

Title of Session: American Indian Studies

Moderator: Michael Wilson

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MichaelDW: Hello Hannah.

HannahI: I am very excited about this discussion!

MichaelDW: Good!

MichaelDW: Let's wait a minute to see if anyone else wants to logon.

GlynnN joined the room.

MichaelDW: Hello Glynn. Welcome.

GlynnN: hi...how are you?

MichaelDW: I'm doing great. Normally, our friend BJ Berquist, who is on staff with Tapped In, sends out a message. She doesn't appear to be online tonight.

GlynnN: oh, that is how that works

MichaelDW: The way this has worked is that we begin with introductions and then any questions about Indian related issues you might have. Then we look at the topic for the night. Tonight it's Manifest Destiny.

MichaelDW: My name is Michael Wilson. I'm a member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. I am an associate professor at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

HannahI: I'm Hannah, a senior at NYU and a student teacher in a 3rd grade inclusion class in Brooklyn. I am also half Makah, and spent the first few years of my life on the Reservation.

MichaelDW: That's great, Hannah. Congratulations on almost being done.

HannahI: thanks!

GlynnN: oh neat...I am originally from Milwaukee Wisconsin. I moved to Houston Texas when I was 6 years old. All of my family still lives there. I am also a senior. I am at the University of Houston. This is my last semester.

MichaelDW: Congratulations to you too, Glynn. Teaching is a very rewarding profession.

MichaelDW: Not in terms of money, usually, but in lots of other ways.

GlynnN: Thanks. I was just hoping to sit in on a conversation and learn a few things but I see this isn't a peak time, lol.

MichaelDW: I was writing to someone about that today. There are 21 users online right now nationally.

MichaelDW: That doesn't seem like very many. When I logon to Yahoo chat, I see thousands.

GlynnN: Yeah! I know...

GlynnN: crazy...

MichaelDW: I wrote a note to someone at the BIA to see if more reservation and BIA schools would be interested in Tapped In, esp. since it's free.

MichaelDW: Do you know what BIA stands for?

GlynnN: No, I sure don't.

MichaelDW: Some thing it stands for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but others say it stands for Boss Indians Around (that's a joke).

GlynnN: LOL

MichaelDW: Any questions either of you have?

MichaelDW: Hearing none, I would direct you to the following web page:
<http://www.uwm.edu/~michael/tappedin/manifestdestiny.htm>

MichaelDW: You will probably have to use Internet Explorer.

MichaelDW: Let me know when you get the web page to come up.

GlynnN: Not really but since I have you, I guess I can think of a few. You don't really hear much in U.S. media about what is going on with Native Americans. What are the most current issues right now? The hot topics.

MichaelDW: The most visible topic remains Indian gaming.

GlynnN: well can you elaborate on Indian gaming

MichaelDW: Do you hear much about Indian gaming in NYC?

MichaelDW: In New York, it's been very interesting, because the Haudenosaunee have been through many aspects of it.

MichaelDW: At Akwesasne, for instance, a Mohawk reservation, a fair amount of violence occurred when individuals operated their own gaming places.

GlynnN: No...I'm in Texas and it seems like everyone tries to act like everything is just fine which I know isn't completely the case.

MichaelDW: Texas has been haunted by the Abramoff fiasco with regard to gaming.

MichaelDW: I think when there's so much money at stake and so much being part of the political landscape, it becomes a huge issue.

GlynnN: Yeah, that usually opens up the door for issues when other people want a piece of the cut.

MichaelDW: That's very true.

GlynnN: or get greedy

MichaelDW: There are also sovereignty issues when tribes believe they have the right to operate gaming places, but the state says no. I believe Texas closed one down.

HannahI: I hadn't heard about that.

MichaelDW: I can't remember the name of it . . . Tigua?

MichaelDW: In any case, tribes are always asserting their independence, not just with gaming, and state governments resist that.

GlynnN: they just want more from the casinos, lol

GlynnN: the government that is

HannahI: Whaling has been an issue for my tribe that falls under that category.

MichaelDW: Here in Wisconsin, the state and city governments get many millions from the tribes.

GlynnN: wow

GlynnN: and what right do they believe they have to that money?

MichaelDW: That's right. In the upper Northwest, the whaling issue pit two groups that normally are allies: the environmentalists and Indians.

HannahI: Not to mention discord within the tribe.

MichaelDW: It's part of federal law, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Tribes must negotiate compact agreements with the states.

MichaelDW: Yes, I understand that some do not believe it's right to hunt whales since it hasn't been done in such a long time and it's unclear if it's being done properly.

HannahI: It is still an issue that I struggle with -- I feel allied to both sides of the debate.

MichaelDW: Yes, I can imagine. I can really see both sides.

MichaelDW: For educators, I think it's important to students to know that Indian people, like any other culture or church, continue to struggle with the past traditions and present realities.

HannahI: As a teacher in New York, my biggest struggle is to familiarize my students with the idea that there are STILL Indians.

GlynnN: It is amazing to me how much culture has been lost in so many places.

HannahI: It wasn't unexpected, but the lack of a Native presence in this city is unsettling.

MichaelDW: I remember when I first moved to NY to go to graduate school, I wasn't sure I would see any Indians. But I certainly did meet many, who are now lifelong friends.

HannahI: I suppose it is a lack of modern presence within the curriculum, to be more precise.

MichaelDW: There are a few of my tribal members who live in Houston, but not that many, I imagine.

MichaelDW: Or the belief in the old idea of the Vanishing Race.

HannahI: The Children's literature usually works only to compound the misconceptions as well.

MichaelDW: Sometimes, it does, you are right!

GlynnN: So many cultures have lost their identity here in this country and a few by force.

MichaelDW: There really are two fronts to native struggle: cultural and political, or lifeways and freedom.

GlynnN: what does the political aspect consist of?

MichaelDW: In this sense, native people are different than other "minority" groups because many reservations assert a kind of national independence.

MichaelDW: It may seem kind of strange these days, but you will see signs going into reservations that say "Onondaga Nation Territory" or "Oneida Nation."

GlynnN: Yeah, I have noticed that

MichaelDW: In terms of federal law, this independence is recognized to a very large degree.

GlynnN: I even visited a website that spoke in terms of nations

MichaelDW: In addition to that, there are many Indians who live off reservations and expect the normal recourse to Civil Rights, &c.

HannahI: Can you elaborate on that?

MichaelDW: Yes, Indians who live in cities, for instance, live according to the laws and enjoy the rights of all other citizens. But on the reservation, they have a different status, in terms of taxes, for instance.

GlynnN: Interesting. I didn't know that.

MichaelDW: If you are an American Indian running a business on your own reservation, you are not subject to state taxes. (as an example)

GlynnN: well, that is the least the government can do, lol

GlynnN: in my opinion...

MichaelDW: Even so, all Indians who are enrolled members of federally recognized tribes are wards of the federal government, no matter where they live.

HannahI: How does the tax situation, then, affect the reservation schools?

MichaelDW: Yes, they still have to pay federal taxes. But the tax breaks have allowed, in the past, tribes to make money by selling cheaper cigarettes and gasoline. I think that might have changed now, though.

HannahI: I had no idea that Indians were considered wards of the state.

MichaelDW: Most reservation schools are funded by federal dollars. It is unclear whether education is part of the federal "trust responsibility," but federal money is often the source. And now, gaming money supplements education as well, and such things as health care, the police force, &c.

MichaelDW: Yes, that is part of the paternalistic trade off: Indians can have gaming, but within that same legal structure, they remain wards.

MichaelDW: When one of my fellow Choctaws found out she was a ward, she turned in her tribal membership. I think there were other reasons as well.

GlynnN: Seems like a method to still have control over a group of people.

MichaelDW: So you can see how the struggle for political independence remains crucial for tribes.

HannahI: I am still somewhat shocked. I just had no idea. It's rather appalling.

MichaelDW: Yes, very much so. The structures of power exist in ways that allow a few tribes to do well with gaming, but many to remain quite poor.

HannahI: Is it also part of the trade-off then, the scholarships and grants that allow Indians to attend college?

HannahI: for cheaper, that is.

MichaelDW: The federal government no longer administers money for education. They send the money to the tribe, which then disperses it according to their own determinations.

MichaelDW: It's often not that much. My tribe has an 800 dollar a semester scholarship. It really helps, but it's by no means near what college costs, esp. these days.

HannahI: That is very true.

MichaelDW: I say "my tribe." I should say, "tribal members get 800 dollars a semester."

MichaelDW: I think the tribe could allocate more to education, but they do have so many other things to worry about, especially health care.

GlynnN: 800 bucks? yeah that helps but only slightly.

MichaelDW: There are other tribes, like the Wisconsin Oneida, who offer much more.

MichaelDW: They are able to do so because of gaming money.

MichaelDW: The last I heard, they were paying up to 20,000 a year for students.

MichaelDW: That's quite an investment, and in the next generation or so, they will have a very well educated tribe.

GlynnN: wow...that is a substantial amount of money

MichaelDW: I think that's a very smart use of gaming money, but I may be biased because I'm in the field of education.

MichaelDW: Not many tribes can do that, though.

HannahI: And for younger children, does it also hold that for Tribes doing well with gaming, the schools are better?

MichaelDW: They have their own elementary school that is shaped like a turtle if you look at it from above, like from an airplane.

HannahI: You're preaching to the choir -- I'm sure we're all biased a bit in that direction!

MichaelDW: They do an excellent job infusing culture into their curriculum.

GlynnN: definitely biased!

MichaelDW: It's true that they are fortunate to be near a large population that makes their gaming highly successful (Green Bay), but they also use their money very well, in my view.

HannahI: I really must study that more in depth. I feel it's very important to maintain a curriculum that is culturally relevant to the students.

HannahI: whatever the culture.

MichaelDW: I agree. They do a good job with that and with many other projects.

MichaelDW: That's right, Hannah.

MichaelDW: So the struggle really is on two fronts. The cultural struggle most people in American understand who have strong ethnic or religious ties. The political struggle is still kind of a mystery to most Americans.

HannahI: Especially for young children in tough situations, where the motivation to learn is so often dimmed.

MichaelDW: I often wonder, especially in high school, how students understand success.

HannahI: I think it's hard for "minority" children, when success in school is so often tied to being white.

MichaelDW: That's a very sad truth.

GlynnN: I agree

MichaelDW: That's why these kinds of schools are important, although some argue that they create divisions.

GlynnN: socioeconomics play a role in that as well

HannahI: I've just heard on the news about a city that is re-segregating their schools.

MichaelDW: I've met some Indian high school students who did realize that college was even a possibility.

GlynnN: schools are already segregated here

MichaelDW: Yes, I'm showing that to my students tomorrow -- I think it's in Indiana.

MichaelDW: Busing was so controversial.

HannahI: It's a chilling idea, especially due to the benefits that may come out of it.

HannahI: of segregating schools, I mean.

MichaelDW: I wonder if benefits will come out of it.

MichaelDW: I actually wonder if it will happen, because I think it's to occur in 2008, giving them plenty of time to back out.

GlynnN: I haven't heard of this

HannahI: I think stereotype threat is very real, and I can understand that as a motivation for official segregation

GlynnN: how are they segregating them? By race?

HannahI: yes, by race

GlynnN: wow...

MichaelDW: Yes, segregating into three racial schools.

HannahI: Latina, black, and white

MichaelDW: What if the Latino/a school does really well academically?

GlynnN: I'm going to do a google search on this when we get finished.

GlynnN: this is crazy..

GlynnN: how are they justifying this?

MichaelDW: I really wonder if they are going to go through with it.

HannahI: That would be an interesting result. It would bring up so many debates on the inherent abilities of the students v the environments they are in.

MichaelDW: They are saying that this is what students want.

MichaelDW: Here at UWM, a group of American Indian cohorts stay together through their four years in the School of Ed.

HannahI: There are also proven instances of segregated schools improving the academic performance of black males in particular.

HannahI: to play the Devil's advocate.

MichaelDW: There was some discussion of dispersing them to other cohorts, but I think the students will do better if they stay together. It's the same kind of issue.

MichaelDW: Of course, that only deepens the social and racial division in the country, which can't be a good thing.

HannahI: I feel the problem, however, is the bias inherent in the education system.

HannahI: And I agree to what you've just said, Michael.

GlynnN: yeah...me too

MichaelDW: I imagine that, like in my segregated hometown, that the black and Latino/a schools will not be nearly as well funded.

HannahI: A couple years ago a LGBT high school was opened here, as well.

GlynnN: LGBT?

MichaelDW: Well, this hour has gone by way too fast.

HannahI: Lesbian, gay bisex. transgender

GlynnN: oh...

HannahI: it certainly has!

MichaelDW: If you have any other question about issues, please email me or check in to Tapped In next Wednesday night.

MichaelDW: michael@uwm.edu

GlynnN: ok...thanks

GlynnN: we managed to get an hour done with only 3 people

HannahI: Thanks. I've learned something that will really stick with me tonight

MichaelDW: You two take care, and good luck with your degrees and your teaching.

GlynnN: thanks again

GlynnN: bye

MichaelDW: Night!