

**Title of Session:** American Indian Studies

**Moderator:** Michael Wilson

**Title of File:** 20060510amindian

**Date:** May 10, 2006

Room: American Indian Studies

**BJB2:** Robert, you're in the right place

**RobertHe:** Well I had meant to be here two other times, but life happens

**MichaelDW:** I'm having the hardest time working off my University server.

**DavidWe** joined the room.

**DavidWe** waves

**DavidWe:** Hi

**BJB2:** Michael, I keep telling people this is the last session FOR THIS SCHOOL YEAR. I am certainly hoping that you will be back in the fall?

**BJB2** waves hi to David

**BJB2:** Robert, the past discussions are or will be archived at [www.tappedin.org/transcripts](http://www.tappedin.org/transcripts)

**RobertHe:** thank you

**BJB2:** Michael has led some really fascinating discussions

**MichaelDW:** We will have to wait and see if I will do this in the fall. Maybe once a month.

JeffC joined the room.

**RobertHe:** This is 80% for assignment and 20% of total interest, and only reason 80% is deadline =o)

**DavidWe** smiles

**BJB2:** that sounds great, Michael

**DavidWe:** What's the deadline, Robert?

**BJB2** nods solemnly to Robert.

**DavidWe** . o O ( end of semester? )

**RobertHe**: Yes sir End of Semester

**MichaelDW**: Is this part of a class of some kind?

**BJB2**: let's officially start. Welcome to today's last American Indian Studies discussion for this school year.

**RobertHe**: but I could have chosen any subject, but American Indian Culture is one of my interests

**BJB2**: Our discussion leader is Michael Wilson. We usually start all discussions with introductions

**BJB2**: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In

**DavidWe**: I'm a teacher educator (math+technology) and a HelpDesk volunteer. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City

**BJB2** hopes Michael doesn't have too much trouble with the uni server

**RobertHe**: Hello, my name is Robert, working on my Masters at Midwestern State U, Wichita Falls, TX, Social studies with emphasis in political science.

**MichaelDW**: Michael Wilson, member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee.

**DavidWe** was just in Madison, Wisconsin last week

**MichaelDW**: After introductions, I ask if anyone has any questions about Indian issues.

**MichaelDW**: Let me know if you can bring up the following web page:  
<http://www.uwm.edu/~michael/tappedin/>

**DavidWe**: Got it

**MichaelDW**: As you scroll down under links, you should see the name "Iron Eyes Cody." Please click on that.

**RobertHe**: Thank you.. Iron Eyes Cody .check

**DavidWe** used to love that commercial

**MichaelDW:** If you click on his face, you will see the famous commercial. Real Audio player required.

**BJB2** hopes Michael isn't going to tell us something depressing.

**MichaelDW:** Tonight's topic is Playing Indian.

**DavidWe** wonders if he can ask a question

**MichaelDW:** Go right ahead.

**DavidWe:** How many Americans at present consider themselves "Indians"/Native Americans, etc.

**DavidWe:** ?

**MichaelDW:** Not too depressing, I hope. We've had some downers so far.

**MichaelDW:** I believe between 2 and 3 million.

**DavidWe** nods

**MichaelDW:** Race is such a strange thing. At what point does someone identify as Indian, how much "blood"?

**DavidWe:** Exactly!

**DavidWe** . o O ( quadroon, octaroon... )

**MichaelDW:** Some tribes use hypodescent, i.e., one drop. Most don't.

**DavidWe** . o O ( one drop? )

**RobertHe:** Is it true that the % of blood to be considered pure Indian is a lot lower than to be considered "black"?

**MichaelDW:** My own tribe uses hypodescent, so you see people with 1/256 Indian tribal cards.

**DavidWe:** Wow!

**MichaelDW:** I would guess a "pure Indian" would have a certificate of degree that says 4/4.

**DavidWe** . o O ( 8 great-grandparents, 16, great-great-grandparents.... )

**RobertHe:** wrong word, sorry, more as in to get gov Recognition for benefits or birth cert??

**DavidWe:** They actually use the fraction "1/256" on an identification card?

**MichaelDW:** I don't think the percentage matters. If one is to receive benefits from a tribe, I don't think you get more if you have more "blood" on your certificate.

**DavidWe** smiles

**MichaelDW:** I say "from the tribe," because many tribes make a lot of money on their own these days.

**MichaelDW:** Yes, the fractions can be quite outlandish.

**DavidWe:** Geez - it could be a math lesson!

**RobertHe:** Is it stereotypical to say most money is earned from casinos?

**DavidWe** would have guessed that casinos are providing a lot of funds

**MichaelDW:** You can't run for tribal chair or for councilperson, I don't think, with 1/256 "blood," but you can vote.

**MichaelDW:** Please keep in mind these fractions are bogus.

**DavidWe** smiles

**RobertHe:** please define bogus in this sense

**MichaelDW:** For a few tribes, gaming is a large source of income. For others, it might be mineral rights (Navajos), or grazing rights.

**MichaelDW:** There's an excellent article by David Beaulieu, "Curly Hair and Big Feet," which shows the corrupt science that determined "blood quantum" on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota.

**MichaelDW:** Scratching the skin, for instance, was supposed to indicate the degree of blood.

**DavidWe** smiles

**MichaelDW:** How the skin responded to scratching, that is.

**MichaelDW:** I think the new DNA evidence should be quite interesting with these questions.

**MichaelDW:** But fundamentally, it's a question whether tribes should aspire to nationhood based on "race."

**MichaelDW:** Race-based nationhood was originally an imposition by the United States. Whether we should keep it is another matter.

**DavidWe:** And before it was imposed by the US Government?

**MichaelDW:** Mostly language, I think. Also appearance, although white people often became part of tribes too.

**DavidWe** nods

**RobertHe:** but how many languages are becoming "lost"

**MichaelDW:** Question: What contemporary people want their nation to be based on race?

**DavidWe** . o O ( Some Israelis.... )

**RobertHe:** yes but Jews are of different race??!!

**DavidWe** . o O ( race/religion )

**DavidWe** isn't really sure

**MichaelDW:** Israel is to a large extent racial, but not 100 percent.

**MichaelDW:** How about Nazi Germany?

**RobertHe:** For evidence show the 13th tribe of Israel is in Africa

**MichaelDW:** How about the KKK?

**DavidWe:** Perversion of some of the ideas of eugenics popular in the first third of the 20th century

**RobertHe:** race is start, but then culture, beliefs and commonality???

**MichaelDW:** Race based nationhood is a dangerous concept, in my humble opinion.

**BJB2** agrees

**DavidWe** agrees and not always so HUMBLLY

**RobertHe:** and is historically war ridden nationhood

**MichaelDW:** At the same time, if you are a racially identifiable Indian, you will have felt powerful discrimination in this country.

**MichaelDW:** So, as Cornell West says, race matters.

**MichaelDW:** I really don't have any answer for this, whether tribes should aspire toward tribalism or toward contemporary nationhood -- political identity rather than racial.

**MichaelDW:** Did you play the video for the commercial?

**RobertHe:** I was unable to,. but I am 40, I remember the commercial

**MichaelDW:** Or perhaps you have already seen it.

**MichaelDW:** I criticized this commercial somewhat in my class, and one of my students was troubled by that because the commercial did a lot of good for the environment.

**DavidWe:** Why was the student troubled by your criticism?

**RobertHe:** well first I would like to ask .... what was your argument?

**RobertHe:** against

**MichaelDW:** I'm trying to send it here. Just a sec.

**MichaelDW:** I really don't have any answer for this, whether tribes should aspire toward tribalism or toward contemporary nationhood -- political identity rather than racial.

**RobertHe:** sorry,

**MichaelDW:** Thanks for your thoughtful note. The Iron Eyes Cody issue

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**MichaelDW:** Thanks for your thoughtful note. The Iron Eyes Cody issue

**MichaelDW:** one of those strange things that's not black and white, neither

**MichaelDW:** good nor bad.

**MichaelDW:** There's no question that many tribes have a very strong

**MichaelDW:** environmental ethic. The commercial uses this environmental

**MichaelDW:** ethic, almost like a prop, and combines it with the stereotype

**MichaelDW:** of the stoic Indian. If you can make an Indian cry, you've

**MichaelDW:** really done something terrible.

**MichaelDW:** Also, the commercial employs a man who plays the part

**MichaelDW:** of an Indian in buckskin, but who is not Indian himself. The

**MichaelDW:** commercial seems quite fake for this reason, especially with

**MichaelDW:** the history of how certain people have "played Indian" for

**MichaelDW:** for own benefit. Yet at the same time, this did not make

**MichaelDW:** Iron Eyes Cody a bad man. In fact, he worked on behalf

**MichaelDW:** of Indian people, raising scholarship money, as I recall.

**MichaelDW:** Finally, as you point out, the commercial had some important

**MichaelDW:** benefits for the environment. But the question is this: Could it

**MichaelDW:** have been done in a better way? I think the answer is yes.

**DavidWe:** Isn't that hypothetical?

**MichaelDW:** There you have it. There's something strange about a person who quotes himself.

**MichaelDW:** Hypothetical in what sense?

**DavidWe:** Well, of course it could have been done in a better way

**DavidWe** . o O ( "Weapons of Mass Destruction" )

**DavidWe:** Any number of historical events where information and honesty might have led to better outcomes, right?

**DavidWe** smiles

**MichaelDW:** Yes, I think so.

**MichaelDW:** This is interesting because many, many Americans' view of Indians was shaped by Iron Eyes Cody.

**MichaelDW:** Is it OK to use a stereotype if your outcomes are commendable?

**RobertHe:** Most today think of "Dances with Wolves" in the class room

**DavidWe** doesn't appreciate being stereotyped

**MichaelDW:** Why is the concept of the non-emotional Indian so prevalent in American society?

**RobertHe:** where my generation thought of the John Wayne version

**MichaelDW:** Statues of wooden Indians, westerns, Iron Eyes Cody.

**DavidWe** has done some reading...Leslie Marmon Silko, Sherman Alexie, etc.

**RobertHe:** is it a non-emotion or a love for mother earth?

**MichaelDW:** For all its faults, Dances with Wolves did show Indians laughing and enjoying themselves.

**DavidWe:** Who kept getting Lewis and Clark out of trouble on the westward trip?

**MichaelDW:** Yes, both stoicism and the environment. A little of both to make the emotional impact.

**MichaelDW:** That would be Sacajawea, but the idea of the ethnic sidekick is another topic for another day.

**RobertHe:** What movie do you feel best portrays American Indians

**RobertHe:** I must admit I did see one but don't remember the name, .. I will do a quick look in web

**MichaelDW:** You mean in terms of representation?

**RobertHe:** yes, one you would recommend for High School kids to know the truth?

**DavidWe** . o O ( THE truth is a challenging thing to come up with - often there are many truths )

**MichaelDW:** I think people like movies by Chris Eyre because he's a native director. But the very nature of movies (and literature, for that matter) is that they must be non-representational.

**MichaelDW:** If you were going to make a movie that represented a native family, it would involve people going to work, getting their children to school, getting them to the dentist, &c.

**MichaelDW:** But a movie about a family in a community isn't going to sell movie tickets.

**MichaelDW:** There must be dysfunction and conflict. So I don't think movies or most literature offers representation.

**MichaelDW:** I hope I'm not being a downer again, BJ.

**RobertHe:** you're not,

**RobertHe:** but that is true with any culture

**MichaelDW:** Yes, it is. Think about Frank McCourt's book and movie.

**MichaelDW:** So the question is: What do you want your high school kids to know about American Indians?

**RobertHe:** but good news or every day news is not found on the first page of the paper

**RobertHe:** Well I have plans on going to the Lawton and asking for a guest speaker

**MichaelDW:** Lawton?

**RobertHe:** Lawton OK

**MichaelDW:** The Comanche Nation now has a tribal college there. They might be helpful.

**RobertHe:** I have been in communication with them.

**MichaelDW:** But what is the goal of bringing an Indian speaker to class, or offering Indian issues?

**RobertHe:** Social Studies is about truth, not and that is not always in the History books

**MichaelDW:** I only ask because I'm in the dark about that one.

**RobertHe:** Me saying it to the kids, does not have as much value as a guest speaker

**MichaelDW:** I think my classes these days are fundamentally about equality.

**RobertHe:** the next best thing would be standing in Geronimo jail and telling the story

**MichaelDW:** But that is extremely problematic, because I don't often believe that myself.

**MichaelDW:** What would you want them to take away from a visit to that jail?

**RobertHe:** more of an introduction.

**RobertHe:** get them to ask questions

**MichaelDW:** I'll keep thinking on this one.

**RobertHe:** not what I want to teach them, but what I want to wake up in them to ask

**MichaelDW:** Well, the topic tonight was Playing Indian. I have a link on the web page under discussion images that is called Playing Indian.

**MichaelDW:** We don't have time to look at them, but if you're interested, they give a sort of chronology of the ways Americans used the image of the Indian for their own ends since the beginning of the country.

**RobertHe:** I remember my Sunday John Wayne days, asking my mom about those not being real Indians

**MichaelDW:** The Boston Tea Party, for instance.

**MichaelDW:** Later the Boy Scouts.

**MichaelDW:** Modern movies.

**MichaelDW:** The Men's Movement.

**MichaelDW:** &c.

**MichaelDW:** Any questions?

**RobertHe:** Do you believe the Boy Scouts has caused more harm or good in this category?

**DavidWe** smiles

**MichaelDW:** I don't think it's been helpful.

**DavidWe:** For perspectives on Native Americans or...?

**RobertHe:** other than being based on the book "Last of the last of the mohicans"

**MichaelDW:** No, not helpful for the concept of the Indians as something one can or should use to play on weekends.

**DavidWe:** What did you think of "Last of the Mohicans", Michael?

**DavidWe:** . o O ( same Hollywood stuff? )

**MichaelDW:** It was binary in its conception of Indians -- very good Indians and very bad Indians.

**DavidWe:** Like many historical figures

**MichaelDW:** This binary concept, by the way, was also fundamental to Dances with Wolves.

**MichaelDW:** Also, Last of the Mohicans played on the concept of the Vanishing Race, which made perfect sense to Cooper's readers, and I guess modern movie audiences.

**DavidWe:** nods

**RobertHe:** But isn't true no matter what, if it is for public interest written or media or movie it is good vs bad, or "big bang

**MichaelDW:** In my class, I tell students we aren't reading fiction about America's Indians, but American Indians. Often, they bring a lot of stereotypes to class with them, and we spend a fair amount of time looking at them critically.

**MichaelDW:** Robert, yes, that's old fashioned melodrama -- very good v. very bad. It sells, but it also sells the people short.

**MichaelDW:** Any other questions?

**RobertHe:** so in a high school class room what

**RobertHe:** would you want to be said to stay with them?

**BJB2:** Thanks so much for leading this series of discussions, Michael.

**DavidWe:** Thank you, Michael

**MichaelDW:** Honestly, that Indian people, their cultures, their religions, and their governments are absolutely equal to theirs.

**MichaelDW:** Thanks for your kind attention.

**RobertHe:** time is an enemy. Thank you

**DavidWe** smiles

**MichaelDW:** Night everyone.

**DavidWe:** Have a good summer, Michael. Hope we can catch up with you in the Fall

**DavidWe** waves