different things [about how mascots are used and how they affect Indian students and peoples]. I was assured by [one tribal member] that he had talked to the council and they were going to tell the president: “We want this to stop. No more [tribal

namesake].” I [had even] brought in [the leading spokesman] for the National Coalition against Racism in Sports and Media... we were sure it was all set.

[At the meeting] everyone spoke. The president was on board and the last person to speak was [the chairwoman who] just skinned us all. She said: “I’ve thought about this.” And of course, [she] is from another generation. “I’m the chairwoman and we feel alright. We think it’s an honor and we are going to keep the name.” And [the national coalition spokesperson] and I looked at each other and [another Indian leader from the tribal namesake] and I looked at each other and we just about died! Here I had people coming in from all over the country. It was a big effing deal! And then someone else said: “Well maybe you can keep the name but we want scholarships.” And [the president] said: “No, I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to feel that we’re being bribed to use the name. We want to be respectful. If you want the name, and you feel honored, and it’s respectful, fine. If you don’t, then we want to get rid of it.” And so that’s how it was left...It was [the chairwoman from the one band] who said: “I’m the chairperson and it will stay.”

In spite of the defense used by many that such practices honor Indigenous peoples, no data exist that these types of mascots promote a better academic context or sports experience for American Indians or members of any other racial group. On the contrary, stereotypical depictions of any group have been found to be not only detrimental to members of that group but to everyone else who believes the inaccurate

and misleading representations are accurate (see the work of Fryberg and Staurowsky generally).

The impact of mascots on students.

American Indian mascots raise important questions about who benefits, and how, from these types of (mis)representations and whether the degree to which those who reportedly are harmed by such practices outweigh the benefits of preserving the practice. Scholars have asked: what does it mean to benefit? To be harmed? What about differential benefit and harm? Are there multiple benefits and harm? Harmful benefits? Beneficial harms? (Flores, personal communication). The answers to these questions are complex and vary depending on which social group is examined. For example, research has found American Indians experience significantly reduced psychological, social, and financial benefits from Indian mascots compared to their White counterparts.

Mascots elicit both positive associations and negative psychological effects for American Indians since they can simultaneously bring to mind positive associations as well as reminders of the limited ways in which they are seen by mainstream society (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman and Stone, 2008). Some studies have found exposure to generic, mainstream American Indian images, including sports mascots, have a negative impact on American Indian high school and college students' feelings of personal and community worth as well as their achievement-related possible selves (Fryberg et al., 2008). Some speculate this may not be due to negative associations with mascots, per se. Instead, the negative effects of exposure to these images may, in part, be due to the relative absence of more contemporary positive images of American Indians in American

society (Fryberg, et al., 2008). These findings are important to consider given the already low enrollment and achievement rates of American Indians in higher education. Of the American Indian/Alaska Native students who graduated in 2004, only 52% of enrolled in college immediately after high school compared to 74% of White students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). Of those who enrolled in a four-year institution in 2004, only 39% completed a bachelor's degree by 2010, compared to 62% of White students (NCES, 2012b).⁴⁴ These numbers have remained relatively stable. In 2012, 39% of American Indian/Alaska Native students who started in 2005 as first-time, full-time students at 4-year institutions graduated, compared to 60% of White students (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2011). The financial, psychological, and social benefits some groups experience by exploiting inaccurate and sensationalized representations of a group already experiencing significant challenges to access and persistence in higher education cannot be ignored.

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest Whites overwhelmingly benefit from the use of American Indian mascots since they are the ones who typically own or control the production and distribution of such images and are best able to participate in the colonizing narratives associated with American Indian mascot sports culture (Staurowsky, 2004). This is, in part, because American Indian mascots in university and professional sports create a racial hierarchy that promotes a “white public space” or “a

⁴⁴ Graduation rates are for first-time, full-time students enrolling in four-year institutions and seeking a bachelor's degree.

morally significant set of contexts that are the most important sites for the practices of a racializing hegemony, making Whites invisibly normal and racialized populations visibly marginal and the objects of monitoring” (Farnell, 2004, p. 32 citing Page & Thomas, 1994). The resulting imagery and fan behavior reduces American Indian peoples to generic caricatures and promotes attitudes about American Indians as conquered or inanimate, acontextual, ahistorical beings. In other words, American Indian mascots allow for the staging of racial difference “according to a contemporary Euro-American, neocolonial imagination that is directly predicated on the 19th-century colonial project” (Farnell, 2004, p. 32). Stereotypical symbols and images play an important role in sanctioning and promoting racist legal and social practices that both protect the property/material interests of Whites, through trademarked images and icons for example, and uphold the White supremacist ideology the U.S. was founded upon while potentially contributing to the “pushing out” of American Indian students enrolled at the institution (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno and Solyom, 2012; Harris, 1993). This portrayal boosts the self-esteem of Whites, asserting them of their dominant place in school and in society while at the same time limiting the social and educational experiences of American Indians in these contexts (Fryberg, 2002).

Since being/playing “Indian” is viewed as a performance/identity that can be “taken on” and “performed” at will, concern for the desecration of particular symbols and/or objects for American Indian communities vanishes and all objects become potential “props” in a larger performance of fandom (Deloria, 1998). American Indian

mascots then become crucial role in reaffirming White identity and fostering a sense of community among Whites. According to King and Springwood (2001),

...playing Indian surely animates dangerous and demeaning stereotypes about Native American mascots, it also enacts particular Euro-American identities. Native American mascots stage privileged versions of whiteness. They illuminate the manner in which Euro-Americans understand themselves, importantly creating themselves through renditions of otherness and cultural difference. Native American mascots thus open privileged spaces in which individuals and institutions re-create the white subject... For Euro-American fans, alumni, and students, performances mimicking (and mocking) Native Americans bind individuals together, creating shared sentiments and solidarity, while marking the (racialized) limits of the moral community and the terms on which others may enter into it (p. 16).

For some fans, this bonding ritual begins at an early age. Dr. Joseph recalled a conversation with a former student at MSU that indicated this type of bonding may begin as early as infancy.

[I had a student in my undergraduate American Indian studies class; what they would call the "Ethnic Studies experience"]. She was an older student, a White woman, who was really, really thoughtful about these issues [of mascots and racial representation]. She talked about an [experience] she had. [She had] just had her first baby and she came from a family of Pioneers. They had been in the state for several generations and had been at [MSU] forever; I mean she was

a third or fourth generation [student]. And we had just finished watching In Whose Honor? in this course and were discussing the mascot issue—which I always took head on in class because I thought it was important for us to have the conversation about what it meant.

I had to try to bridge the fact that the [university tribal namesake] had approved this even with all the problematic stuff involved with it. In spite of that, they had approved it. So I had to balance respect for what the [tribal band] was saying and what we know psychologically. And so she came to see me at office hours trying to figure out how to manage this and she said: “I just had this baby.” I think the baby was six months old or something. And she said: “She’s already getting these messages.” And I said: “How is that?” And she said: “She’s being dressed in [clothing featuring] drum and feathers but when it hit me the most, and was the most profound, and my mother and I had a blowup about it, was that we were getting ready to go to a game and the baby starts crying in one of those shrill baby cries that sound like ‘woooooooo’ and at some point the baby covers her mouth and then opens it back up. So the baby starts going ‘woo woo woo.’” And the grandmother says: “Oh look honey! She’s already [an Indian]!” And starts encouraging the granddaughter, the student’s daughter, to continue making these noises and be [name of university tribal namesake].

The student was horrified by this and ended up having this conversation with her mom about what it meant for her daughter to grow up, this young White girl, to grow up with some sense that that’s what it meant and represented to be a

[name of university tribal namesake] and how damaging it would be to her daughter educationally and socially to have these experiences...At that point the [2005 American Indian Psychological] study had come out [about the harmful psychological effects of mascots and stereotypes] and the students had read it. We had [had] a conversation about how it wasn't just a bad thing for Native students but it was a bad thing for all students to have these caricatures and these mascots, symbols, whatever you want to call them, as being okay.

So for me I always walk away from [this experiencing thinking the] student [was] being thoughtful about this but also [how this experience demonstrates] the ways in which we [ingratiate inaccurate and stereotypical beliefs about particular cultures] with kids who can't even talk and to have no real sense of understanding. Yet we imbue them with our own wackiness so that the granddaughter continues to get positive encouragement when she demonstrates this kind of behavior. And the grandma is helping her with [making the noise] and other things! So she said it finally came to a head when it became clear to [her] that [her] daughter, this woman's granddaughter, was starting to do this to please her grandmother.

The research Dr. Joseph alludes to in this passage suggests mascots, and their associated imagery, expose American Indian and other students of color to a myriad of racial micro- and macro-aggressions (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, Esquilin, 2007), endanger their physical safety (Tovares, 2002; Williams, 2007), jeopardize their academic success (Banks, 1993), and limit the ways in which youth may

ultimately come to see themselves (APA, 2005; Fryberg, 2002; Fryberg et al., 2008; NCAI, 2005). Ultimately American Indian mascots and imagery, particularly on predominantly White campuses, replicate historic colonial practices that suppress Indigenous identity and agency (Berger, 2009; Rosaldo, 1989). These effects are what the mother in the story was witnessing – psychological damage beginning at 6 months. By endorsing these behaviors and depictions, as children grow up, they may continue to think this is acceptable. Such beliefs can lead individuals to perceive little or no problem with hanging Native effigies from trees, planning and attending a “cowboys and Indians” party, or donning war/face paint and headdresses to football games because these displays of fandom have always been encouraged as being all in good fun.

The mother in Harold’s story is wise to be concerned. For not only does this indoctrination happen in the family, curriculum and textbooks used in the K-12 setting also promote stereotypical beliefs. Such materials depict American Indian peoples by stereotypes such as the “noble savage,” “White man’s helper,” “Indian maiden,” “red varmint,” and “warrior/fighter” (Hanson & Rouse, 1987). In one survey of over 300 primary and secondary textbooks, researchers found not one could be approved as a dependable source of knowledge about the history and cultures of American Indians (Hanson & Rouse, 1987). This type of curricular exclusion continues today. In the rare instance information pertaining to American Indian/Alaska Native communities is mentioned, the information provided is generally overly brief and/or grossly inaccurate (Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Pewewardy, 2004; Reese, 1996, 2000). Rendering American Indians to the periphery of school curriculum leads to cultural illiteracy not just for

Indigenous students who themselves may be alienated from their communities but also for non-Indigenous students who come to associate American Indians with the past or with inappropriate and inaccurate beliefs (Staurowsky, 1999). Curriculum that associates Native peoples in predominantly stereotypical or dichotomous ways through games (playing “cowboys and Indians”), songs (such as “Ten Little Indians”), the alphabet (associating “I” with Indian), and Thanksgiving (encouraging children to wear feathers and vests) perpetuates mythical/historical inaccuracies that ensure non-Native children do not see American Indians as real or worthy of respect but only as a source of entertainment (Green, 1988; Shanley, 2001; Staurowsky, 1999). Ultimately, as Native scholars have pointed out, playing Indian leads to America’s real past-time: Racism (Banks, 1993, Pewewardy, 2004).

If mascots are so damaging, why hold on to them?

Like MSU administrators, the primary argument used to defend American Indian mascots is that American Indian mascots are intended to honor the accomplishments and traits of American Indians (Banks, 1993, Connolly, 2000; Rose, 2002). They also argue that the mascot is part of a long-standing university tradition and thus, simply because they have been used and beloved by fans for decades, they should remain. Universities that promote this argument explain their mascots, steeped in important traditions, ultimately represent respect and dignity for Indigenous peoples. Although Indigenous activists and scholars have conceded there have been exceptions where schools that have chosen tribal names have not used Native peoples as mascots nor have they portrayed American Indians in negative ways, these examples are often the exception and not the

norm. According to Dennis Banks, one of the long-time leaders of the American Indian Movement (AIM), these exceptional examples have hosted events with dignity, have respected Native dress, and have disallowed mockery of Native culture (Banks, 1993). It often takes great education and work to uphold such respectful practices. Generally, though, American Indian mascots and imagery, particularly on predominantly White campuses, replicate historic colonial practices that suppress Indigenous identity and agency (Berger, 2009; Rosaldo, 1989). As non-Indigenous peoples continue endorsing and defending mascots made in the image of “mythical” Indians, their attempts to dispossess American Indians from their culture, identity and rights increase.

In spite of the popularity of such mascots, real-life Indigenous peoples, like the activists featured in this study, continue to meet challenges presented by these practices with resistance. By calling for the eradication of hostile and abusive American Indian mascots, and their related imagery, as well as promoting accurate and culturally appropriate information about American Indian peoples, activists and allies seek to mitigate the effects of these practices (Banks, 1993; Hofmann, 2005; Pewewardy, 2004). American Indian students who do not understand how institutions of higher education could condone the use of a racial mascot that is, more often than not, appropriated and used to perpetuate caricatures and stereotypes that depict racist and morally depraved behaviors continue to protest against these institutions (Banks, 1993; Connolly, 2000). The past 30 years have shown a rise in protests challenging the use of American Indian mascots and imagery at both the collegiate and professional sports level (Davis, 1993; King, 2008). Some scholars credit the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s for

intensifying efforts of American Indians to define themselves in the social and public sphere (Deloria, 1974, 1984; Nagel, 1995). Increased Indian activism during this time is believed to have forced the U.S. to acknowledge many concerns of American Indians—including the use of American Indian-related nicknames and logos by professional and collegiate sports teams (Connolly, 2000; Deloria, 1987).

University administrators have generally responded to student protests and challenges to American Indian mascots in one of three ways: (1) they have accommodated anti-mascot activists by changing their mascots; (2) they have sought a middle ground between eradicating the mascot and keeping it by retaining the name and imagery as a symbol rather than as a mascot or; (3) they have ignored the pleas of activists and continued usage of their mascot (Black, 2002; Connolly, 2000; Rose, 2002). MSU falls under the latter category. These administrators argue they should be able to retain their mascots if they portray the mascot in a culturally “authentic” and non-stereotypical manner. However, like the students in this study, opponents of mascots have responded to this by pointing out “a school/team cannot control how others, such as the media and other schools/teams, use their mascot” (Davis, 2002, p. 12) regardless of whether or not the costume donned by the mascot is “authentic.”

As I explained in chapter one, one of the most shocking calls for the elimination of MSU’s tribal athletic nickname came in 2005 when the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) issued the following statement:

Colleges and universities may adopt any mascot that they wish, as that is an institutional matter, but as a national association, we believe that mascots,

nicknames or images deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity or national origin should not be visible at the championship events that we control.

The organization went on to report it had voted to adopt a policy that prohibited any colleges and universities utilizing hostile or abusive racial/ethnic/national origin mascots, nicknames or imagery from hosting any NCAA championship competitions. Mountain State administrators scrambled to appeal its implication in the ruling and were able to receive immunity shortly after the announcement. Still, it is important to note this decision generated much discussion about the treatment of Indian peoples in higher education as well as the sports arena. Some scholars argued the NCAA statement was issued in name-only as the organization granted forbearance to many of the institutions, like MSU, listed in violation of its policy shortly after making its announcement (George, 2006). Additionally, the organization's position against American Indian mascots and imagery (presumably because they foster hostile environments) did not lend itself to taking action against its corporate sponsors—including the Coca-Cola company and Pontiac which have exploited American Indian imagery to sell its products (George, 2006).

Why Does the Tribal Athletic Nickname and Iconography Persist at MSU?

In spite of evidence suggesting racial mascots cause harm to all students, as well as consistent opposition over the years by its Indigenous students, MSU remains stalwart in its tribal nickname use. Although the university has taken action to remove certain racist imagery associated with the nickname, a culture of racism and hostility toward Native peoples continues to exist. Even university administrators become a party to the

symbolic and literal domination and exclusion of Native bodies on campus when they defend the mascot but sanction decisions and actions that whittle down support services that increase Native student enrollment (the termination of NTPP is one such example). When MSU was approached by the NCAA to consider discontinue its tribal nickname, White senior administrators quickly acted to defend its practice. Ida recalls,

[When the university was approached to re-think its position on using a tribal mascot] I was [the AVP for diversity at the time but] not involved in that whole decision process. So, what I understand happened was that they found one of the three bands of the tribe [located within the state and] one of [them] was okay [with the use]. In fact I was in a meeting once on a different matter with the person who was the leader of the [tribal band at the time] where he said he was honored to have the university use them. I can't remember what that meeting was for but it was not about that. He just said how honored he was that the university was using it. So you know [that band] wrote a letter saying they were fine, it's not offensive. And the University ran with that and didn't really get approval from the other two [bands]. And the university said: "Well, we got their blessing!"

The other thing is that I was in the meeting once with a higher ranking university leader who actually said out loud: "No one ever heard of the [tribe] until we began to use them." [All of this happened in spite of the fact that] prior to [that NCAA incident] students had come forward and expressed their unhappiness with the nickname and had raised issues. Faculty had and some staff members [too]. They [said they] found it demeaning. They did not believe that it

honored American Indians. They couldn't understand if [MSU was] so in love with [Indians] why weren't there any enrolled at the university?

The support of one tribal band presents significant implications for Native peoples in their efforts to reduce the hostility faced by Native students as the result of the tribal nickname. Because MSU needed permission from only one band to remove itself from the NCAA ruling, it did not seek to consult with any of the other bands who would be faced to deal with the university's appropriation of their tribal name and iconography. In some ways, this decision suggests the self-determination and sovereignty of other tribal bands is trumped when institutions consult with or engage only certain tribes (or bands) and not others. And although the university may not feel the need to honor the sovereign rights of an entire tribe, the remaining bands within the state have expressed their opposition to this decision but, perhaps out of respect for tribal sovereignty, have not actively challenged their sister band's decision. As Rose explained:

There are five total bands that comprise this tribe; three located within the state. Along the way [one band has stated they] have disagreed with [the use of the tribal name by MSU]. [And the other has] said: "Hey!" You're not the only [band in the tribe] in the world! You can't do that [give permission]." But, you know, they're not going to cause trouble with [the third band that has given permission so] yeah that was the end of it.

I think one very foolish thing that I'll always regret, because it was carried in Indian Country Today, that was the newspaper at the time, [is that] I wrote in and said how disappointed I was, you know? And [I mentioned] what

had happened [at the meeting in the 90's where we came close to dissolving the use of the name]. And then later [the coalition spokesperson] and I talked and he said: "Well, you know, it's really not up to us. It's the tribe. Who are we? They're sovereign. If they want to be the [the university's athletic nickname] who are we to say [otherwise]?" So all we could say is we gave them the option. We told them all about [the campus racial context and climate. We told them about the attitude of]: "We'll act like Indians. We'll war whoop. Get drunk." Told them about a lot of other things and yet that's the way it was settled.

Receiving the support of Indigenous communities to use them as mascots therefore allows universities to ignore the sovereign rights and opinions of other tribes. While the sovereignty of one band choosing to support the nickname should not be ignored, it allows the institution to ignore the broader effects on Indigenous peoples through token support. Universities also continue to profit considerably from the sale of merchandise. Commodity culturalism, or the economic appropriations of cultural images, has led some universities to dismiss the idea of eradicating use of its profitable American Indian nickname or imagery (Black, 2002). The university thus has a material interest in hawking stereotypical "trash and trinkets" including clothing, golf paraphernalia, school supplies and statuary, hygiene products, and seasonal accessories often serve as grounds to dismiss the concerns of anti-mascot advocates (Black, 2002). Additionally universities sometimes indicate a fear of lost patronage as wealthy university donors have sometimes threatened to retract their donations to the university should it choose to change the

nickname (Banks, 1993). The perceived potential economic harms to the university come to supersede the harms felt by students.

Mountain State University's insistence on making small changes to protect its use of the tribal namesake is particularly meaningful when considering such actions were not undertaken at the behest or request of the (entire) tribe. Ellen J. Staurowsky has written extensively on the subject of predominantly White institutions who fight ardently to preserve their American Indian mascots and iconography. She argues these efforts are manifestations of White colonial power on the bodies and lives of American Indians. "Within the context of a college sport spectacle, the scripted form of White people 'becoming' American Indian renders invisible the ignominious history of American Indian genocide by the U.S. government, replacing it with a culturally comfortable and comforting myth of the 'American Indian warrior'" (2007, p. 62). Staurowsky goes on, "when viewed through the expanse of history, the taking up and taking on of American Indian identity by Whites has paralleled the taking of land and the taking over of the land mass now commonly referred to as the North American continent" (p. 65). The latter point is particularly poignant given the history of the physical location of the campus and suggests now that the university has "conquered" the traditional homelands of Indigenous peoples, it is now preoccupied with controlling the conditions of their voices and presence on campus. The politics of colonial space thus include not only the geographic territory, but the peoples who continue to live there. A university not only effects where the campus sits, but the campus climate felt by students who attend the university.

The Desire for Cultural and Racial Appropriation

Staurowsky's work suggests mascots enable Whites to unjustly determine the authenticity of American Indians when this right is not theirs to begin with. Coffey and Tsosie (2001) explain that in addition to political sovereignty, American Indians are entitled to cultural sovereignty, that is, the right of Indian people to exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures. They explain, "The rhetoric of conquest speaks to the annihilation of sovereignty, but the rhetoric of assimilation (vividly represented by the image of the 'vanishing Redman' that characterizes cinema westerns) speaks to the annihilation of culture" (2001, p. 209). Sovereignty for American Indians calls for the preservation of culture and the people; effective political activism is characterized by the ability of the people to define for themselves the ways they want to be represented. One way to do this is to do exactly what the activists in this study have sought to do, that is, actively resist cultural appropriation.

According to Jarune Uwujaren (2013), "cultural appropriation is itself a real issue because it demonstrates the imbalance of power that still remains between cultures that have been colonized and the ex-colonizers" (para. 45). In this context, cultural appropriation is not an exchange between equals but an asymmetrical power relationship between the appropriator and the culture. This means cultural appropriation may not lead to the acceptance of that culture. Appropriating the symbols, practices, and objects of a diverse culture may be interpreted as a celebration of self-expression when a member of the dominant culture does it but when those same symbols, practices, and objects are utilized by a member of the culture itself it may not be as celebrated. And although

“using someone else’s cultural symbols to satisfy a personal need for self-expression is an exercise in privilege” (Uwujaren, 2013, para. 19), for American Indian students, embracing and honoring their own cultural practices may be interpreted as a failure to assimilate.

Therefore considering the political context of the appropriation is important in understanding that not all peoples are on equal playing fields. This becomes all the more poignant when considering that although non-American Indian students, at MSU and elsewhere, appear invested in preserving Native mascots and nicknames as appropriated athletic symbols, they are not quite as invested in celebrating or supporting their real-life cultures and practices. The Native students in this study experienced myriad challenges when seeking to obtain support for their powwow. During this time, no non-Native students who heard of their struggles stepped in to support their efforts. Thus mascots and culturally appropriated imagery can therefore serve as a further mechanism of colonial control, allowing appropriators to determine the ways, times, and places where voice is expressed at the exclusion of those whose cultures have been appropriated.

However, cultural appropriation needn’t always be negative. It can be successful when a culture is engaged as a “a respectful and humble guest,” however, “there needs to be some element of mutual understanding, equality, and respect for it to be a true exchange” (Uwujaren, 2013). American Indian sport imagery exists at the intersection between American Indian and non- American Indian worlds (Staurowsky, 1999). Few who seek to embrace Indian imagery take the time to educate themselves regarding the significance and appropriate use of the practices or symbols.

Buoyed by race privilege, those who support the continued use of these images slip into and out of contact with beliefs about American Indians, selectively choosing to honor faux American Indians while ignoring real American Indians, expressing a feigned desire to be a “redskin” when to live the reality of being labeled a “redskin” would be intolerable (Staurowsky, 1999, p. 17).

Negative cultural appropriation thus occurs without mutuality – choosing to overlook or discount those who may be harmed by negative imagery and focusing only on perceived benefits.

What Can Universities Do?

Throughout the U.S., American Indians “fall to the bottom of assessments of education, health status, and income, and at the top of assessments of crime victimization and incarceration” (Berger, 2009, p. 595). American Indians have been denied the right to vote, they have been forcibly uprooted from their homelands, segregated in schools, prohibited from marrying Whites, eating at restaurants, staying at hotels, or getting jobs because of their race (Berger, 2009). Additionally, they have been lynched, raped, and have had their homes burnt down. The usage of American Indians as mascots serves to relegate this history of oppression and mistreatment to the periphery – trivializing their experiences, reducing American Indian identity to uni-dimensional images and commodifying them for the entertainment of Whites (Deloria, 1984). The decision of American Indian students at MSU to protest American Indian mascots *in relation to* the everyday usage and exploitation of American Indians in brand marketing and advertisement and Hollywood films is important. Their efforts highlight that, although

one tribal group may have given permission to use their name and related imagery, the imagery does not impact that tribe only and the university's uses affect all Native peoples, not just the ones they have selectively chosen to enter into agreements with. Protesting the inaccurate and racist ways in which American Indians have historically been presented to the American public for mass consumption highlights the extent to which they have still (not) been incorporated into the citizenry (Strong, 2004). Moreover, it highlights the ways in which they have been denied the right to define themselves and their lives on their own terms (Tsosie, 2005).

The successful education of American Indian students cannot happen in hostile environments where students are being “pushed out” by racist and discriminatory practices or where they are receiving threats from their peers for speaking out against such practices. The usage of American Indian mascots is not just a “minority” issue—it is an issue that affects us all (Banks, 1994; Brayboy, 2005; Deloria, 1974, 1984; Pewewardy, 1994, 2001, 2004; Staurowsky, 1999, 2004, 2007; Tsosie, 2005). Practices that promote and uphold hostile institutions affect American Indian/Alaska Native student persistence but they also compromise the quality of education all students receive. According to Barnhardt (1994), “In many university settings the implicit assumption is that Native Americans will need to undergo a cultural suicide of sorts in order to avoid an intellectual suicide” (citing Tierney, 1993, p. 129). For the students in the study, accepting the racist (ab)use of the mascot and the dwindling support on campus for Native student persistence would have been akin to a type of cultural suicide. Perhaps it is because they prefer to not commit suicide at all that high numbers of Native students

either protest against university decisions or leave the institution each year before completing their programs (Barnhardt, 1994; Brayboy et. al, 2012). One way attrition could be mitigated is by promoting accurate and respectful information about American Indians, by respecting the wishes of American Indians, and by eradicating factors that contribute to hostile learning spaces. Considerations of campus climate are only a part of the total educational experience students receive, but attentiveness to campus climate can go a long way in lessening the harms felt by students and maximizing the benefits of their education.

This is not just a call to address “minority” concerns; it is about justice. As Pewewardy (2001) puts it, “the current way indigenous mascots are used in school-related activities is oppressive and inaccurate...eradicating indigenous mascots has become an issue of educational equity” (p. 1). The resistance of Indigenous scholars, communities and students to American Indian mascots and its related imagery, in spite of facing increased hostile attitudes, symbolizes a deliberate reclamation of identity and assertion of the strength of self-definition. Those who resist are not only acting for their own well-being, their persistence in the face of oppression serves as a testament to their devotion to future generations. Protesting American Indian mascots is important, not only for themselves, but perhaps also to avenge those who have been pushed out by educational systems and those who have fallen victim to the negative effects of these representations. Ultimately taking a stance against American Indian mascots becomes an assertion not only of inclusion in larger society; it is an assertion of their humanity.

Without educating the student body on the educational, psychological and financial implications of the use of mascots, universities run the risk of becoming counterproductive to their educational mission. A lack of focus on it simply serves to uphold and promote inaccurate views of history. MSU's attempt to educate the public about American Indians can be defined as scant, at best. As Ida and Dr. Joseph explained, conversations about American Indian issues and struggles for justice tend to happen only in specialized Ethnic Studies courses or on "diversity" day in core courses. According to Harold, conversations about the mascot occurred regularly in his courses because he initiated them. There was no institutional expectation to educate the students about the university context.

The Intro to American Indian studies was one of [those] courses and because of where the institution was situated, and its connection to the local tribe, it was always oversubscribed. I had 80—between 80 and 100 students in my class. And [courses about] other ethnic groups would have fewer students. The multicultural ed. course was required in the college of education so there were always 40 or 45 in that. [I think students were so interested in this class] because of the state and its history with Native peoples [although I had] some sense [it might also be because] of the use of the mascot...I did surveys with students in the class asking them why they were taking it. Many of them would say things like: "Well, I want to learn more about where I live" or "I want to learn more about American Indian peoples" or they [indicated they had a relative who was Native].

Ida also sought to incorporate conversations about the mascot into the courses she taught.

I introduced this course at the university called American Racism and I taught it in the ethnic studies program and it looked at—it was in part theoretical but it was also—we talked about the mascot. We talked about it in general ways and we talked about it [as it related to MSU and] we talked about it broadly across the country... And it really had an impact on the students because it's really I think hard sometimes for dominant students, you know majority students, to understand why that's offensive. I think it's sometimes hard for White students. I've [even] had students of color who aren't American Indian not quite understand what the big deal is.

Ida's comment suggests that *all* students benefit from learning about the accurate struggles and modern day concerns and challenges of diverse peoples. In order to better prepare its students to see American Indians as real-life peoples with real-life concerns, these excerpts suggest universities need to encourage students to engage in these conversations and to take more than one semester of a special topics class in order to fill a diversity degree (as well as desist from promoting stereotypes in its advertisements for these classes). They need to hire more educators prepared to address these topics. Moreover, although MSU has devoted small sections, on various webpages explaining the history of its tribal namesake and expected fan codes of conduct, they need to disseminate this information more widely. Unfortunately the bits of information provided

by MSU on these topics tend to be located on specialized pages and do not offer much in-depth information about Native peoples.

Finally, as stated in chapter three, universities have the responsibility to listen and to respect students. This should not just be a required step with the ultimate goal of appropriating cultural symbols, like it appeared to be when MSU sought permission to use the tribal name and later promoted student fans in face paint and war bonnets all over its institutional web pages (see chapter one), but should be standard operating procedure.

We have a responsibility to listen to people of marginalized cultures, understand as much as possible the blatant and subtle ways in which their cultures have been appropriated and exploited, and educate ourselves enough to make informed choices when it comes to engaging with people of other cultures... This isn't a matter of telling people what to wear [and trampling on free speech rights]. It's a matter of telling people that they don't wear things in a vacuum and there are many social and historical implications to treating marginalized cultures like costumes (Uwujaren, 2013).

Unfortunately MSU falls short in its ability to do this. When Leah and Gabby met with the AVP for diversity to address their concerns with the climate toward Indigenous peoples on campus, he listened for a short period of time before interrupting to rebuke and chasten them for having a "bad attitude" and finally inviting them to leave. The students worried how who he might unleash his anger and frustration on after they left. As it turns out, it was Rose. According to Rose, who was the director of the AIRC at the time, he then turned to her and said,

“Can’t you control these students?!” To his credit, he immediately regretted saying this. Admitted it was inappropriate and apologized but this says something about the pressure he is under and what is expected of him from his White superiors.

At the time, Rose explains she felt intimidated and found herself in a catch-22 type of situation where she was professionally expected to advocate on behalf of the students yet was being asked to silence or “control” the very students she is supposed to serve.

Campus climate influences the experiences of students, faculty, staff and administrators alike. Students take the brunt of university policy as their daily experiences are affected by the mascot and university decisions. Faculty, staff, and administrators are expected to serve as conduits and connections for students in facilitating a positive educational experience but face internal pressures to maintain the norms of the institution, including prioritizing the economic success of the university. In order to successfully meet these expectations, administrators must police one another in maintaining the status of the university, as Rose demonstrated, placing pressure on each other to insulate the university from students who would challenge the existing climate that they find harmful. This causes the focus to shift from meeting and addressing student concerns to maintenance of the institution: White administrators pressure the AVP, who seeks to control the director, who is told to control students. The result is that student concerns become lost among in the internal structure of the institution supposedly dedicated to serving them. The resulting battle for power leaves students to fight for their

educational rights and endure the costs, while the institution continues to reap the benefits of tuition, alumni donations, and status associated with the image of the university.

Concluding Thoughts

Opposition to the usage of American Indian mascots and imagery is not new. In fact, prior to and immediately after the NCAA policy was announced, Native organizations including the National Congress of American Indians (Chase, 1998), the National Indian Education Association (NIEA, 2005), National Congress of American Indians (NIEA, 2005), Advocates for American Indian Children (www.iresist.org), the National Coalition for Racism in Sport and Media (Teters, 1991), and the American Psychological Association (APA, 2005) all publicly stated their opposition to the practice and called for the elimination of American Indian mascots and imagery. In 2005 the American Psychological Association additionally issued a call to its membership, urging all psychologists to speak out against racism and recommending the “immediate retirement of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities by schools, colleges, universities, athletic teams and organizations” (www.apap.org). The association conceded that the continued use of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities undermines educational experiences of members of all communities – especially those who have little or no contact with Indigenous peoples. The statement was based on research findings suggesting mascots promote harmful effects including promoting inaccurate and stereotypical racial portrayals. Such a practice establishes an unwelcome, oftentimes hostile learning environment for American Indian students, affirming negative images/stereotypes promoted in mainstream society. They further

claimed the practice has a negative impact on the self-esteem of American Indian children, undermines the ability of American Indian Nations to portray accurate and respectful images of their culture, spirituality, and traditions. This is a form of discrimination against Indigenous Nations that can lead to negative relations between groups. Other professional organization followed suit, issuing their own resolutions or proclamations against usage of racial/race-based mascots, nicknames, imagery, tokens, logos, and associated symbols.

The distortions in logic that permeate justifications for American Indian imagery reflect what feminist researchers refer to as White assumptions (Maher & Tetreault, 1997). These assumptions, in turn, influence and mold the construction of knowledge as it is produced and resisted in classroom and school settings. In fact, images and statements like the ones depicted by MSU's rival university fans (e.g. "Back to the Reservation" and "Trail of Tears Part II") capitalize on the oppression and violence inflicted upon marginalized communities and reveal how school sports arenas can become public backdrops to showcase the education and values of a particular community and society. Mascots, nicknames and team logos thus evoke allegiance to an institution's athletic teams, are instrumental in shaping the image of the entire school, and teach important lessons about race, culture, and history (Connolly, 2000; King, 2008).

Until 2002, over 2,700 schools had Indian mascots or team nicknames (Berger, 2009), including over 60 colleges and universities (Connolly, 2000). Appropriation of tribal specific nicknames and mascots make American Indians the second-most popularly adopted mascot (Black, 2002; Davis, 1993; Rider, 2002). According to Davis (2002),

animal mascots are often associated with aggression and fighting (e.g. tigers). Thus the selection of American Indian peoples among aggressive, wild animals serves to articulate this group of people with the violent, dangerous, and aggressive behaviors associated with animals (Nuessel, 1994; Rider, 2002). To date, the only other use of human beings used as team names include the Boston Celtics, the Minnesota Vikings, the New England Patriots, and the Notre Dame Fighting Irish (Berger, 2009). These team names are unique from American Indian names in that they have been selected by descendants of these communities and do not associate these groups with wild, animalistic behavior. Furthermore, outside reservations, teams known as Braves, Indians, Redskins, or Scouts have historically had little to no Native membership (Berger, 2009).

Significantly, the use of American Indian imagery for sports teams represents a reductionist appropriation of indigenous cultures that reduce peoples to play (Deloria, 1998).

When someone's behavior is labeled culturally appropriative, it's usually not about that specific person being horrible and evil. It's about a centuries' old pattern of taking, stealing, exploiting, and misunderstanding the history and symbols that are meaningful to people of marginalized cultures. The intentions of the inadvertent appropriator are irrelevant in this context (Uwujaren, 2013).

What is important is asking administrators, fans, and the general public to educate themselves, listen, and be open to reexamining the these types of symbols. After receiving immunity from the NCAA, MSU turned around and terminated the NTPP. It touted Indian-serving programs when it was politically convenient or likely to benefit the

university's bottom line but terminated them when it became inconvenient – simultaneously ignoring student concerns and overlooking the educational opportunities such programs afford. According to Dr. Joseph, and the documents submitted to the NCAA (On file with author), MSU used NTPP as a way to preserve use of the nickname, claiming it was evidence of its commitment to Native students by wrongfully asserting the university (not the federal government) was providing scholarships to train Native teachers (rather than explaining it was a federally funded payback program).

They highlighted our program as a commitment to Native peoples. So they took our program and said this indicates that and that this program is supportive of the mascot and that we spent millions of dollars educating American Indian students.

Ultimately the university's use of Native imagery is representative of its treatment of students. The university treats Native students, and their communities, as important when it's most convenient for them; for example, Native peoples become important when their approval allows the institution to continue reaping a financial benefit through branding and alumni donations. It insists on maintaining imagery that is hostile to the educational experiences of American Indians and others largely because it supports its bottom line.

Though its rhetoric emphasizes a student-serving, student-oriented approach, the university's status as a brand and the internal institutional control take precedence. However, this study suggests that, given the context of MSU, the racially hostile campus would remain even without the presence of the mascot. This is evident in MSU's loss of

Native advocates, in its slowness to replace important peoples and resources for its students, and in its approach to its ethnic studies advertising campaign. Although some respectful depictions of Indigenous peoples exist at MSU, for example the powwow, the funding and support for perpetuating these types of events are based on soft-moneys placing them in constant peril. In the case of this study, the use of Native imagery takes on an additional representation largely unintended by administrators: the university's failure to consider the educational rights asserted by student activists as student resistance to the use of American Indian imagery by the university was an assertion of their educational rights – not only the right to be educated, but to be educated in a safe climate (as outlined in chapter two).

Part III

Motivation and effect: Understanding what makes resistance personal
and its tolls on the body and spirit

Chapter 6 – Understanding the Context for Student Resistance

Despite numerous studies of underrepresented populations in higher education, little has been written regarding American Indian resistance (Brayboy, 2005). Perhaps this is because institutions push Indigenous students out and, in the process, seek to disempower them when they voice their discontent or opposition to institutional climate, administrative decisions, and institutional policies (Tierney, as cited in Brayboy, 2005). In chapter three I suggested epistemological, ontological, and axiological differences in communication, problem-solving and definitions of justice between Indigenous students and administrators of predominantly White institutions may be one reason for why student attempts to advocate for institutional change stall. Although students of color “engage in resistance that is motivated by a desire to create more just and equitable learning environments,” their efforts to “create change and to improve the educational system” can only be effective if the institution is prepared to listen (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 309). Oftentimes resistance efforts are initiated through what Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) refer to as mainstream accepted channels but when little advances are made, students may turn to more public forms of protest. The remainder of this chapter explores the personal reasons for what inspired the students in this study to protest university policies and decisions as well as the personal tolls incurred as a result of that decision.

What Leads to Student Protest: Understanding the Role of Climate

I began this project by talking about the importance of diversity for many postsecondary institutions. Research has found students of color experience campus

climate differently than their White counterparts. For example in a 2005 study, Rankin and Reason found students of color experience harassment and perceive institutional climate as more racist, hostile and less accepting of minority groups at higher rates than their Caucasian peers. This can seem counter to its mission to support diversity many universities espouse. Like the students in Rankin and Reason's study, the American Indian students in this study similarly offer key examples for why they found Mountain State University hostile and unwelcoming. These students, like the Chicana/o students featured in Solórzano and Bernal's 2001 study, engaged in resistance motivated by a desire to "create more just and equitable learning environments" (p. 309). In chapter one, I introduced the key issues the students' identified for engaging in resistance. Although the number of incidents increased over time, it is important to note that their resistance efforts mark just one small moment in time and one part of a larger culture of resistance that has been ongoing for decades.

American Indian opposition to the portrayal and treatment of American Indians at MSU long precede the efforts of the students featured in this study. Just as resistance efforts continue to be waged by new generations of students who enrolled well after the students exited the institution. What makes their protest efforts unique from their predecessors is the manner in which they attempted to link together campus climate, the school's athletic nickname, and the systematic loss of programs and services to larger issues of educational justice. The history of American Indian resistance at MSU, though receiving only slight or modest media attention, suggests protests are spurred by a concern with larger systemic issues rather than individual, isolated incidents. This is not

to say that individual, isolated incidents cannot function as a catalyst, rather it is to say that the larger institutional climate and policies serve to create and maintain the conditions for what may seem to like individual, isolated incidents to occur. For now, it is important to keep in mind the institutional incidents and policies that led the students in this study to engage in resistance.

One of the earliest incidents arose as students began to perceive a growing threat to the support for the university's annual powwow. The event, which is an important assertion of Indigenous spiritual and cultural rights, also serves an important community building function. By inviting the outlying Native communities to campus to celebrate and partake in Native inspired foods, music, ceremonies, and traditions, the event serves an important purpose of introducing current university students to the larger Native community. As the hosts of the event, the students are presented as potential up-and-coming leaders within their communities and as current and future advocates of Indian country. Thus they were more apt to interpret any decision or condition that might jeopardize the event as a threat to the literal presence of Native peoples on campus as well as a threat to their assertion of cultural and spiritual rights.

Of course the reason they experienced a challenge in obtaining support for the powwow had to do with the university's inability to retain its current American Indian Project Coordinator (AIPC). The AIPC provided essential support functions for American Indian students on campus such as advocacy, planning, academic and professional advising and mentorship. Moreover, the AIPC was primarily responsible for advocating and allocating resources for the annual powwow. With no AIPC due, in part,

to the institutional lack of timely replacement, students not only struggled to access resources needed to implement the powwow; what's worse, they received no advising during semester changes. In the wake of the AIPC's resignation, students were encouraged to meet with other advisers in the Center for Minority Student Services. However, although many expressed appreciation for that invitation they pointed to the importance of working specifically with folks who can not only understand but navigate Native culture, tribal structures, and opportunities available to Native students as dual citizens. The students explained they needed someone who not only understood Native student personal and academic needs and desires but who had relationships with tribal leaders across the state and country and could help them tap into unique opportunities available to them.

*The [AIPC] was an **amazing** asset for [us]. He was more than just a support. He is such a good friend. He took care of [us] regardless of where [in our academic track we] were. He ended up moving into [another] department [when he left the Center for Minority Student Services but] I know he didn't want to leave. He was so committed to students... [but the powwow,] that was such a mess! I really think that all of [our struggles with that] stemmed from the fact that [he] left. We lost [him]. And [he] was the main person doing all of that stuff for us [i.e. helping to allocate funds and coordinate the university event that brought tribal persons from all over the state and nation] and then he was gone. And they didn't replace him for so long.*

In addition to providing important advising to students, this passage stresses the personal relationship students developed with the AIPC as akin to a type of trusted friendship and mentorship. This stresses the sense of deep trust and connectedness felt between students and the American Indian advocate and suggests, though not entirely irreplaceable, it was not immediately transferrable. In other words, although MSU appeared to be well intentioned in its invitation for students to meet with other advisors, the students stressed the importance of having an advisor who was connected to tribal communities and who demonstrated a desire and intention to maintain a deeper, long-term relationship with American Indian students. Moreover, the student goes on to suggest that it takes time to build trust between students and advisers which is why the AIPC's resignation was felt so acutely. Gabby goes on to explain that the AIPC played an important function not just in advising individual students but in helping to connect them to one another and facilitate the creation of friendships and alliances intended to promote the needs, concerns, and rights of Indigenous peoples.

Well yeah he helped with the powwow but the students did it [actually helped plan, host, and execute the event]. Most of the students did it. But once he was gone, he was gone. And they didn't have an advisor to fill in for him. And then they put in a temporary person right before the powwow and I felt like [lost and hurt] ... Like I remember during that time that was the hardest time for me just because it was when everything was happening. Like [that was around the time] when we started learning everything else that was happening [with the Native Teacher Preparation Program and how it was going to be shut down].

This passage suggests the loss of the AIPC did not solely represent the loss of important academic advising and support for powwow planning but the loss of a confidante and ally. Of someone who understood the importance of sovereignty and self-determination for Native Americans and who might have appreciated why the students felt deeply troubled by the loss of a federally funded Native teacher preparation program (NTPP). Thus students identified the loss of advocates who provided advising and support as a primary motivator for engaging in resistance. The 2007-2008 school year brought more than just the loss of the AIPC representative. It also ushered in the loss of the prominent American Indian professor of education who was also the creator/director of the NTPP as well as the loss of the director of the American Indian Resource Center (AIRC).

We were at this point talking about stuff that [MSU had stopped] doing. They were getting rid of [NTPP]; they were getting rid of [the AIRC director]. [Like at one point,] we could no longer use the American Indian Center [because Rose was fired and there was no one around to open it or run it] so we had to go up and use the [Minority Student Support] Center where all the other ethnic students [went, even though they hadn't appointed a full-time AIPC there yet].

Without these important advocates, students felt they had limited recourse in resisting decisions that further threatened existing support for students. They also felt they had little access to spaces they felt they belonged. Leah explains that with the loss of Rose, the AIRC was no longer readily available to use as a meeting space or study space. And although they were invited to use the space in the Center for Minority Student

Support, without an AIPC they felt as if they didn't completely belong. Furthermore, the students reported feeling the loss of the American Indian professor led to a loss of funding for culturally relevant programs. Shortly after the professor left, the university announced it was going to shut down its successful NTPP program.

As some students explained, the decision to terminate NTPP suggested MSU did not respect tribes nor take their needs seriously. Terminating the program and returning the recently awarded federal grant monies appeared to fly in the face of agreements the university had made to a neighboring tribe to prepare students to teach in their community. It also indicated the university was not interested in upholding the treaty agreements this grant originated from. What's worse, as Heseeo'o noted, MSU did not report having consulted with nor contacted the tribe to inform them of their intention to terminate the program and return the grants.

The students were angered MSU appeared to be treating a neighboring sovereign nation with flippant disrespect. To add insult to injury, when they openly called out MSU officials for what they believed were callous behaviors, MSU staff members and administrators responded by accusing them of being "ungrateful" for the support Native students received on campus. Leah recalls feeling personally shamed by a staff member.

For me, personally, I had had a [very serious medical episode] while I was there... Basically [the university] paid for my mom to come and be with me during this time... I remember [a Native administrator chastising me for my participation in the resistance efforts and me] responding back to [an] email about how I should be "grateful" that the university supported my mom coming.

My response back [was] not that I wasn't grateful. I was grateful that my mom was there [but I knew the reason she was able to come and] it wasn't [because] the university [felt it was the right thing to do. Rather, she was flown out because the NTPP administrators did. Her trip was funded by the NTPP]. They [university administrators] may have okayed the signature authority to say "yeah, pay for that plane ticket" or "pay for her room and board" but [they did not make this decision on their own].

The other thing is...I can't believe as a Native person you would tell another person they should be grateful that that service had happened because Native people are going to move heaven and hell to get to where they need to be – especially if it involves one of their kids. And while my mom, by no stretch of the imagination was somebody that had wealth, I do have uncles who would have paid for her to have gotten to me.

In this passage, Leah recognizes how some Native staff and administrators on campus, rather than supporting student needs and seeking to understand their motivation for dissent, immediately sought to act in the image of central administrators and shame and dismiss them. By using a personal example of how Leah had benefitted from the university's generosity, MSU is positioning itself as a benevolent benefactor to its Native students who are treated as lacking the physical and financial capacity to meet their own needs. Leah's anger with MSU becomes further exacerbated when she is personally attacked and shamed for speaking up for what she perceives are Indigenous rights struggles. She goes on to question the moral and ethical fiber of a university who would

seek to silence its students by treating one of the few additional services it provided to an ailing student as a sort of bribe.

Their expectations... it was one of those—I think it was a silencing effort. That you should just be quiet; be thankful they did this for you. Like they did something for me as a student who actually got to go through NTPP—something extra—so I should have no room to speak, kind of thing. What was my tipping point? I think that was it. I think it was that point of making it a “you should be grateful” [situation] versus “this was a service” [and it was done because it was the right thing to do].

Of course, complicating all of these issues was the ever looming presence of MSU’s athletic tribal nickname. The students remained constantly at the mercy of myriad displays of fandom that were inappropriate and hurtful. This happens, the activists explained, when institutions fail to engaged in *active* efforts to enforce respectful use and to educate their students about what is acceptable and what is not. Without institutional enforcement, hostile messages are made manifest not just through symbolic gestures and signs but through tangible objects, ripe for consumption. For example, students may go from displaying hostile and racially offensive signs at athletic events (such as the signs displayed at the volleyball game) to creating fan gear that perpetuates stereotypes and the desecration of sacred symbols (such as the t-shirts sold in anticipation of the Blackout game). They argued the abuse levied against Indigenous culture and identity has evolved in society from displays of overt hostility and violence to include abuse made manifest in the athletic and marketing field through the use of Indian mascots and its associated

imagery. Such images line the coffers of predominantly white public universities through trademarked appropriation of Indigenous culture and symbols and allow non-Indigenous fans to collectively participate in generating a group identity at the expense of living peoples. Mountain State's tribal athletic nickname in this case served to create, maintain and enhance an already hostile racial campus climate. The nickname was instrumental in generating uncomfortable and hostile spaces for Indigenous students who were forced daily to confront the consequences of inaccurate and hurtful stereotypes associated with them (Staurowsky, 2007).

What Makes Resistance and Protest so Personal

The students in this study openly questioned the general treatment and portrayal of Native peoples on campus where they are embraced and fetishized as symbols but scorned and silenced when they call for more support. They critiqued the dedication of MSU leadership responsible for academic and student support; administrators and staff who openly demote the requests of Native peoples for additional services intended to boost enrollment and retention as "hand holding." For example, during the 2006 school year officials from the namesake band which had granted permission for MSU to use their tribal name gathered with university leaders to discuss their partnership. Meeting notes indicate that during this meeting the tribal representative requested support with college readiness, academic and financial assistance for current and future students, as well as other benefits.

In addition to requesting they receive direct payment for use of the name and access to other academic resources, the tribal band expressed a desire for MSU to more

actively recruit their students and help prepare them for college. They invited campus recruiters to visit their tribal homelands and also requested MSU return the invitation for their students and their families to visit campus. For example, they asked that university recruiters stop at their tribal charter school during the annual high school tour and also suggested MSU host a day in which, “students and parents can come to campus for an introduction to the university and its programs” (document on file with author). In terms of college readiness, they wanted assistance for students completing applications for admission and financial aid one term before the application is due as well as assistance at the junior and high school level in preparing students for the university experience. Moreover, they requested a boost in financial support, explaining that increased assistance that could help provide funding for child care, room, board, etc. would help boost retention efforts for tribal students already enrolled at MSU. And, finally, they requested mentors for their enrolled MSU students.

In many ways, the tribe’s requests reflected growing research that suggests financial support, assistance with college readiness and application preparation, as well as mentors who are familiar with Native student culture and needs are crucial to the success of American Indian students (see generally Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012; Shotton, Lowe & Waterman, 2014). The meeting ended with MSU officials indicating they would consider these requests. Later, the associate vice president of enrollment management circulated an email to MSU administrators and staff members who had been in attendance. In that correspondence, the VP reiterated the requests made by the tribal

band along with myriad financial and institutional reasons for why many of the requests appeared to be simply out of the question. According to the VP, MSU had

...already [been] extending to the [tribal] students a level of support which is beyond our normal level of support for other students. Hence I am not confident that we will find other support available within the resources available to us to increase support for them. Nor am I confident we could provide more funding to them, if we had it, without resulting in a corresponding decrease in the level of assistance provided to them under Federal aid programs – we are prevented from extending to a student more than 100% of their demonstrated need (document on file with author).

Next the VP refers to the request for mentors as akin to a request for, “one on one hand holding.” They suggest such a request, “would only work if [MSU] could find volunteers within University Staff and Faculty who are genuinely interested and want to do this for these students” (document on file with author). Important to note is the language of “hand holding,” as opposed to recognizing the legitimate importance of mentors for all students during their time at the university, and the suggestion that mentorship should be unpaid/unrewarded by the institution. In other words, the VP doesn’t appear to consider the potential for allowing mentorship to count toward service or any other metric used by the institution during the promotion/tenure review process. By not considering this as a viable option, it frames any request for such types of mentorship as an additional burden to faculty who may already feel over-extended. The VP’s overall response suggested MSU was unlikely to fulfill many of the requests.

Native staff and faculty wrote to one another and discussed the requests, the email from the VP, and the overall state of Native education at MSU. In an email exchange between the Native representatives on campus, one expressed his frustrations with the process and reiterated his desire to obtain and improve support for *all* Native students on campus.

Again the ignorance is apparent with our administration. They act dumb and pretend not to know recent assessments and numbers on our American Indian students. They have access to the same assessment numbers as I do. They know what is occurring on our campus in regards to recruitment and retention of our students...I brought to [their] attention that there is a lack of funding in all aspect[s] of recruitment, retention, programming and services for American Indians, as if they didn't know that already.

What this email exchange suggests is that, without knowing it, the concerns expressed by the student activists in this study had previously been expressed to MSU, formally, by tribal leaders.⁴⁵ Unfortunately MSU's lackluster response to the tribe's requests served to uphold the existing educational climate which felt confusing, unwelcoming, and, at times, hostile to the Native students.

Perhaps because MSU had not ramped up its efforts to recruit, retain, and enroll Native students, staff, and faculty, the activists in this study felt the loss of important

⁴⁵ For example, the desire for the university to retain and recruit mentors and advocates for students, the desire to implement and sustain important culturally relevant programs and practices that led to higher enrollment and graduation rates for Native students, and etc.

programs, peoples and services that provided these types of support so acutely. In their opinion, such decisions further perpetuated education discrimination and inequity against American Indians. They were frustrated with decisions that allowed the institution to use Native peoples to further its personal interests while demonstrating little interest in negotiating with or honoring promises, to neighboring tribes and/or to the students themselves, when it became inconvenient or expensive. Such actions reminded them of the history of broken treaty agreements Native peoples have faced since the formation of the U.S. nation-state. However, they still believed they could effect change if they met with administrators and presented solutions or ideas that would help to address some of their concerns.

Their intention was to not only address the individual incidents but also promote a larger vision for making campus a less hostile space for the next generation of Native students. Their arguments suggest they believed there are at least five basic education rights every Native student deserves, which were outlined in chapter two, and included ensuring university administrators understood Native peoples, at the most basic level, are members of a political group who have a right access treaty protected programs. For example, one of the motivating factors for engaging in resistance and protest efforts against MSU was the dissolution of NTPP.⁴⁶ The students were especially concerned with helping the public and MSU administrators understand that the programs and

⁴⁶ They believe this decision led to not honoring education rights, a drop in Native student enrollment, poor treatment of Native peoples associated with the program, as well as lack of access to mentors and advising available through that program.

services they were advocating for existed as a result of American Indians' status as dual citizens and was a reflection of their political status within the U.S. rather than their racial status. As Leah put it,

I think the one [point we really wanted to get people to understand] was definitely the idea of giving back the money [was not right] and the [idea this was about] educational sovereignty [and not about thinking] having the [NTPP] was not just a race-education [like some people thought]. [Some people were trying to say] that potentially it's a violation of Affirmative Action [so that's why they should get rid of it because] if they were to do it, that they risk losing money that way if they continue to do it. [But these programs aren't related to Affirmative Action at all].

That people uprooted their lives and had left their communities to gain skills they could bring back as licensed teachers in order to address a pressing community need only to have the university MSU renege its agreement was intolerable. Several students talked about the guilt and anger felt when MSU accepted and then returned the grants to perpetuate NTPP. They recalled experiencing a personal sense of outrage, loss, and failure.

There was one student specifically. She was from the [university namesake] tribe... She relocated, all by herself [and] left her whole family behind. All by herself came to this city she's never been to with the understanding that she would be a part of this program. She was at the university, ready to go. And just kept waiting and waiting and waiting for [MSU to get the new cohorts going]. [But

that didn't happen; they shut down the program after a few months and the university leadership, who knew about this student,] they didn't do anything for her. They kept promising her that they were going to take care of her because she came there specifically for that reason and they ultimately never helped her. So she eventually dropped out of college just like most American Indians do actually. Statistically we're not finishing college and so she [became] another statistic.

Heseeo'o's comment here suggests anger not just at the termination of NTPP but at the blatant disregard for the sacrifice made. In Heseeo'o's eyes, sacrifices were made not by the individual student who left her community to attend MSU but also by her community who lost a talented young person. By having her relocate to attend MSU, the tribal community was sacrificing the important talents and services she could be providing at home. Mountain State's decision not only invalidated an existing agreement the institution had made to the student's tribe, its subsequent decision to terminate the program without informing the tribe meant the student was left with little recourse for support during her time away.

Heseeo'o went on to speak more explicitly about the importance of Native teachers for Native student success, the current teacher shortage facing many Indian communities, and the sting felt knowing MSU had lost an important resource to help meet those needs.

You see this data and you know that when students have [Native] teachers that understand the[ir] communities and all of the stuff [they're dealing with], understand where they're coming from, [it's] going to make a huge difference. We

see data on this all the time. I don't think I was the only one but I had this personal belief [this work of preparing and training Native teachers] is [among one of] the most important thing in the world. [That] there's never been anything more important [than educating teachers to serve Native students].

The importance of recognizing the reason these types of programs and grants existed in the first place – of the sacrifices made by those that came before them – was not limited to Heseeo’o but mentioned by every activist. Leah and Gabby both mentioned their personal sense of connectedness to these issues, as Native peoples whose ancestors sacrificed so that future generations would have access to education opportunities, and the profound sense of loss experienced when MSU shut down the NTPP.

This [grant funding] is blood money—people died for this. This is so important! I felt like it was really personal to me. I was just imagining my grandparents, you know? And the sacrifices that people have made, you know? And all the people that have died and all these lands that they have lost [and] the culture that they have lost [and] the language that they have lost [and] their way of life.

Ultimately, [their] epistemology [and] ontology—all of this. All of this stuff that they have lost and this is what we were paid back?

In this passage Gabby expresses her sadness at losing NTPP, which she credited with being a program, for Native people by Native people, which promoted education from an Indigenous perspective. This approach to education, she later confessed, was the first time she had ever felt Indigenous knowledges of science, math, and language to not only be recognized as valid in a Western educational setting but as an important resource to

students, teachers, and to their communities. Losing NTPP, for her, felt like losing an important bridge connecting school to her own family and community. Heseo'o went on to explain her own thoughts about NTPP – about its mission and about how she felt the college of education dean failed to understand its mission.

We were given this [great opportunity to guide the next generation of educators who were prepared to welcome and nurture the languages, knowledges, and environments of their Native students]. I took it really serious. It was so important to me.

However Heseo'o was spurred to action when the dean, in a series of internal email messages and in-person meetings, expressed intentions to poach the program in order to allocate its funds to benefit the larger non-Native student population within the college. Such a move was prohibited by the federal funding agency.

There was no way I was letting [an arbitrary university administrator] take that and never say anything about it. There was no way! I think I wasn't as strong as I had hoped that I could be but I did my very best...we got the news out. We let people know what was happening and [the funding agency] shut them down [when the dean proposed to use the funding for opportunities that didn't serve non-Native students the federal funding agency informed them they couldn't do that so] they had to send the money back. So it was good on some level because they didn't get to keep the money and just to use it the way that [the Dean] was going to reuse it. He was going to reuse it any way he wanted to, he thought he could do that.

For many of the activists, this was not their first time engaging in resistance efforts. One had been actively involved at their undergraduate institution in advocating for the preservation of a cultural resource center that provided important student support services for ethnic minority students. Another had worked closely with the governor's assistant in her home state to fight against legislation that sought to dismantle a tuition waiver available to Indigenous students of the state. This type of advocacy required efforts in reminding legislators that treaty agreements made with American Indians are not generally made with expiration dates. When one legislator, arguing for the termination of the waiver impetuously exclaimed, "haven't we educated enough of you already?!" the student calmly responded with "sure, if you feel that way then just give us our land back!" With this history and experience in resistance, the students pooled their collective knowledge and skill sets, in hopes of enacting positive change on campus. Unfortunately this task appeared too tall for the time.

How Do Universities Typically Respond To Student Protest?

Previously I have argued that what students were protesting on campus were not just a series of individual, isolated incidents and decisions. These incidents and decisions were reflective of a larger systemic form of oppression that served to promote and maintain a hostile campus climate for Native peoples. Understanding the overall racial environment of a college campus is important. Research has found campus climate/context may influence college access, persistence, graduation, and transfer to professional school for students of color (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012;

Shotton, Lowe & Waterman, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Solórzano and Yosso (2000) found that a positive collegiate racial climate includes at least four elements:

1. The inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color;
2. A curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color;
3. Programs to support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color, and;
4. A college/university mission that reinforces the institution's commitment to pluralism (p. 62).

The efforts of the students featured in this study suggest a strong desire to advance a campus climate that is positive and receptive to the needs of American Indian students. Unfortunately, many of their concerns were minimized, ignored, or partially attended to. The language of the associate vice president of Enrollment suggests administrators at MSU perceive the requests and desires for academic and student support to be reflective of a desire for “hand holding” rather than intended to strengthen MSU’s already meager American Indian enrollment, attrition, and graduation rates. Such reactions to requests for student support may actually lead administrators to act punitively if/when students or their communities request an improvement.

This study suggests that when students engage in protest with the intent to improve campus context, administrators ultimately respond by quashing their efforts if students are calling the integrity of the institution into question. In this case, the students were questioning not just the low number of enrollment and mentors/advisors available to

them; they were questioning institutional attitudes toward keeping the few who made it onto campus. For example, they questioned why university administrators referred to faculty of color as “hot property,” ripe for luring away to other universities. Such framing refuses to focus attention on the struggles faced by American Indian students, staff and faculty during their time there including an overall lack of mentorship, hostile climate, difficult in obtaining culturally relevant academic and professional advising, etcetera.

Instead framing Native faculty as “hot property” absolves the university of the responsibility to retain its few American Indian personnel. Within such an economic framework of property, the institution is seen as unable to do anything if faculty are wont to sell themselves and their services to the highest bidder. Focusing on the material reasons for why Native faculty might leave suggests they are primarily motivated by financial incentive rather than loyalty to a particular community, students, or institution. Such an interpretation is misguided. For example, prior to tendering his resignation the Native faculty member was asked by a member of central administration what he needed to stay. The faculty member responded in the following manner:

I didn't ask for more money or a title. I asked them to help create an environment in my college where I could be at peace. I wanted to have senior faculty members who were behaving badly and trying to poach our program cease doing so. There was no [attempt to negotiate a higher salary and no] “higher bidding.” What [the Provost] ended up saying to me was, “getting them to give you what you want is like trying to push water uphill...it's not going to happen.” So I decided to go on the [job] market. I got several offers and came to realize there are

administrations and institutions where they really do work to help faculty be successful. [MSU] didn't create an environment to keep its highest performing faculty happy. [M]any really strong faculty left [shortly after I did and] in a short period of time, all for better, higher ranked, institutions.

This excerpt suggests such a passive attitude toward retention may be intentionally divisive, exacerbating an already hostile and unwelcoming environment for staff and faculty.

Institutionally apathetic responses to the loss of staff and faculty of color can be detrimental for those who experience discrimination, fear, or who have historically felt unsupported. Lack of retention efforts are strategic as they may dissuade them from speaking out against their experiences for fear of completely losing their jobs. Moreover, the institution's efforts to induce fear were not limited solely to the denial of retention efforts. Rose recalled an email sent from the AVP for Diversity that suggested anyone who dared publicly speak out against the institution would be disciplined. In his email, the AVP requests she send the student who had spoken with mainstream media about the activists concerns⁴⁷ directly to him. The message was akin to what one could expect to find in a grade school setting where naughty students are sent directly to the principal's office for discipline and became a veiled threat to Rose herself. The message of the

⁴⁷ Here the AVP was referring to the student identified by the institution to scapegoat and shame publicly in their media interviews. Administrators framed her as a lone dissenter, stirring up problems when few other students seemed to have any

central administrator was clear: anyone who dares to critique the institution will be punished.

The message that university administrators and personnel are responsible for controlling and quashing student dissent surfaced a second time when, after meeting with Gabby and Leah, the AVP for Diversity warned Rose, “you’ve got to do something about these students.” Suggesting it is her job, as a university employee, to also enforce discipline. Although he immediately apologized for making the statement, his actions left the impression it was up to Indian-serving staff members to silence/quell student dissent while also fulfilling her professional responsibilities yet when Rose inquired as to how she is supposed to do these things, no further information was offered.

The Chicano AVP’s attempts to control Native students, staff, and faculty suggests an internalized understanding of what his White, male superiors want from him. However enforcing these desires wasn’t always what the AVP of Diversity did at MSU. The African American woman who held the position before him, refused to tow this line. Prior to her resignation she had also been asked to quash student dissent and discourage a protest. She refused to do this, explaining such action is counter to what university institutions should encourage.

There was this [Pacific Islander] football player [whose] brother had been in a gang. Someone had done something to his brother and [the football player] retaliated by setting a fire, [then] went [away to serve a religious mission]. While he was [away] the police called him and said, “We think [you] set this fire.” And he said, “I did,” and came back and served two years in prison [for it]. Well

there's some university policy that says he couldn't play football [because he had been imprisoned]. He played at a junior college and had done well and [MSU] wanted him on the team but wouldn't let him play. [The vice president for Student Affairs came] down to my office to explain to me why [MSU decided not] to do that. [Even though he had served his debt to society] it didn't matter because it was a rule.

So the [Pacific Islander] students held protest. I remember a friend of mine from athletics wanted this guy to play but felt the protest wasn't going to help. This friend of mine calls and says: "Really, can't you control the people who report to you and those students?" And I said: "Oh I'm sorry! I thought this was America. Oh wait. It is!" He laughed and said: "Oh. You are so right. I'm sorry. Pretend I didn't call."

Well one day walking back after some meeting the [the vice president for Student Affairs] said to me: "You know? Maybe you should talk to [the Pacific Islander Program Coordinator in the Center for Minority Student Services], you know for her to be supporting the students in this protest is just... You know you have a way about you that I think she could learn a lot from you. And have you thought about maybe talking to her about the best way to be working with the students?" And I said: "Hey! If you can't protest in college, when can you protest?"

In this excerpt Ida points out the inherent frustration experienced when, as the sole central administrator of color responsible for working with minority students on campus, she is pressured to silence and control students who question the legitimacy and fairness

of campus policies. Rather than inviting an examination of whether existing campus policies were just or in need of change, she was asked to blindly defend the institution and a policy that further penalized persons who had already atoned for their crimes. Ida, however, chose to tactfully point out the inappropriateness of university administrators curtailing the free speech rights of its students. A response that became the exception, and not the rule, for how the institution responds to the dissent of students of color.

Ida's resignation ushered in an environment in which professors and faculty of color who commiserated with students and wanted to support their resistance efforts were met not just with stern warnings from administrators (such as Rose's example) but from colleagues. One Asian American professor shared her fears with one of the activists:

I've been told that I should not participate in this protest that I might put myself in some sort of jeopardy. I've been told that this is too political and that I should stay out of it...I should make clear that the "precautions" came not from administrators or administration, but from some friends and acquaintances I have. I forwarded them the info [about the protest] and asked if they would go with me – the reply back was cautionary. I'm torn. I'm trying to get more information to see what I should do. I'm not happy about this.

The professor goes on to further express concern that supporting students could end up costing her job to which the student responded:

I am beginning to lose my faith in humanity and in this institution. I cannot tell you what to do but does the institution presume to suggest you are not free to do what you like on your own time? Does the institution really believe it can control

the personal convictions of a person? I am surprised folks are already working to thwart the support students receive when the announcement for this event was barely sent out a few hours ago. Would you mind having a conversation with me over the phone?

Later that same day, the professor wrote back.

Yes, to all of what you asked. The institution would not say or see itself as controlling my personal convictions, but any action that may put the image of the institution at risk is unwelcomed. There are definite inequities of power here. Discipline and punishment (Foucault) is implied. What happened to [Rose] could happen to me.

I'm leaving and going home. I'm not getting any feedback from my contacts and, I have to tell you honestly, that I am afraid. Such a chicken-shit – that's how I feel about myself right now. I feel like I can't afford to lose my job or make enemies in high places. I feel like I should be invisible and just do what I do. I know that I'm in a position right now that does not threaten anyone and that is why I still get to be here. There is nothing I can say or do to justify my actions and feelings. I feel really bad. You are brave and the other students are brave.

This excerpt illustrates how faculty of color are threatened or coerced into remaining silent while students continue to struggle for fear of losing their jobs.

Considering that in 2011, of those full-time faculty whose race/ethnicity was known, 79% were White (with 44% identifying as males and 35% as White females), 6% were Black, 4% were Hispanic, 9% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1% were American

Indian/Alaska Native or two or more races. Among full-time professors, 84% were White (60% identified as males and 25% as females), 4% were Black, 3% were Hispanic, 8% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and less than 1% were American Indian/Alaska Native. And that American Indians account for 1.1% of total enrollment in colleges and universities, but just 0.5% of faculty members at degree-granting institutions (NCES, 2013).

Faculty of color may be more likely to simply remain on the sidelines during times of struggle as they have neither the clout, critical mass, nor institutional support to voice their own opposition. Ultimately the institution engaged in fear and intimidation tactics not only toward the students but toward its staff and faculty of color. This hurt the student efforts, leaving them on their own, and removed much needed critical numerical and moral support.

This excerpt suggests that although faculty and staff may have wanted to support student efforts, they experienced a culture of fear that left them feeling dejected and morally conflicted. Rose reported not only feeling pressure to not support student resistance efforts but also a sense of jadedness. Although she had previously supported other justice-driven initiatives she was left feeling burned, not just by the institution, but by members of the very community the efforts were intended to serve. This experience discouraged her from lobbying for similar efforts later down the line.

Those were interesting times. I really felt like we were going to get something done [in the 90's when we discussed eradicating use of the tribal name altogether]. And we DID get rid of the [mascot. The] stupid man on the horse. But as far as the name thing, I have no idea what's going on with that. And when I

came back to [MSU] in 2006 it was like: "Don't even talk to me about it. I've done my duty. I've gotten beat up. People have yelled and screamed at me. I don't want to do that anymore." I had already been down that road before.

However, not wanting to participate in the resistance efforts herself did not immediately mean Rose wanted to thwart the students' efforts. Instead she reported feeling backed into a corner by her immediate supervisor who first asked her to "do something about the protesting students" then, when her efforts were not sufficient, demanded she send students directly to him, presumably to be disciplined. The actions of the AVP for Diversity reveals something about the pressure he is under and what is expected of him from his own superiors. In this case, it appears the AVP, as an agent of the institution, was attempting to help the institution insulate itself from its students through the use of bureaucracy. Asking Rose, a staff member responsible for serving American Indian students, to buffer higher administrators from student critiques was strategic. Rose was not delegated power to give students redress but rather responsibility for protecting the institution from criticism, asking her to keep students from higher ups so they don't have to address them directly or feel responsible for what they are bringing up. This allows central administrators to save face when the larger public asks about what is happening. They can legitimately claim they had no prior knowledge of the stated concerns or incidents. Moreover, Rose was put into a place to individualize student concerns (as opposed to recognizing and honoring them as the concerns of the collective group). One student recalled how this happened during a meeting with the AVP,

I think it was one of those things because [the male administrator], he was going to have [Rose] in there with him. And I think while we were in there [she] was negating some of the student conversation. “Well that’s not important to the students.” Or “that’s just your own thought.” Or “that’s...” [even though there were several other students present who had wanted to attend the meeting but were denied entry!] So by Rose saying “Well that’s just your opinion” basically it seemed to me that the vice president created the conditions for her to make that statement since they wouldn’t allow other people to come in [who] could say “no, actually that’s not true, that’s also my experience.”

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Rose’s story reflects a fascinating tale of how power gets manifested and wielded among administrators and university personnel. It is also ironic considering she herself was victimized by the AVP and yet became complicit in victimizing the students simultaneously. In the next section, I return to an examination of how the institution’s response to dissent affected the individual lives of its students.

Transformational Resistance: Understanding the Tolls Incurred

Even though the numbers of students of color have historically been low, but are growing steadily, some researchers argue these groups are uniquely positioned to advance change in the institution. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) suggest student protests, when engaged with a conscious awareness of systems of domination and with behavior that demonstrates a commitment to social justice, may lead to much needed social transformation. They refer to resistance from this standpoint as transformational

resistance. According to Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), much resistance research has focused on the role the individual plays in the process of social reproduction rather than “investigate the possibilities for social transformation” (p. 310).⁴⁸ Inspired by Critical Race Theory, they identify four types of student oppositional behavior: reactionary, self-defeating resistance, conformist, and transformational resistance. Transformational resistance “allows one to look at resistance among Students of Color that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (p. 320). They argue transformational resistance presents the most potential for systematized change.

Similar to the Chicana/o students in Solórzano and Delgado Bernal’s (2001) study, this study suggests the social justice values that motivate awareness and critique of oppression stem from cultural roots, family, and personal histories. Brayboy (2005) further explains that, for Native American students, strategies of resistance through education are used to achieve autonomy and self-determination and are important given their unique political and legal status. Unfortunately, engaging in transformational resistance does not come without great personal cost and sacrifice and may leave already vulnerable students worse for the wear. In other words, although the institution may benefit from the students’ impact and engagement in these struggles (through improvement of programs, services, or otherwise), often students walk away with scars

⁴⁸ Social transformation is defined as “the process of eliminating various forms of subordination such as racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia and thereby creating the conditions for social justice” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 337).

that affect them for years to come. As (Brayboy, 2005) explains, it is important to not romanticize transformational resistance as it is often attended by serious individual costs and consequences. The tolls associated with engaging in transformational resistance are high for students who are left to shoulder that pain alone.

Enrollment and graduation.

It is important to understand how activism affects American Indian peoples in postsecondary campuses during their time enrolled and after they have exited. The experiences of the students in this study suggest engaging in transformational resistance came at great personal cost. Some students were so deeply impacted they were unable to complete their degrees in a timely fashion, if at all. Two graduate students reported taking over a year to complete the work they were unable to complete their final semester at the university, when the protests took place.

One commonly reported experience was the overwhelming urge to leave campus immediately after the requirements for graduation were fulfilled and to never return. As Gabby explained in the opening vignette,

I graduated on a Friday, I moved out on Saturday, I was [back home] by Sunday afternoon. I left so fast that I didn't want to be there anymore, I didn't want to be on campus anymore, I didn't want to have anything to do with that. It had been so miserable in every possible way by the end that I was so happy to be done with it and to get out of the situation and to just leave and teach. I just wanted to go teach and be with my students and do more than I could there. [More] than anything I could try to attempt to do in that setting.

What was particularly striking for her was not that she wanted to leave quickly. It was that, unlike what she experienced with her undergraduate institution, she has never wanted to return to MSU. She goes on to explain that she had legitimate reason to return and yet found ways to avoid campus.

For the powwow somebody donated this banner for us to announce the [event] and when I moved I took the banner with me. I had it for like 2 or 3 years. I never [during that] time felt comfortable enough to go back into [the Center for Minority Student Services] office to give it back [to the new advisor or the director of the office] ...The weird thing is when I was at [my undergraduate institution] I would still go back to that office, [talk to] my counselor [there], [we're] friends on Facebook. But any connections that I had to the [MSU] I don't have any more.

Sometimes the cost for students is that they want to completely separate themselves from the institution where they earned their degree. The pain of the experiences is so profound that individuals actively avoid the institution; this is not only a bad result for the student, but also for the institution who lose potential mentors and role models for future students.

After being made to feel ungrateful for the support received by MSU Leah noted how her activism at began to take a toll on her. It reminded her of the pain she incurred from her previous activist efforts elsewhere. This pain tore at her until she graduated and was also left as soon as she could. Like Gabby, she has yet to return to MSU. Other students reported taking longer to finish. One explains that it took her longer to finish her degree.

Never in my life – ever, ever in my life, high school, whatever – NEVER had I had an incomplete. I've never not finished what I started. With that [final] class it took me a whole year to finish a paper. I had to file for disability [I had been diagnosed with PTSD after all that happened] because they didn't want to work with me. My department wouldn't work with me. [It felt like I was being blacklisted for being involved with NTPP].

And some didn't finish at all. One student recalls the story of a fellow activist.

The one person who kind of got stuck with it all...she didn't finish up her degree from the university and I think that that's sad that there's that bitterness and that anger that she missed that opportunity due to her activism.

These excerpts suggest when student dissenters are pushed out, this may allow the university to be successful in preserving the status quo but it affects their Native student graduation rates. It also means the institution loses important agents of justice and change. Ultimately, this finding raises the question: If students leave to go on to serve as leaders in other places – if they refuse to work with the university in the future – can it really claim to be preparing the leaders of tomorrow? A question that becomes especially poignant considering it cannot seem to hold onto the leaders of today.

Psychological, health, and relational effects.

All of the students in this study reported experiencing significant physical, psychological, and physiological effects from having to deal with the accumulating effects of micro- and macro- aggressions. Researchers have defined microaggressions as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often

automatically or unconsciously” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 60). These insults can be covert, conscious, and/or unintentional or they can manifest as “automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of [racial] inferiority” (Davis, 1989, p. 157 as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 60). On the other hand, macroaggressions are attacks, insults, and/or pejorative statements made against people of color by Whites. Unlike microaggressions these are neither directed at, nor designed to offend a specific person of color (Russell-Brown, 1998) rather, macroaggressions reinforce stereotypes of racialized groups as “either criminals, illiterates, or intellectual inferiors” (Russell-Brown, 1998, p.140 as cited in Romero, 2006, p. 452). Macroaggressions can become manifest as a systemic and institutional form of racism when institutions promote discriminatory law, policy, and/or office practices that project inaccurate and/or damaging assumptions of a particular group. Both micro- and macro-aggressions can present significant physical, psychological, and physiological effects for those on the receiving end of these slights. Sometimes referred to as racial battle fatigue (Pierce, 1995), victims of micro- and macro-aggressions may experience physiological symptoms such as increased tension headaches and backaches, rapid breathing and/or heart rate, extreme fatigue, gastric distress, loss of appetite, and elevated blood pressure. Additionally, they may experience psychological discomfort including constant anxiety and worrying, increased swearing and complaining, inability to sleep or sleep broken by haunting conflict-specific dreams, intrusive thoughts and images, loss of self-confidence/feelings of hopelessness, difficulty in thinking coherently or being able to speak articulately under racially stressful

conditions (e.g. when one perceives a stereotype threat), hypervigilance, frustration, denial, emotional and social withdrawal, anger, anger-suppression, and (non)-verbal expressions of anger, withdrawing oneself and/or keeping quiet in social situations, and resentment (Pierce, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Smith, Hung & Franklin, 2011). Needless to say, the effects of micro- and macro- aggressions can cause more than just bodily and psychological harm to the individual person, they can cause strain on their interpersonal relationships and jeopardize their professional, academic, and personal success (Solyom, Chin & Ryujin, 2007).

The student activists in this study reported feelings of fear and paranoia. Of having one's personal safety jeopardized. Some expressed a persistent feeling of being in physical danger, of possibly losing one's job (for those students who were also staff members at the university), and an overall sense of not being able to freely express themselves without incurring some type of institutional form of retaliation. One indicated fear in losing her livelihood and shared the story of a former colleague who had not been able to find work on campus after confronting university administrators about their decision to shut down American Indian programs. Another explained that her fear was not simply limited to herself but that was also affecting her family. She expressed her family's concern that her participation in the efforts would inspire the university to refrain from awarding her degree. All activists indicated experiencing a constant tension between feeling fear and rage, "it makes you suicidal or homicidal," one explained.

Another student expressed thoughts of feeling suicidal and at one point, attempting to take her life. This is especially alarming when contrasted with an internal

document of MSU research conducted in 2006 on the mental health status of their students of color (study on file with author). Hwang found that approximately 500 students indicated a 12% suicide attempt rate for minority students, with 4% of the 12% reporting more than one attempted suicide. This was much higher than the 1.5% reported by the American College Health Association (ACHA) study the [MSU] study was based on. Additionally the study found that approximately 20% of ethnic minority students could be diagnosed as having major depression during the past two weeks based on their responses. Again this was an extremely high proportion given the 4.1% rate in community samples using the same instrument. In discussing these issues with students, some felt uncomfortable going to the counseling center because there are few ethnic counselors, and some felt like they had bad experiences where counselors did not understand their culture and were unable to meet their needs because of the time required to educate their counselors about cultural issues (study on file with author).

Finally, students reported a general decline in their physical and emotional well-being. Many experienced weight gain, marital distress (which eventually led to one student's divorce), difficulty sleeping, feelings of depression and exhaustion, and overall lethargy. Every time activists requested to meet with administrators or hosted information sessions for fellow students it "took a little more out of me," as one student put it. In addition to feelings of anger and fear, students reported having to quell concern among their [reservation] community members that they were not engaged in efforts to promote their own personal agenda at the expense of other American Indians.

How Students Survived: Strategies for Resilience

Gilmore, Smith, and Kairaiwak's 1997 study on student resistance in Alaska found that,

Though the University had not created a free or safe space, the students were able to maintain their traditional ties and seize a context for themselves. They learned the value of situated freedom which is not granted, but seized and created it in the context of so many obstacles. For the most part students appeared to be able to transform anger, hurt, and confusion into professionalism and academic effort. That they could so strongly resist the stigma and vulnerability in such a hostile and assaulting environment is a remarkable story of resistance and resilience (p. 98).

The same can be said for the students in this study. Many found a way to gain a sense of empowerment even as those around them were silenced (including faculty and staff). However many struggles they faced, even with their own persistence, they found strategies to survive in hopes of, at the very least, seeing each other to graduation. Survival strategies ranged from employing humor, to appealing to each other and their communities for personal, emotional, and academic support, to finding creative ways to utilize media to garner support from peoples across the nation.

Vine Deloria (1969) has said one of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh for, "laughter encompasses the limits of the soul. In humor life is redefined and accepted... The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it" (p. 146-7). Humor was of paramount importance to the students in this study, often helping them survive enough to see another day.

The importance of humor was evidenced through the names the students used to address one another. Here I am not referring to a person's given name but to the special names self-selected during one of their activist planning sessions. In chapter two I explained how the activists formed a Coalition after realizing their private meetings with administrators were not having the larger effect they had hoped. The purpose of the Coalition was to invite the media and the larger public to pressure the university to explain itself and potentially reverse or ameliorate the effects of the issues being raised. As they prepared to galvanize their public efforts they anticipated the fear and threats of punishment facing them would magnify. Fearing future repercussions they began to take precautions. They first purchased a disposable cell phone, which was free of contracts or any other identifying information connecting any of them directly to the phone or the phone service provider. This is the phone they used to talk to media and other supporters. Next, they selected pseudonyms to be used during their meetings and in their personal correspondence to each other (by this time they had stopped using university email and were communicating through other independent messaging sources). These names were as much about levity as they were about asserting their own power while also seeking to protect themselves

The pseudonym selection process was one way to recognize and validate the activists, not just for who they are, but who they want to be and was undertaken in a manner that recognized each individual's power to name themselves. The activists selected individual "Agent" names and revealed them to one another at a formal planning session.

During the Agent name revelation ceremony, the students were pleasantly surprised to see the great deal of thought and care each person had taken in selecting who they would be/come. Their selections highlighted their strongest traits, wishes, and desires and the group laughed and teased each other as they revealed their selections.

Underlying their humor was recognition for the present and future fear, pain, and violence they knew their activism would bring. Like everything else they did, selecting a name became a collective process. It became about intentionally incorporating humor into a space/context that seemed perpetually heavy with pain, with the sense that at any moment a person's sense of reality and of belonging in the world might be shaken, but that in that moment, together, as they revealed their names to one another and they explained their meanings, they could see each other for who they really were and what they wanted to be. It was a sacred moment during which many responded to each other by nodding and saying, "Yeah, that makes sense" as each person shared his/her name.

I was surprised to find all the activists recalled these moments and returned to them when I invited them to select a pseudonym for this study. They engaged the selection of their study pseudonym with the same thoughtfulness and levity they had shared years earlier, though this time, they selected a different name. Even the administrators interviewed were humbled to hear the origin stories of the activists' pseudonyms. Both Rose and Ida chuckled after hearing about how others had selected their names.

Rose: Who am I gonna be? What are other people? Do you use a person's name?

Interviewer: People have gone about this in kind of funny ways. One selected the name of her favorite author that she happened to be teaching at the time.

Gabriela; she's going by Gabby. Another picked his favorite superhero [and] is going by Tony for Tony Stark from the Iron Man franchise. Another made up a stereotypical Native sounding name to sort of push back at the [institution] because they love their stereotypical Indians but not the real ones. He picked [a nonsensical, romanticized Native sounding name]. Roger Flower Maples.

Another invited me to catch a play with her [that her friend was acting in, prior to her interview]. So we went to this play and as we left we were joking about some of the characters and she turned to me and said: "I can't make fun of the character Leah as much because I'm the Leah in my family. I'm the [rebel]. [I'm the] unwanted, unmarried one." And then she was like: "Hey! That's what I want for my pseudonym. I want you to call me Leah." And we laughed and it stuck for the rest of the visit. You can have fun with it. All the students did.

To the casual reader, the pseudonyms used in this study may seem arbitrary, but they're not. There was a great deal of thought that went into the selections. Each person selected names that are personally meaningful to them in one way or another. Take for example, Tony, the superhero selection. This student who selected this name originally wasn't sure he wanted to be interviewed. He felt his efforts weren't noteworthy and admitted that his reasons for participating in the resistance efforts weren't entirely clear to him in the beginning.

It was mainly comments [that drove me to participate that] I'd overhear while going about my day or in class when the issue of Native American sports team names [came up]. Really it came down to nobody caring and suggesting the matter was smaller than what it was perceived.

After talking for a while and understanding why he had been identified by his peers as a person to include in this study he said he'd do it. He went on to explain his reason for agreeing.

[If my] words are able to help another student who comes after [to] feel [validated]. Like they're sane. Like they're not alone or the only one going through hard times. If [my words] can help them feel like they're okay. And [if] that's [the closest I'll ever get to truly being a superhero in this lifetime. If that's my] only superpower— to make one other person feel less crazy – then that's what [I want].

Thus was born Tony Stark. The fact each participant's study pseudonym is different from their activist pseudonym is important. It implies a shared recognition that certain information, just like certain moments, are sacred and confined to a certain time/space, intended to be shared only with those who were privileged enough to be present for its birth. To this day, the only existing record of each activist's agent name remains in the memory of the people present during those meetings. Only the other activists understand where their hearts and minds were during that time, everyone else, including those reading this study now, can only grasp the words remembered, with great

pain, years after they endured some of the most brutal assaults against their deepest sensibilities.

In addition to humor, another tactic students utilized was relying on each other to survive. When asked what helped sustain her decades of activism, legendary civil rights activist Yuri Kochiyama once responded with, “People in the movement sustain each other. It’s because their spirit is so contagious.” (King, 2014). Such was the case for the students in this study. Students reported feelings of finding new friends and colleagues as one of the biggest benefits of engaging in activist. Many felt that engaging in the efforts allowed them to expand their social network so that it included others who could validate their experiences (after administrators worked hard to invalidate their concerns and silence their voices). This validation led to a perceived increase in self-worth (though this increase was often temporary). The increase in social support also led several students to feel as if the support of their colleagues extended beyond the activist efforts into their personal and academic lives.

Students reported feeling an added sense of support from the group when it came to personal and/or academic accomplishments. The sense of connectedness among the group (facilitated by the feeling that the group was connected as a result of sharing a common goal or purpose) allowed them to experience a much-needed purgation of emotion by sharing their grief and stress with one other. One common finding reported was the added sense of feeling as if individuals, as part of a larger group, were fighting for something larger than oneself. One respondent referred to this as a collective move toward self-determination.

By engaging in the efforts to meet with administrator's, raise awareness of the concerns of American Indian students, and create policies that ensure the continued respect for American Indians, students felt they were helping to reframe how the general public views American Indians in a way that was historically and socially appropriate. The students believed ensuring university enforces policies indeed honor the tribal namesake by preventing fans from displaying inappropriate messages or engaging in abhorrent behavior, would have served as a means of protecting the American Indian students who would attend the university long after each activist has graduated. As a result of feeling as if they were looking out for future generations, some students found the inspiration to continue in their protest efforts.

Others identified the importance of network building, or relying on other Native peoples for support, as a source that contributed to their resilience. Upon realizing their voices and concerns were being subverted by administrators in mainstream media reports, they found creative and alternative forms of amplifying their already marginalized voices. For example, through their Coalition blog they were able to engage in online activism which helped connect them with peoples in different time/spaces and across roles in ways they might otherwise not have been able to. This brought a much-needed sense of support and excitement to the work. This approach provided an additional social support network as well as an exciting way to approach social media for the greater good. Through circulation of their petition they were able to collect the voices, thoughts, and experiences of Native peoples who were not immediately available to come to campus to voice their thoughts and found ways to connect with Native media outlets.

Native media outlets particularly served as important places of support and helped to preserve the good status/name of students in their communities. Through these publications, students were seen as champions of Native rights and justice (as opposed to the “troublemakers” mainstream outlets, through university leaders’ quotes, reported them to be). What the students came to realize was that, achieving mainstream media visibility could end up perpetuating more harm (as it branded some as “troublemakers”). On the other hand, they feared not having mainstream media visibility (i.e. remaining invisible) would indicate compliance and acceptance of university decisions and policies – something they were unwilling to compromise on. Thus they reached out to non-mainstream media sources in hopes of reaching a wider readership as well as achieving a more balanced reporting (although they recognized that partnering with Native media may also have limited reach and may not be consumed by those they need on board).

What Makes an Activist an Activist for Life

Until now the focus of this chapter has been to understand the personal motivating factors that led students to persist in their protest efforts as well as the ways engaging in activism impacted them emotionally, physically, relationally, and spiritually. The previous section explored the factors that allowed students to remain engaged in their efforts even as they experienced significant tolls. As one student explained, the beauty of Natives is their resilience. Heseo’o, who shared a sentiment that had been expressed by an earlier graduate of NTPP, explained: “when it comes to thinking about us as Native peoples I find it helps to remind myself ‘you are the product of a people who would not

die.” The resilience and dedication demonstrated by the students in this study is remarkable and raises the question: was their activism tied only to this context?

A survey of what happened to the students *after* they left the institution suggests the answer to that is no. During their time at MSU the students appear to have been keenly aware of the potential tolls of resistance. Many of them had engaged in activist efforts prior to this and had learned from experiences in their own tribal communities that they could potentially lose their jobs, funding, or have their reputations questioned. But silence was not an option for them as it would have meant being complicit in the dissolution of important services and the misrepresentation of Native peoples. They knew the pain of exclusion firsthand and didn't want others' to have to go through what they went through.

The other bigger activism piece [is that speaking up against something you think isn't right, that's unjust can create] this separate civil war. We tend to decide which side of the fence we are going to stand on and support. People lose their jobs over these [kinds of effort. But it's important to understand that, even though I took a public stand,] I wasn't a victim of the situation. I was an adult. I went into it willingly. I knew what I was doing.

Still, students argued, just like their tribal communities, taking a particular position on a topic, even when it is not the popular one, doesn't mean a person should be pushed out, ostracized, or banned from returning to the community. (Just as they shouldn't be made to feel they no longer belong on campus).

This study suggests students continue to maintain a commitment to social justice efforts. If an environment becomes threatening or remains stalwart, they move on to places where the structure is malleable enough to make significant changes. Many have continued in engagement of social justice issues but on a more individualized level. That is, the group's efforts have transitioned from full group efforts, to smaller personal efforts. For example, one student is currently engaged in exploring legal action against the university for the experiences she was forced to endure during her time at the university as a staff member and student while also working, professionally, to provide important support and programming services to Indigenous students at a different institution. Another went on to initiate national collaborations with American Indian student activists at other universities who use continue to use of American Indian mascots.

Concluding Thoughts

I know a lot of times that American Indians can be shy. When do you become a leader? Deciding “when should I step up?” “Do I need to step up?” constantly asking those questions...

This chapter raises important considerations when considering American Indian student resistance. Although some say it is students who can largely drive change in universities, is it fair to place such burdens on them when there is so much at stake considering they haven't graduated and may not even have a job yet? Is it ethical to encourage them to take up and challenge the institution without internal support? Furthermore, whose responsibility is it to advocate for the rights and support services of

marginalized and minoritized? If we return to the importance of what it means to be a minority (in numbers as well as ethnically/racially) then we understand that, when it comes to predominantly White institutions, Native students *do not* have the numbers to affect change through resistance alone. As Sudie Hofman once put it, “A minority group, which is directly affected by a policy, does not have the strength in numbers to influence its own destiny” (2005). Therefore American Indian students need community, peer, and mentor support during times of crisis. But is this possible when the university is not only pushing out students but also their allies, mentors, advisers, professors and advocates (and doing little to retain them)?

Little research has focused exclusively on the experiences of American Indian students attending institutions in which the mascot is an American Indian symbol or caricature. Additionally, little research has been published on the resistance efforts American Indian students engage in at these various institutions and the tolls and benefits such resistance efforts have on the students during and after their time at the institution. This chapter suggests great consideration goes into deciding whether American Indian students will become involved in advocacy efforts at the university. While several participants had previous experience engaging in social advocacy all participants indicated a personal motivation for engaging in the activist efforts. For some students, the loss of funding of the NTPP was the motivating factor since they were either students or employees of the program. Others were motivated to become involved in efforts after witnessing racist acts and messages targeted toward American Indian communities at sporting events. Whatever the impetus for becoming involved in the efforts, all activists

held reservations about speaking out publicly for their own personal needs rather than advocating for an entire group of people. This is because bringing unnecessary attention to oneself, particularly public attention, is considered inappropriate (even selfish) in many of their communities. However, many of them indicated a desire to engage in the efforts as a group, as opposed to individually, because this approach demonstrated a sense of unity and strength needed for the students to draw attention to themselves. Working together as a group, they did not feel as if they were being selfish—rather there seemed to be a sense that working together honored the group as a collective of American Indians affected by these issues.

During my conversations with the student activists the question of whether they would engage in resistance efforts again, knowing what they know now about the tolls incurred with this kind of work, would inevitably arise. Most indicated they would. Although they experienced significant physical, emotional, and relational tolls they felt it was nevertheless important to advocate for students' rights. For some, who experienced the heaviest tolls (divorce, attempted suicide) the answer of whether they would do it again depended on the day I asked. Heseo'o admitted she goes back and forth on how she feels about it and that she can't think about it for too long as the memories that sting the most are not when White administrators attacked the talents, abilities, needs, and potential of Native peoples but when Native peoples did it to each other.

It took its toll. It destroyed me. I was not prepared for it. I never thought they would ever do what they did. Ever. You could've knocked me over; I was so shocked that that really happened! I'm still in denial that they had the [nerve] to

[shut down the program and push us out]. They've tried to cover it up, they tried to make it sound like [they've done so much to support Native students]. They even got [the state director of Indian education] to speak out against us. It was a full-blown attack. Even from our own. Our own turned on us! There were so many Chato's that turned on us suddenly and it was insane. I had no idea.

One of the unintended consequences of this work, for Heseo'o has been to learn to forgive and accept when other Native people don't support you. Leah adds that although she stands by her actions that these struggles are for the young.

Yeah, I don't think I have continued with anything as huge as that. [I'm still an advocate for social justice, just on a smaller scale. I'm just not] putting myself – and I don't think that I ever will. I think that there are just some things that, in the grand scheme of things, is it going to make a difference? [Is it going to raise] awareness? I think that that is something I will always be involved in. Making sure that people are aware of issues. I don't know that I will ever be as entrenched in the issues as I was at the [university]. There comes an age where you get to sit back and [accept] those fights [at that level] are for the young. They're more impassioned and they're more embroiled. It's theirs.

Much of what I have intended to say in this chapter is that while the cause that these student activists were engaged in was, and remains, noble, it also comes with significant personal costs.

Chapter 7 – Concluding Thoughts

Implications for this story of survival

Campus climate plays an important role for retention and graduation of students of color. The central focus of this study is on how university administrator attitudes, policies, and decisions influence campus climate and, in turn, affect the persistence and experiences of American Indian students. In 2008, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported the number of American Indians and Alaska Natives enrolled in higher education more than doubled in the past thirty years (Wiedeman, 2008). This increase in enrollment is reflective of a larger trend in undergraduate enrollment across the board. American Indians now account for 1.1% of total enrollment in colleges and universities (Wiedeman, 2008). However, although enrollment is increasing, American Indians remain least likely to be enrolled in colleges or universities and simultaneously experience the lowest graduation rates from postsecondary institutions (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). Some research suggests campus climate, university policies, and a lack of access to important resources may be to blame for this. For example, Tierney (1992) suggests their experiences are influenced by an attitude of “official encouragement and institutional discouragement.”

American Indian students are also more likely to attend public institutions. Of those who attend postsecondary institutions, 77% attend public two- or four-year colleges or universities. This is important because public institutions are more likely to utilize American Indian mascots, athletic nicknames, and imagery in an ahistorical, racially hostile, or abusive manner (American Psychological Association, 2005; Brayboy, Fann,

Castagno & Solyom, 2012; Hofmann, 2005; National Congress of American Indians, 2013; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2005). Research has found such racially-themed mascots and iconography can lead to hostile campus climate and can personally affect the self-perception and success of Native students who may be left to deal with the effects of having to see, daily, inaccurate, disrespectful or racist depictions of themselves as Native peoples

About this study.

This study examines the experiences of five American Indian student protestors from 2007-2008, with supplementary interviews from three former university faculty/administrators (three males and five females). During 2007-2008 American Indian students, and their allies, witnessed a severe decline in what they believed were programs, people, and services that are critical for American Indian student persistence. At the same time, while not heavily focused on the issue of the school's nickname, the protestors remained aware of the effect the use of the tribal nickname had on the very particular representation of Native peoples on campus wherein Natives were reduced to icons and caricatures, to drum up team and school spirit and promote its programs to its larger non-Native student demographic.

I approached this study from three angles. The first part looks at the context for AI struggle: what led the students to protest and how they framed their struggles. The second part looks at how the university and outlying communities understood and framed the students' protests and struggles and, subsequently, responded to them. The third, and final, part looks at the effects of student resistance on student persistence and future goals

and life experiences. Focusing on the experiences of five American Indian student activists, with supplementary testimony from three former university administrators, my major research questions included: What were the contextual factors contextual factors that led students to resist university policy and decisions regarding American Indian programs and services? What response did the activism garner? What was the effects of their activism (personally, academically, professionally)? And, finally, what does the university's response to student protest convey about its commitment to American Indian students and their communities?

Data were gathered over a seven-year period (2007-2014) and included in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews served dual purposes: first they helped to understand students experiences and their motivations for engaging in protest as well as provided a counterstory to the university's colonial, majoritarian narrative. This study also included participant observation of the protests and of activists' planning sessions for protest or community and media outreach and archival research that included the examination of university documents, internal emails, etc. This study is a case study. It is not about American Indian student activism across the board. Rather, the context of Mountain State is unique in that it remains among the public universities identified in a 2005 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) press release issued by its Executive Committee as an institution that utilizes "mascots, nicknames or images

deemed hostile or abusive in terms of race, ethnicity or national origin.”⁴⁹ This study is guided by critical race theory (CRT) which argues that although race may be a social construct, it is significant in U.S. society. This theory posits the U.S. was created with the colonial intention of promoting and protecting the property interests of Whites and explores the intersection of race and property as it is seen as important because it serves to create the foundation for securing important rights for certain groups over others. It is also guided by an offshoot of CRT known as Tribal Critical Race Theory which argues that not only is racism endemic to society but, in the context of American Indian/Alaska Native history, colonization is also endemic. TribalCrit seeks to ensure research is contextual, culturally relevant and that it honors the self-determination and sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2005). And, finally, it is also guided by a media theory, known as Agenda Setting Theory, which argues the media doesn’t tell us what to think but, rather, what to think *about*. In other words, the media play an important role in our lives in terms of the rate of frequency of what is found to be newsworthy and highlighting particular aspects of the issues presented. According to this theory, media is believed to have the potential to serve to advance the interests of powerful political and social leaders by promoting or upholding assumptions about a particular group (Griffin, 2003). Although agenda setting research has rarely been used to advance social-justice

⁴⁹ Later that same year MSU issued a letter to the NCAA in response to this claim, explaining its athletic nickname was respectful and honored the peoples the state is named after. The university additionally provided documentation that demonstrated it had permission from one of the state’s tribal bands to use its name and related iconography (documents on file with author).

goals, pairing AST's focus on media influence with TribalCrit provided for a robust framing and analysis of data within a social-justice framework.

Major findings.

Like other research has found (Brayboy, 2005) American Indian students sometimes deviate from the traditional college student in that they may report they do not attend college to fulfill individual goals and pursuits, though that can certainly be part of why they attend, but may be inspired to attend and persist out of a desire to better serve their communities. All five students in this study reported a desire to better serve American Indian communities or advance justice for historically underrepresented communities as a motivating factor for attending college. Therefore as a collective they identified concern with campus climate as the central driving force behind much of their resistance efforts as they believe it affects the enrollment and persistence opportunities, not just of themselves and their peers, but of American Indian students who may come after them.

Interviews and analysis of student created materials suggest they believe American Indian students possess certain inalienable education rights that should be recognized and honored by university administrators. These rights include the right to higher education and access to treaty protected programs (such as programs like the Native Teacher Preparation Program); the right to access culturally informed academic and student support services; the right to be recognized and respected as members of a political, not just racial, group (including demonstrating respect for programs such as NTPP and support for events that allow American Indians to exercise their treaty

protected rights to express their spirituality and connectedness to the land and each other through powwow); the right to attend institutions that feel safe and not hostile to their presence, and; the right to be seen as viable, present, “modern” human beings rather than as commodified or stereotyped peoples, goods, or objects.

The students’ believe observing and respecting these rights can be accomplished, above all by three things: First, by having an educated administration that demonstrates knowledge and respect for the political status of American Indian students. Second, demonstrating respect for ALL Native students and peoples, not just ones from tribal namesake. And, third, by promoting the importance of intercultural competency. Intercultural competency means having administrators, faculty, and staff that understand, engage, and respect intercultural communication in dialogue, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Unfortunately when students engaged administrators from their personal and community-based interaction styles, the university was ill-prepared to understand or meet their needs.

Overall the students were concerned about the health and well-being of their peers and future Native students; this is what drove their efforts. They originally sought to work directly with administrators in private meetings to address their concerns. During those meetings higher administrators sought to dominate the conversation and/or dismiss their claims, accusing the students of being unnecessarily aggressive. To the students it appeared their struggles and concerns had fallen on less than sympathetic ears so they chose to voice them in a more public manner.

They held peaceful protests in the hopes of: (1) raising awareness of how the university (mis)treats real-life American Indians on campus; (2) calling for an investigation into the treatment of American Indians on campus, and; (3) holding the university accountable for its decisions. Although administrators chose to also ignore these efforts, the protests generated modest interest among media and surrounding community members. Students used this opportunity to meet with reporters and explain they were motivated to protest, not out of a desire to needlessly shame their university or to protect their individual interests, but because they were concerned for the collective well-being of Native students and for the future opportunities, programs and support structures available to the next generation of students. The education struggles faced by Indigenous students, they explained, represent their struggles to be seen as human, as students, as scholars, and as people rather than simply as mascots or as commodified symbols of a time and peoples long forgotten.

The public attention generated by the protests led to the reporting and publication of stories about the students' concerns and struggles at MSU in local news media. University administrators' quotes dominated mainstream news media stories and sought to recenter their majoritarian story by using four tactics: minimization, defense, denial, and shifting accountability through victim-blaming and scapegoating. Minimization emphasizes a belief that when it comes to validating claims of oppression or mistreatment, numbers matter not experiences. Defense recognizes something has happened but doesn't see it as a "problem." Denial refuses to acknowledge that, even if something has happened, no harm was caused. And, finally, shifting accountability was

directly accomplished through victim-blaming and scapegoating American Indian students and faculty themselves.

Mainstream media became a tool to continue to perpetuate colonialism and silence the voices of students. Administrators framed Native activists, especially one female student scapegoated as the sole dissenter responsible for trying to create a “social problem” when none existed, as “militant.” This tactic allowed the events that caused the news to be presented to the exclusion of the conditions that produce them (Harjo, 2006). Native and student owned/operated media, on the other hand, sought to add complexity to the reporting by making connections between the historic struggles for education parity and the representation of Native peoples on university campuses (as mascots more often than as scholars).

Thus, on the one hand, mainstream, local news media outlets became a platform for university administrators and local residents to deny, invalidate, and negate the examples and concerns raised. Statements made by university administrators received considerable space in these mediums and ultimately allowed for administrators to discredit the claims of the activists. American Indians themselves were blamed in these stories for the university’s unwillingness/inability to sustain beneficial programs and services for its American Indian students. On the other hand, news media produced by Indigenous peoples sought to provide a historical and legal context grounded in American Indian history and law to understand the experiences and concerns presented by the activists. These stories ultimately placed their struggles within a larger historical, national and political context. This finding reveals an overall need for both university

administrators and local, non-Indigenous mainstream media outlets to understand the unique history, political status, and accompanying rights of Indigenous peoples.

This study suggests the power of Native voices cannot be stifled by institutions of higher learning. When they realized their private, closed door meetings with administrators were not adequately addressing their concerns, the activists chose to galvanize media in creative ways. Moreover, the use of petitions and blogs allowed them to keep their communities informed of their struggles and feel support even when they didn't feel it on campus. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the role of media in influencing social and cultural dialogue about the experiences of American Indians and what that meant for the project of educational and racial justice. The collected media stories added to extant discussions of the agenda-setting function of media by framing student concerns in a polarizing manner. For the students, local media stories served to either dismiss their validity or, less frequently, validate their concerns. The determining factor for how biased a story was written was dependent upon who owned the media outlet (i.e. whether it was owned and operated by Indigenous peoples or not). Thus media these reports served to maintain the university majoritarian narrative. However a few stories, *not* published by local news outlets, helped to shape the students' counterstory. Native-owned media outlets that picked up the story served to both historicize and contextualize the relevance of both the students' concerns and struggles. What is important to note is that when student voices were subverted in mainstream media, students found alternative ways to voice their concerns to the larger public and garner

support for their cause. They created their own blog, circulated petitions in Indigenous communities, and worked with Native-owned media outlets to get their message out.

This finding suggests the heart of activism remains strong and that protecting collective AI education rights as well as educating others while doing so is what helped the activists persist; looking out for the seven generations forward while relying on the strength and knowledge of those seven generations back (doing as their ancestors did). The students in this study are social justice advocates for life who recognize that institutions can and do chew them up but who are like their ancestors: the product of a people who would not die; warriors through and through.

However there were significant personal tolls to this work. I will get to those momentarily. First let me state that although this project was not about mascots, per se, I would have been remiss if I did not analyze and seek to understand the role of how the practice of adapting Indigenous peoples and iconography as the school's athletic symbols and nickname affected the experiences and perceived support for real-life American Indian students. The tribal nickname serves as an important signifier of how certain practices can transform postsecondary institutions into overtly hostile environments.

A tribal athletic nickname is a reflection of how American Indians are depicted on campus, rendered at once both visible and invisible in the milieu of higher education. In the case of Mountain State University, the nickname influences its institutional climate and is reflective of the climate toward people of color – and American Indians, in particular – and allows the university, and its alumni, to literally profit from a practice that interferes with the health and success of students. While examining the role of the

use of the tribal name and iconography, what I found was that the university, unsurprisingly, has a significant vested, material interest in controlling the use and image of its Native icons. This can be seen in how it sanctioned the use and distribution of stereotypes associated with Native peoples to promote its Ethnic Studies courses but stepped in to quash the distribution and sale of the blackout t-shirts (but only after Native students approached the vendors first and well after several hours had passed which had allowed the vendors to sell hundreds of shirts). The university appeared to monitor the use of Native icons only when their own profit and control was at stake.

Thus the university's reaction to its real-life American Indian students was generally to quash their dissent and ensure it did not garner much media attention. This was accomplished through several methods mentioned earlier (minimization, defense, denial, and shifting accountability). This, however, does not mean the university doesn't address grievous incidents. In fact the university DID step in and address the incident of the blackout t-shirts. This research suggests they intervened in this instance because this shirt was not only offensive to its namesake tribe but it presented a potential financial threat to the university's interest in Native icons and merchandise and, importantly, ignoring such an incident would send the message the university is not doing the job it claims to be doing in terms of "honoring" the "respectful" use and treatment of its namesake. This impression is important to avoid considering the NCAA, in 2005, issued a decree that would ban university utilizing racially hostile and offensive mascots from hosting post-season tournaments or events. However, other instances that generally

targeted Native peoples in the sports arena, such as the volleyball signs, were met with little intervention and response by the university.

Finally, although they may continue in their efforts to promote Native rights and struggles, students faced significant personal tolls during their time at MSU and beyond. This study suggests the student activists faced an overall lack of respect and recognition for social structures and community practices of Native communities. The tolls they incurred were personal, professional, academic, physical/physiological. For example, academic effects included feelings of isolation, push-out, delayed, or no graduation. In other words, the university's response to the students protest efforts significantly impacted the retention and enrollment of its American Indian students. Some left before graduating, others graduated and left quickly, while others took longer to graduate. Psychological, health, and relational effect affected interpersonal relationships outside of the school setting. For example, students experienced fatigue, exhaustion, trouble sleeping, irritability, hypertension, anxiety, and depression (in one case, suicide attempt) among many more conditions, all of which contributed to relational friction and for some led to divorce, significant weight gain, and other physiological/chronic conditions that continue to plague them to this day. In the professional sphere, besides loss of immediate employment, some even experienced trouble in finding future employment.

So what helps students persist? Although a majority of the student activists reported feeling isolated or pushed out by the institution, they did not let this deter them from engaging in other social justice oriented efforts and remain dedicated to the pursuit of social justice and/or the protection of American Indian education rights long after they

left the institution. Part of what kept them going was the reminder that, as one interviewee put it, “they are the product of a people who would not die” these struggles, the result of a violent and colonial history with non-Native hegemonic structures, precede them and will continue well after they have passed on but during their time here, they will work to try to ease the struggles of those around them and for those who will come after. Humor was also crucial to student survival but when they could no longer find humor in their situation, some responded by simply leaving. Students exercised agency and demonstrated personal resilience when, upon realizing the university environment was not malleable, responsive, or conducive to their concerns, they left to advocate for justice struggles elsewhere.

I mentioned earlier an increase in postsecondary enrollment for American Indian/Alaska Native students. This is important for tribal nation building. As tribal nations continue to strengthen their infrastructure, systems of governance, health care, education systems and other areas, many have stated a desire for educated citizens who can not only fill these positions but can lead these initiatives. However important enrollment in higher education is, what many are now concerned with is ensuring Native students not only enroll but graduate with the skill sets necessary to serve their communities.

Implications.

In order to improve the recruitment, retention, and graduation rates of Native students, it is important to understand their needs and experiences in higher education. MSU did not demonstrate deep understanding, knowledge, or respect for the political and

personal needs and challenges facing Native students and their communities. The experiences of the activists in this study, in asserting their education rights as Native peoples, and the university's response to their activism, suggest there is much to be learned about how campus climate, administrator attitudes, and services for Native students impact retention, graduation, quality of life, and academic experiences for American Indian students. This study, like other research, suggest students believe campus climate and factors such as racism affect student persistence. Access to financial support from either personal and/or institutional sources, hard funding for Native-serving programs, culture-related extracurricular activities, relations with faculty and administrators who have an understanding of Indigenous cultures and histories, are all important factors for Native student success and persistence (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012; Lotkowski, Robbins & Noeth, 2004). Additionally important is access to culturally relevant programs and curriculum as well as receiving academic support through counseling, tutoring, and mentoring.

University's interested in promoting diversity need to better understand intercultural approaches to communication, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Although I don't focus on this too much in this study, this research suggests there is hope for young Native men in seeing Native women as leaders and directly disrupts the visibility of Native men as symbolic of savage violence and shows they are thoughtful and willing to question patriarchy and paternal notions of leadership. The support and actions of Native male students for their female counterparts suggests younger generation

of leaders are more gender-conscious; while the older ones may be more invested in gender patriarchy and coloniality.

Finally, I'd like to end by pointing out that, "Like the miner's canary the Indian marks the shift from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere and our treatment of Indians even more than our treatments of minorities reflects the rise and fall of our democratic faith" (Cohen, 1953, p. 390). The educational struggles faced by the students in this study represent more than theoretical discussions of power, rights, and justice. They embody the contemporary failure of universities to promote the retention, persistence, and graduation of American Indian students. Not only that, but as many activists pointed out, the additional use of inaccurate race-based mascots make a mockery of Native peoples and their cultures and open the door for prejudicial (mis)treatment by the dominant cultural against, not just American Indian nations, but all other ethnic minority groups

When universities promote decisions and policies that minimize the importance of supporting minoritized student populations, this can affect the enrollment, achievement, and graduation rate of these student groups. Some say it is students who can largely drive change in universities but is it fair to place such burdens on students when there is so much at stake for them? In other words, whose responsibility is it to advocate for the rights and support services of marginalized and minority (in number and "ethnic" definition) communities? And, furthermore, how can institutions claim to be preparing the leaders of tomorrow when they are losing the leaders of today if students who are involved in protest ultimately leave the institution to go on to work with/for other places

where they can advance change? When students are pushed out in this manner, the university may preserve its desire to maintain the status quo but it also loses important agents of justice and change.

Throughout this study, I have tried to promote a deep understanding of what the students were fighting to protect and what motivated them. What they fought to protect was the programs, peoples, rights and services they know help Native students do well and lead to Native student persistence. These include access to culturally relevant mentorship and advising, financial support and other funding opportunities, culturally-specific events such as the powwow which is hosted by the Native students on campus, funded in-part by the university, and held on university grounds. Events like the powwow serve important spiritual and cultural rejuvenation purposes and introduce young up-and-coming Native students to other Native community members.

Findings from this study suggest participants reported experiencing significant negative consequences for their decision to protest. Many felt forced to sacrifice their academic success at the university in favor of protecting their immediate personal and psychological safety. Some reported feeling pressure from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous university leaders to cease their efforts while at the same time receiving strong support from Indigenous peoples located away from the university—in their communities and across the nation. This finding reveals an important element in how institutions of higher learning promote practices that negatively affect the persistence and achievement of American Indian students. That is, many protestors reported feeling

ostracized or “pushed out” by university leaders for their decision to protest and ultimately ended up leaving the university before completing their degree.

This study also suggests university administrators and leaders at Mountain State University, a predominantly White institution, generally know little of the political status and everyday issues affecting American Indian peoples. The Native student activists featured in this study tried to educate MSU leaders about their political and treaty-protected education rights, as well as the struggles they faced daily as a result of the university’s decisions to (1) utilize an American Indian athletic nickname and (2) terminate or fail to retain and/or replace important peoples and services conducive to Native student success. Unfortunately, these efforts were too often met with apathy or resistance. University administrators and state leaders, all male, framed the students’ struggle for the promotion and protection of Native education rights at MSU as irrelevant and of concern to only a few deviant Native student dissenters. What’s more, they used media to target specific Native students and generate comments intended to chasten and rebuke them. Because the majority of activists were women, this approach perpetuated a misogynistic desire to impose patriarchal and paternalistic control over student voices and bodies.

As Williams (2014) has pointed out, “while not intentional, the long push to bring the Native American mascot to the forefront has been led, in large part, by women...who highlight a recent history of Native female leadership [in Native justice/rights struggles]” (washingtonpostblog.com). The role of women in advancing education rights struggles for American Indian peoples is not uncommon and was particularly important during the

late-1960's and early 1970's when American Indian groups fought for the establishment and support of important programs including American Indian/Native American studies and ethnic studies. Williams (2014) explains that as more women across the U.S. are stepping into leadership roles, more Native American women are leading the charge for American Indian rights and efforts that promote the health and well-being of their peoples. Perhaps because more women enrolled in the program under attack at MSU (the Native Teacher Preparation Program), more women appeared to undertake and lead the protest efforts. This was not the first time they had served as activists to defend and promote education rights and programs for Native peoples. Gabby and Heseo'o had been involved in protecting the longevity of programs and initiatives that offered American Indians unique educational opportunities at their alma mater while Leah had experience working directly with her home state's government officials to protect legislation that provided postsecondary education access to the American Indian people of the state. Even Rose, as both a graduate student and former administrator, had been actively involved in fighting for inclusion in higher education and against racist mascot practices prior to coming to MSU.

Although the students' efforts were not solely focused on fighting against a particular representation of Native masculinity (exhibited through the use of the mascot and athletic nickname), it is important to note the high number of women engaged in fighting against these representations. This could be because Native women tend to be enrolled in higher education at higher rates than Native men. Of the total number of undergraduate Native students enrolled in higher education in 2006, Native women

comprised 61% while Native men comprised just 39% (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012, p. 54).

Native women have often listed their intersectional struggles in dealing with oppression as both American Indian/Alaska Native peoples and as women. Says Amanda Blackhorse, a Native activist advocating for the termination Washington D.C.'s professional football team's mascot, "In my estimation, a woman is not going to blink twice about saying, 'I'm going to protect the integrity of my tribe, my children'" (Williams, 2014). And went on to add, "I think that as Native women that's probably why we do work harder – because we've struggled more. I don't really know how to compare it to anything else. I don't know if it would be different if I were a man." The strength and leadership of women is something that has long been recognized, honored, and respected among many tribal communities – especially those that are matriarchal in structure. It is something that, perhaps because they themselves were from matriarchal tribes, was honored and respected by the Native male activists in this study. Unfortunately, this is not always the case in university settings, particularly when it comes to central administration.

This study suggests the student activists faced an overall lack of respect and recognition for social structures and community practices of Native communities. Administrators framed Native activists, especially the female student they scapegoated as the sole dissenter responsible for trying to create a "social problem" (see chapter four) when none existed, as "militant." This tactic allows the events that caused the news to be presented to the exclusion of the conditions that produce them (Harjo, 2006). However,

THERE ARE POINTS OF HOPE! For a majority of activists, their decision to leave did not appear to deter their commitment to American Indian peoples or their communities. Rather when the institution became overly hostile, they left but continued the important work of addressing the needs of Indigenous communities and peoples elsewhere. These preliminary findings suggest American Indian student resistance entails resisting university practices whenever and however it is feasible. However, if an environment becomes threatening or remains stalwart, students move on to places where the structure is malleable enough to make significant changes.

Second, striking differences in media reporting and public responses to the students' activism. On the one hand, mainstream, local news media outlets became a platform for university administrators and local residents to deny, invalidate, and negate the examples and concerns raised. Statements made by university administrators received considerable space in these mediums and ultimately allowed for administrators to discredit the claims of the activists. American Indians themselves were blamed in these stories for the university's unwillingness/inability to sustain beneficial programs and services for its American Indian students. On the other hand, news media produced by Indigenous peoples sought to provide a historical and legal context grounded in American Indian history and law to understand the experiences and concerns presented by the activists. These stories ultimately placed their struggles within a larger historical, national and political context. This finding reveals an overall need for both university administrators and local, non-Indigenous mainstream media outlets to understand the unique history, political status, and accompanying rights of Indigenous peoples.

Third, this research suggests there is hope for young Native men in seeing Native women as leaders and directly disrupts the visibility of Native men as symbolic of savage violence and shows they are thoughtful and willing to question patriarchy and paternal notions of leadership. The support and actions of Native male students for their female counterparts suggests younger generation of leaders are more gender-conscious; while the older ones may be more invested in gender patriarchy and coloniality.

Fourth, this study suggests the power of Native voices cannot be stopped or silenced. When they realized their private, closed door meetings with administrators were not adequately addressing their concerns, the activists chose to galvanize media in creative ways. Moreover, the use of petitions and blogs allowed them to keep their communities informed of their struggles and feel support even when they didn't feel it on campus. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of the role of media in influencing social and cultural dialogue about the experiences of American Indians and what that meant for the project of educational and racial justice. The collected media stories added to extant discussions of the agenda-setting function of media by framing student concerns in a polarizing manner. For the students, local media stories served to either dismiss their validity or, less frequently, validate their concerns. The determining factor for how biased a story was written was dependent upon who owned the media outlet (i.e. whether it was owned and operated by Indigenous peoples or not). Thus media these reports served to maintain the university majoritarian narrative. However a few stories, *not* published by local news outlets, helped to shape the students' counterstory. Native-owned media outlets that picked up the story served to both historicize and contextualize the relevance

of both the students' concerns and struggles. What is important to note is that when student voices were subverted in mainstream media, students found alternative ways to voice their concerns to the larger public and garner support for their cause. They created their own blog, circulated petitions in Indigenous communities, and worked with Native-owned media outlets to get their message out.

Lastly, this study suggests protecting collective rights and educating others while doing so this is what makes people persist; looking out for the seven generations forward while relying on the strength and knowledge of those seven generations back (doing as their ancestors did). The students in this study are social justice advocates for life who recognize that institutions can and do chew them up but who are like their ancestors: the product of a people who would not die; warriors through and through.

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APPENDIX A
A NOTE ON METHODS

About my methods

The research project featured in this book incorporates the use of triangulation, or the use of multiple methods to study a single problem, including case study, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and archival research (Denzin, 1978; Janesick, 1998). A case study has been defined as an instance or class of events and is reflective of a “phenomenon of scientific interest...that the researcher chooses to study with the aim of developing theory (or ‘generic knowledge’) regarding the causes of similarities or differences among instances (cases) of that class of events” (George & Bennett, 2005, 17-18). However, case studies needn’t always be comparative across cases. For example, Platt (1992) presents a series of examples in which cases are chosen for their unique characteristics and in which the authors do not particularly focus on the generalizability dimensions of the research. The reason for choosing to focus less on generalizability and more on understanding the depth and nuances of the case is largely because the end result of case study research is not necessarily to replicate study findings (as may be the case when using other kinds of research methods). “The value of a case study is its uniqueness; consequently, reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here” (Janesick, 1998, p. 51). What makes case study research important is that when “phenomena are examined in more detail, they prove to exhibit ‘equifinality’, that is, they involve several explanatory paths, combinations, or sequences leading to the same outcome, and these paths may or may not have one or more variables in common” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 20). The research project reported in this book places an emphasis on understanding the individual motivations for engaging in resistance making

it a good fit for case study research and allows room for individuals to present multiple and varying reasons for why they chose to engage in their efforts.

This study specifically focuses on the experiences of American Indian students involved in activism at Mountain State University, a predominantly White university, from the spring of 2007 through the winter of 2008. Data was collected over seven years, from the spring of 2007 through the spring of 2014. Participant observation for this study took place during the 2007-2008 school years and included attending protests and activist information and planning sessions hosted by the students. Nearly 50 hours were spent in the field. With the permission of the students, I took notes during these meetings. These notes became field notes (copies of the notes were also provided to the secretary of the meetings to help the group document their efforts) or research memos.

It is important to note this study is inspired by two pilot studies conducted in the winter of 2008 and the fall of 2009. The study from the winter of 2008 explored the media portrayal of American Indian student protests at MSU during 2007-2008 while the study in 2009 explored the role of leadership in these protests. The previous projects revealed a stark difference in media reporting on the issues presented by the students and suggested a need for further research in this area. The second study, focused on understanding the role of leadership within social movements, suggested a need to further explore the effects of activism, during protest and after the students had left the university. This study was based on a Participatory Action Research approach in which American Indian student leaders and supporters at MSU were interviewed. This study allowed me to identify the students ultimately featured in this current study.

Participants.

For this current study, I interviewed eight individuals who emerged as leaders in the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014; five female, three male.⁵⁰ These leaders were identified through a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling conducted during the second pilot study. Because I had worked for several minority student serving programs at MSU during the time of the protests, I had some preexisting (albeit somewhat cursory) relationships with two of the students. I reached out to these students, both of whom had been involved in meeting with administrators to address their initial concerns with the powwow and the possible dissolution of NTPP, Leah and Gabby. These women invited me to attend their meetings (and allowed me to engage in participant observation) with other student activists. During those meetings, over time, I began to develop relationships with the students who consistently attended and began to organize and lead the group's efforts. My conversations with the students at those meetings led to the nomination and identification of others I should interview, when they heard about this research project.

Five of the activists interviewed were full-time students. All but one were graduate students during the time of activism, with one holding a dual role as both student and staff-turned-administrator for a Native-serving program. The other three interviewees were not students but former administrators. One worked in central

⁵⁰ Two additional activists participated in the 2009 pilot study but were unavailable for interview at the time of this study.

administration. Another held joint administrative, teaching and research positions. And the third person oversaw a Center dedicated to providing academic and personal support services for American Indian students. The interviews with administrators yielded important information on institutional history and supplemented information about the issues raised by the student protestors.

Interviews and archival research.

All interviews for this study were conducted during the fall of 2013 and spring of 2014. Interviews were designed to be in-depth and semi-structured and were audio-recorded, with the permission of each interlocutor, using a small digital recorder. The sum total of interviews yielded over 285 single-spaced pages of transcripts and over 13 hours of audio. These interviews provided critical context to better understand the motivating factors and results of engaging in activism.

In addition to in-depth interviewing, this study also incorporated the use of archival research and document collection. This part of the study occurred from 2007 through 2014 and includes university documents ranging from financial/merchandise sales records, promotional materials memos, memoranda of understanding, email correspondence, copies of promotional and recruitment materials as well as university public announcements and press releases. Student documents include email correspondence, protest materials (including copies of activist speeches and signs/protest), and screen shots of the student group's information blog. Finally I collected copies of all published media coverage of the protests and any other stories that

covered the specific incidents raised by the students in this study. This yielded over 500 pages of data.

The media reports and news stories regarding resistance efforts provided information both on how the media framed and understood the issues presented by the students as well as how the university interpreted and did or did not address their concerns. Official and/or public university documents provided important contextual information as to why, how, and to what end university administrators supported and/or executed particular actions, decisions, and policies. Materials produced by students, and their allies, provided information on why and how students connected the incidents and interpreted them as instances of injustice. Together, these documents added a rich layer of contextual detail by presenting information that allowed for the teasing out various themes related to the official, public actions and responses of the university as well as the tactics and strategies employed by those engaged in resistance efforts.

The sum total of collected data allowed me to address the research questions presented earlier by allowing me to tease out how the perceptions of (in)justice regarding the issues raised by the protestors and how they were publicly presented. Furthermore, through engaging in participant observation, in-depth interviewing and archival research, I was able to discern how and in what ways the actions of those engaged in resistance efforts were viewed as deviant, and whether there exist possible relationships between power and deviance, race and racism and other themes outlined throughout this book. Research findings were generated using a combined content and document analysis

approach. Interview data was analyzed using content analysis; data collected through archival research and participant observation was analyzed via document analysis.

A Reminder about My Theoretical Framing

This study is guided by the tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit), an offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and challenges mainstream notions of race, racism and racial power in U.S. society. Such projects are intended to simultaneously reject the belief that color-blindness to race will eliminate racism and instead situate race at the center of its critique (see chapter two). By gathering and centering the stories and experiences of marginalized peoples, CRT research offers an understanding of how race and racism influence the creation of law and policy, which in turn can serve to uphold a structure of inequality for historically, oppressed communities. In order to address struggles encountered by American Indians in educational institutions and the programs that are in place to uniquely serve these populations, Tribal Critical Race Theory must be included.

Tribal Critical Race Theory extends the work and mission of CRT scholars by focusing on the unique legal and political relationship American Indians hold in U.S. society and suggests colonization, not just racism, is endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005). TribalCrit reminds us that not only do Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for the political and racialized nature of their identity but that policies toward them have generally been rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain and the goal of assimilation (Brayboy, 2005). Moreover, as a result of their

dual identity, Indigenous peoples have a desire to protect and assert tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification (Brayboy, 2005). TribalCrit urges us to consider the epistemological, ontological, and axiological commitments of Indigenous peoples. From this we can see that the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens (Brayboy, 2005). According to Brayboy (2005), tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups (p. 429). For this reason, stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being (p. 430). And finally, TribalCrit, like its CRT predecessor, argues that theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways and encourages scholars to work toward social change (Brayboy, 2005).

In addition to TribalCrit, this study is also guided by Agenda Setting Theory (AST) or the idea that media does not necessarily shape attitudes about issues but, rather, it shapes public perceptions about what issues are important (Miller, 2002). In other words, the media may not tell viewers what to think but it can exert influence on what to think about by controlling how salient a topic becomes (Shaw, 1979; McCombs & Shaw, 1993). Taken together, TribalCrit and AST provide a sophisticated analytical lens by which to understand the events that transpired at Mountain State.

Both Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit seek particular types of stories, often referred to as counterstories, or testimonies, in order to understand the effects of law and

policy on the lives of marginalized peoples. Agenda Setting Theory also seeks stories but its focus is on understanding how media stories are presented, what values or associations are being promoted, and critically unpacking the associations created by media producers. Together the TribalCrit and AST provide tools to understand the powerful ways in which the media influences the issues facing marginalized communities as well as how power functions to promote the needs, rights, and interests of certain groups over others. Combining TribalCrit with AST underscores the influence and power of so-called mainstream media in promoting, upholding, and protecting particular beliefs and practices that disproportionately affect public perceptions of Indigenous peoples. The results of research that blend these theories is important for examining and unpacking the voices and media representation of Native peoples and may even aid in replacing historically racist and majoritarian framings with accurate, respectful, and relevant information.

The importance of counterstories in CRT/TribalCrit research.

It has been said that “it is nearly impossible for a researcher or educator to accurately assess a behavior as resistance without communicating with and learning from the student’s perspective and delving deeply into the historical and sociopolitical context that formed the behavior” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 321). Rubin and Rubin (2005) echo this sentiment and explain that qualitative interviewing projects are especially good at describing social and political processes (how and why things change), can help us fill in historical blanks, and allow researchers to delve into important personal issues (p. 3). One of the important functions of voice and stories in Critical Race Theory

(CRT) scholarship, which I outlined in chapter two, is to counteract the stories of the dominant group (Delgado, 1989; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). The counterstories shared in this study are grounded in data obtained through hours of participant observation, interviews and through information gleaned from their personal notes, email, and other personally authored documents provided to me.

Since the dominant group tells stories that are designed to “remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural” (Delgado, 1989, p. 240), collecting stories of marginalized peoples can serve to guide oppressed communities in learning to trust their own senses, feelings and experiences—to give them authority even and especially in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality (Lawrence, 1995). Chase (2003) makes a similar argument for utilizing interviews as a way to elicit stories that can be blended into narratives that demonstrate particular social meanings. For example, she argues that by “analyzing the complex process of narration in specific instances, we learn about the kinds of narratives that are possible for certain groups of people, and we learn about the cultural world that makes their particular narratives possible—and problematic—in certain ways. While there is room for interviewing as a viable research method within an Indigenous research methodology, eliciting stories through individual or group interviews is more than just seeking out (counter)stories; it is about exploring and building relationships between people, place, and space.

Because this project asks participants to reflect on their experiences and motivating factors for engaging in resistance efforts, interviews are especially effective.

Interviews allow interlocutors to describe important social and political processes (i.e. how and why things change) and to delve into important personal issues; they also help fill in important historical blanks (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Since the dominant group (i.e. university fans and administrators) often tells stories that are designed to “remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural,” interviews provided participants in this study an important platform to tell their own counterstory (Delgado, 1992, p. 240). Collecting stories and experiences of marginalized and minoritized communities serves to honor their authority as a people and allows for the creation of a counternarrative to the one being promoted by majoritarian storytellers. These counterstories create fissures and raise questions about the narrative of the university that claims to be committed to honoring the education and cultural beliefs of American Indian peoples. Because truth and justice operate very much like a gem with many facets, shining differently depending on where you stand and the angle from which you view the story, creating a counterstory through media analysis and research interviews serve as but one way to foment a space of insurgency that counteracts or challenges the dominant story (Bell, 1995; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2002). Through analyzing the complex process of narration in specific instances, we can learn about the kinds of narratives that are possible for certain groups of people and about what makes their particular narratives possible (Chase, 2003).

Including Indigenous worldviews in interpreting research data.

It is important to note that the research reported in this book is not simply based from written texts or documents but is actually the result of the voices and experiences American Indians shared with journalists and with me, as researcher. Many of those interviewed expressed concern that this research project should have some sort of useful purpose beyond simply helping me meet graduation criteria (a request that echoed the requirements of CRT and TribalCrit research). They wanted to know that the information gathered would be shared and applied with other groups who found themselves in similar struggles. Moreover, not all those who agreed to be interviewed did so easily or without suspicion. Leah met my initial request for an interview with hostility—questioning how I would directly benefit from the information as well as indicating an overall wariness in having to revisit her painful experiences at the university. I responded by acknowledging that I, too, would be suspicious. That I was not trying to engage any of them in painful conversations out of a desire to further myself professionally and academically but out of a desire to better understand what happened at MSU. I explained that the information gathered would only be shared with others who might be interested in these issues and that I would make every effort to share relevant information with other Native students who found themselves similarly struggling.

However it was not until I explained that I had been invited by some of the activists to write about this topic (I will explain more about this shortly) and collaborated with two members of the activist group, who happened to be a trusted friends of hers that she began to seriously consider my request. I explained that her friends and I had had extensive conversations about what kind of research questions would be the most useful

to ask and what kind of information they believed would help future Native students facing similar struggles. She requested that I fly out to interview her in her own tribal community. That I get to know where she comes from (the land), who she comes from (her people) and what issues her community is facing (in terms of education and leadership). She explained that without knowing these things, I couldn't fully understand her own motivations and vested interest in the issues she was arguing for during her time at MSU. I agreed to fly out.

During that trip Leah invited me to attend her tribe's powwow and asked me to help cook. She took me around her community (which spans two countries) and introduced me to tribal leaders, elders, and relatives. This was a subtle reminder that I would not only be accountable in my research to her, but that her people also knew what I was writing about, and that I would also be accountable to them. At the end of the visit, she requested that I remain working closely with all of the Indigenous student leaders, including their perspectives in my analysis, as any type of project that seeks to understand the experiences of American Indians immediately requires a knowledge of the historical, social and even spiritual context they come from. This was a subtle reminder that in order to understand Indigenous issues, an inherent Indigenous perspective and way of understanding the world is needed—something which I, as a woman of Puerto Rican and Hungarian descent, who was raised in a Latino household, clearly do not possess.

Leah's words were important in reminding me that including Indigenous worldviews in research is about pushing back against colonizing research practices and promoting the social justice component of CRT that the original visionaries of the theory

were so adamant about. Since social change cannot simply come from simply changing the ways we talk about things; we must also use our resources and research to actively pursue justice for socially and economically disenfranchised groups. A TribalCrit methodology is important in gaining control of the research process for decolonization purposes and for promoting sovereignty and self-determination. Such an approach centralizes both the racial and political issues facing Indigenous peoples. Moreover, supplementing CRT and TribalCrit—both research methodologies that support interpretivist research—with AST—a typically positivist approach—is important and intentional as it promotes a research approach that maximizes the type of data that can be collected. This encourages data triangulation, or the use of multiple methods to study a single problem. For example data collection methods such as case study, document analysis (through archival research), and in-depth interviewing all become viable research tools in seeking to study a research topic. Combining TribalCrit with AST underscores the importance of unpacking the role the media plays in promoting and upholding racist beliefs and practices that may be disproportionately affecting public perceptions of Indigenous peoples. Finally, the results of research that blends these theories is important in examining and unpacking the media representation of Native peoples and can serve an important function in helping to replace racist stereotypes with accurate, respectful and relevant information—which can be an important part of promoting cultural sovereignty.

Still it is important to note critiques of CRT, TribalCrit, and AST as they raise important considerations for research under the umbrella of these theories, highlighting

potential blind spots. Critiques of research that relies exclusively on storytelling reminds scholars to triangulate data and information. With foundations in law and education, TribalCrit seeks to ensure research is contextual, culturally relevant, appropriate, and that it prioritizes the needs, voices, and interests of Indigenous communities. The primary goal of TribalCrit research is to honor and advance the self-determination and sovereign rights of Indigenous peoples; however, this does not mean the researcher and academic institution cannot benefit from research. Rather, it means that research must be engaged with respect and with the intention of being useful and relevant to the peoples it is seeking to understand (Brayboy, 2005; Deloria, 1969; Smith, 1999). On the other hand, AST explores how media influences individuals' opinion formation about particular subjects. With foundations in communication and political science research, AST examines how media practices can serve to advance the interests of powerful political and social leaders by promoting or upholding particular assumptions about a particular group. Unlike TribalCrit research, AST research has not typically been used to advance social justice goals. However, its focus on prioritizing understanding of how the media influences the thoughts and opinions of those who consume it can serve to advance a social justice function when it is paired with TribalCrit.

And Finally...Regarding My Positionality as Researcher

I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to address my positionality as it relates to this research topic. I was enrolled from 2001-2007 at MSU and remained there, working in a professional capacity, until December of 2008. As an undergraduate student, I did not initially have much contact with American Indians on campus. It was

not until much later that I realized this was likely due to the fact there were so few enrolled and employed during my time there. Upon acceptance into the master's program in communication in 2005, I was invited to work as a research assistant for an award-winning campus Center dedicated to improving the academic experiences of students of color. It was through this opportunity that I began to interact regularly with American Indian peers and other Indigenous faculty and staff. This was because the Center offered important support services for students of color on campus, including participants in the Native Teacher Preparation Program.

Unfortunately the university stopped funding the Center shortly after I began working for it. I was then offered an opportunity to work exclusively with/for the Native Teacher Preparation Program, which I welcomed. This experience was also cut short. In a matter of months, the university lost the key Native faculty member responsible for the creation and success of the program and subsequently returned recently awarded federal grant monies (over \$2 million) to continue running the program. The decision rendered the program defunct and led to a loss of employment for most of its employees – including some of the few remaining American Indians employed by the university. American Indian students were not alone in their disbelief at this decision. I, too, found myself startled and confused. Like them, I did not understand why the university was shutting down important award winning research Center's and nationally acclaimed programs.

After this I continued advocating and supporting efforts to protect the rights and programs of minoritized students but ultimately, like the students in this study, I left a

year later. I could not bear to remain at the university any longer and left Mountain State at a time when its administrators continued to refer to staff and faculty of color in terms of ownership and domination. I was never able to forget the response one high-level administrator provided when he was asked why MSU had failed to retain key Indian-serving faculty and staff:

You've got to be fair– it's hard to hire *these kinds of people*...Once minorities are hired, administrators often have difficulty keeping them[...]If they come here and are successful, other universities see that [and try to recruit them]– *they're hot property* (McConkie, 2007, emphasis mine).

Having to face the outcome of these types of attitudes and they're related decisions exhausted me and began to instill a deep sense of pessimistic cynicism I was not entirely comfortable with. Although I loved the students I served and the programs I worked for, I left MSU because I was afraid of the kind of permanent damage such an attitude could have – that my career as a social justice advocate would end before it had a chance to truly blossom. Like the students in this study, these experiences inspired me to move away from an environment that had become and instead locate my advocacy and academic growth elsewhere. They also served as the motivation for the current project.

As you read this book bear in in mind that although these decisions have forever altered my attitude toward the policies and actions of public institutions of higher learning, my alma mater continues to hold a very special place in my heart. During my time there, it was home to scholars and student activists who invited and joined me to critically examine and understand the social implications of the incidents recounted in

this project. I cannot escape the fact that were it not for the use of the Indigenous athletic nickname, in combination with my professional appointment as a research assistant in a Center that promoted social justice oriented education research and disciplined critical thinking skills, I may not have come to fully appreciate the inherent irony in what educational institutions profess (i.e. honor and support Indigenous peoples) and the behaviors and abhorrent actions they promote and condone (e.g. shutting down beneficial Indian-serving programs and services).

To be sure, although I have respect for my alma mater, the degrees earned and time spent there do not inspire me to refer to myself by the name of the school's athletic nickname. Unlike many of my non-American Indian peers – many of whom are avid fans of the university's athletic teams, I could never participate in treating peoples, and their icons and garments, as props. As a woman born to a Puerto Rican mother and a Hungarian/Yugoslavian father and raised by my mother and Salvadoran stepfather, I have lived a lifetime of never being able to “choose” when I get to take on the role of Latina. For this identity, and the attitudes associated with it, follows me wherever I go. It is saturated deep inside me and emanates from my speech, thoughts, dark hair and eyes. It also influences how others see and treat me.

My life experiences have taught me ethnic and racial identities are not a cloak or costume to be taken up and worn whenever a person wants to participate in collective acts of fandom or promote die-hard demonstrations of institutional pride, to be forgotten or discarded as soon as the season has ended. Such behaviors, witnessed at MSU, appeared to be based on the erroneous assumption that the university, with its decision to

promote a particular image of Indigeneity, can do no wrong and fail to interrogate the morality of the university's actions and its subsequent treatment of the peoples it claims to be honoring. Walking the hills of the campus, I would often gaze at the drum and feather logos brazenly displayed around me and empathize with my American Indian brothers and sisters. Although I was not the target of such depictions, it was not so difficult to comprehend the pain of being (re)presented in a manner that is oversimplified, steeped in ignorance and stereotypes, frozen in history, and that contributes to the commodification of human life. My peoples, too, have had to face our own battles against destructive colonizing practices.

As you can see, I often turn to my personal experiences with racism, discrimination and silencing to empathize and try to attain some level of understanding of the experiences of other marginalized peoples. However, no amount of empathy can help me escape from the fact that I am not American Indian. For many of the participants in this study, their efforts held personal significance because the situations they faced undermined their very existence – as current and aspiring scholars, as members of their Indigenous nations, and as living breathing humans. This is an important element I may not ever be able to fully grasp.

The relationships I developed with American Indian students through both the Center and the Native Teaching Program led to a number of invitations to meetings and events where students gathered to make sense of what was happening on campus. These meetings were comprised mostly of Native students with less than a handful of non-Native student allies. One day, when the group gathered to plan their strategy, we took a

break to enjoy some food and talk about our lives and future goals. I mentioned I was flirting with the idea of pursuing a PhD in social justice. This admission was met by one student jokingly requesting I focus my dissertation on their present efforts. The group laughed, agreeing that there would be enough material to write several dissertations, and went on to talk about other things.

Over the next few months I was approached by different members of the group who were curious about whether I was going to follow through with graduate school. Several stated that since none of them planned on pursuing a Ph.D. in the next coming years (although a number of them are now actively pursuing enrollment in doctoral programs!), I really ought to consider writing about the issues they were facing. It should be documented in detail, they reasoned, and submitted to the public record since the media wasn't presently serving as a reliable or comprehensive avenue for them to get their full story out. Why not do it as a dissertation study?

Furthermore, I was told, I had the language to talk about it in ways that conveyed the importance of the issues for the students so didn't I feel some kind of responsibility for helping to further these conversations? I admit these conversations were intimidating and led me to seriously reconsider my role in the group. I had been invited to participate in their discussions and entrusted to assist in documenting their efforts through my note-taking but was it my place, as a non-Native woman, to tell this story? The conversations with the students suggested this is the wrong question to become preoccupied with. I had been *asked* to tell the story, they reminded me, now it was time to learn how to tell the story in a responsible and meaningful way. With their blessing I applied to graduate

school for the second time – this time with a mission in mind. But I never fully left them. Over the years we maintained our relationship. Getting together at various social and tribal functions to reflect on what had transpired at MSU, how they were still experiencing the effects of their time there, what we were working on now, and how I was fulfilling my goal of advancing social justice struggles. Most importantly, they wanted to know, was I continuing to serve Indian country?

APPENDIX B
SPECIAL THANKS

No work of this magnitude can ever be accomplished without the help and support of many. With gratitude, I dedicate this work to the myriad individuals who shared their time, words, and talents with me. My memory is not always sufficient in recalling the kindness of all those who have supported me. Thus I offer my sincerest apologies to those I may have forgotten to list below. Be assured your compassion and timeless advice was appreciated, kept me grounded and engaged. I remain indebted to you.

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To the voices featured in this study: this work captures but a small grain of the magnitude of your efforts. I hope I have done them/you justice and apologize for any pain or tears you've endured in the process. It was an honor to stand beside you and learn with/from you. Never have I known such fierce warriors in the fight for social justice and education parity. Your willingness to risk it all for the future of others is humbling. Thank you for inviting me into your lives and entrusting me with your stories. As many of you reminded me: we take so that others may have. May future generations benefit from the experiences and stories shared in this work; may the sacrifice(s) you've made

serve to improve the services and experiences of others so that they may suffer less. Mil gracias. You are braver than I've ever been.

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