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**IN BETWEEN CULTURES: AMERICAN INDIANS IN MULTICULTURAL  
AMERICAN SOCIETY**

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## **I. Main Objectives**

The dissertation aims at exploring the status of present-day urban American Indian population in multicultural American society. The two goals of the study are

1. to analyze the multicultural context of American society and
2. to establish the particular standing of the urban Indian population.

Through the case study of the State of Wisconsin, and the formation of the Indian Community School in Milwaukee, I demonstrate how

1. the Indian community of the city exemplifies American Indians' participation in mainstream America and
2. how the establishment of a separate educational institution serves the purpose of being members of both the Indian and American cultures.
3. The dissertation also aims at filling the gap of the study of the nation's first urban intertribal school. The establishment of a separate institution to educate Indians, both literally and figuratively, proves that participation in mainstream culture should be voluntary and occasional, if wished for.

While the "Indian problem" is still a catch phrase with regard to the American Indian minority, achievements, such as the Milwaukee Indian presence are less widely publicized. Milwaukee Indian self-help organizations and the Indian Community School were set up by Indian people on their own and in their own terms.

My basic assumption is that by the establishment of an intertribal school, American Indians participate in American culture through a metaphorical revolving door. The school's operation verifies the need to preserve a cultural sense of Indianness, at the same time it provides the preparation for entering mainstream culture. The revolving door is a cultural tool to enable participation in both Indian and mainstream cultures. The metaphor expresses the

possibility to freely commute between two cultures, but fully be present in one at a time. The revolving door also implies constant mobility and the free choice of directions. With its continuous operation, it expresses the utilization of the door by communities, not only individuals, and the heterogeneity of those who wish to take advantage of this door.

This last factor is essential in exploring American Indian presence in multicultural America as from the Indian point of view, the kind of integration that many other minorities attempted to achieve has not been fully, although Indian activism has employed some of the Civil Rights techniques to voice their discontent regarding the Indian presence and importance in mainstream society.

## **II. Research**

There is a shortage of American Indian studies within the field of multiculturalism. Explanations to this lie in the low numerical presence and concept of the invisible minority imposed by mainstream society. The fact is thought provoking as no other minority have acquired the permanent position of being a declared “problem.” Research was carried out in 1999-2000 in Milwaukee. Data was collected at the University Manuscript Collections, hosted by the Golda Meir Library of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In addition, the Milwaukee Public Museum’s Native American Resource File was of invaluable assistance.

The Native American Resource File is a collection of newspaper articles, community meeting typescripts and minutes, correspondences among Indian people in various organizations, and historical documents on the Indian presence in Milwaukee and Wisconsin. Personal study with Professor Nancy Lurie assisted collecting information. Professor Lurie has not only been an eyewitness to the Milwaukee Indian presence but she also took active part in every one of the activities to further the Indian cause in the city and in the state. Her

relationship with the Indian community and personal acquaintance with Indian people helped establish connections with the Indian community. Weekly attendance at the Congregation of the Great Spirit, personal acquaintances with teachers and Board members of the Indian Community School, and visits to the school provided first-hand experience in Milwaukee's Indian community.

### **III. Results**

1. The difficulty the United States government faced with its Indian problem lies in a very distinct feature of American Indian culture, which is the lack of urge to be integrated in either white, and/or by extension, into the multicultural scene. The majority of American Indian sources would associate dominant culture with white culture. American Indian activism and radicalism did change this standpoint in a direction where Indian people want to participate in mainstream society but in the own terms.

2. When Indian people started to voice their concerns over their place in American society, mainstream culture reacted with the frequent application of stereotypes. Being declared the invisible minority, Indian people had to struggle with this invisibility, that is, the invisibility of the real American Indian. The issue was even more crucial in cities where sporadic population patterns, geographically and culturally varied groups, further complicated the matter. The mainstream tendency to associate American Indian populations with reservations, disregarding the growing number of urban Indian communities still permeates current Indian affairs. The creation of various urban Indian self-help organizations in Milwaukee had one common aim: to fight invisibility rooted in explicit, overt and covert stereotypes of the Indian population. While they chose different means, all of them achieved their desired goals in this matter.

3. The Milwaukee Indian self-help organizations' and the school's existence evoked non-Indian antagonism in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, eventually, time has become adequate to cooperate within and outside the Indian community. The particularity of the situation and the questionable nature of full-fledged multiculturalism lies in the fact that while the Milwaukee scene has been relatively peaceful except for some phases of the schools history, treaty rights controversies still permeate white-Indian relations, and not only in the State of Wisconsin. Explanation to antagonism and still existing anti-Indian feelings are rooted in the clashing value system of American and Indian cultures. Contrary to the mainstream ideal of individualism, Indian people tend to think in terms of group objectives which have formed the core of the Indian problem from the United States' point of view. Throughout white-Indian relations, the government intended to solve the Indian problem by dealing with individuals rather than tribal entities, while Indian people still defy denouncing their tribal ties.

4. If postethnic America is to materialize, there would be no need for a choice between mainstream and tribal affiliations, since no imposed cultural forces would pull any minority towards an identity they do not wish to affiliate with. Postethnicity, if it acknowledged the strength and importance of communities of descent should be the ideal case for the American Indian to participate in multicultural American society. The presently existing ethno-racial pentagon's Indigenous bloc wishes to maintain both communities of descent as well as construct new, voluntary affiliations. The stronger need of the former is expressed in the creation of the Indian Community School.

5. The operation of the Milwaukee Indian Community School is the base where young, urban dwelling Indian generations are learning to identify with their own cultures while, at the same time, being educated in how to participate in mainstream America. The school also offers students the choice to select either or both of these routes. The establishment of the Indian Community School and its curriculum work towards the preservation of a cultural

sense of Indianness, while, at the same time, it provides a safe ground from which to voluntarily enter mainstream culture.

6. The Indian Community School has developed into an institution which serves double functions. On the one hand, at the beginning of its operation, following the goals of other Indian organizations, it intended to undermine the application of the very same stereotypes that hindered its creation and operation for decades. By constructing a new curriculum and a culturally safe environment, ICS started to reinstall the pride of being Indian. Literally and figuratively the school became the revolving door not only separating cultures but also providing access to them. Another significant aspect of ICS's function is how it united the forces within the Indian community and how it managed to overcome the communication difficulties with non-Indian Milwaukeeans.

7. With a cooperative attitude of the Indian community and an awakening multicultural sense led to a compromise which secured not only the future of ICS, but also the acceptance of visible Indian presence in the city. The Indian Community School now is responsible for the education of American Indian generations and, through and by them, of non-Indian community members to attain postethnicity in the future.

#### IV. List of Publications

- Szathmári, Judit. "American Indian Organizations." *Régiók Szerepe, Versenyképessége az Európai Unióban. Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg Megyei Tudományos Közalapítvány Kuratóriuma Füzetei* 18. (2002): 70-2.
- . "Amerikai Indián Mozgalmak." *Diszciplínák Találkozása. Nyíregyházi Főiskola Doktorandusz Füzetek* 3. (2003): 45-52.
- . "The New Indian Country: The Effects of Relocation on Urban Indian Communities." *The 1950s. Hungarian Association of American Studies*. (2005): 211-15.
- . "Urban Adjustment: American Indian Self-Help Organizations in Milwaukee." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* (Fall 2002): 133-52.