Arguments for Integration in the Field of Education in Northern Michigan

By Lois Beardslee

The Setting

I am a Native American with advanced college training, specifically in the field of education. I live in northwest lower Michigan, a region especially well known for racial discrimination. For several years, I have been speaking and writing about the socioeconomic effects of racism, especially in education, upon Native Americans.

During recent years, I have increasingly encountered denial on the part of educational professionals in this region as a response to statistics on race. During 2002 I spent nine months reviewing and renewing my statistical sources for use in nonfiction essays and presentations.

Those statistics that I have been able to renew have been consistent with sources I used a decade ago, indicating very little progressive change in socioeconomic behavior toward Native Americans in the field of education. Significantly fewer statistics are available today than a decade ago, and even the quantity of statistics can be interpreted as a cultural indicator in terms of interracial relations. Sometimes problems can be kept out of sight, out of mind.

For the purposes of statistical presentation, I have created a fictional Native American female character, Jane Doe, or Jane Wawauzhukgiishkwe. Statistics about Jane are presented in comparison to the general population, which includes both sexes and all ethnic groups.

Considering Jane

On a nationwide scale, Jane is four times more likely to have a college education, specifically an associate's degree. She is half as likely to earn a bachelor's degree after completing an associate's degree. Jane is one fourth as likely to go on to graduate school and one seventieth as likely to earn a doctorate. Jane is twelve times more likely to be unemployed (Lynch, 201; Pavel, et al, 2002; Anonymous, 1997; Anonymous, 1999). Jane is ten times more likely to commit suicide. However, that likelihood increases significantly, if Jane obtains a college degree (Hodgkinson, et al., 1990).

If Jane lives on or close to a reservation, she is ten times more likely to receive a tribal job than a non-tribal job. If hired on the reservation, she is likely to receive ninety cents on the dollar compared to an off reservation job. If hired off of the reservation, Jane is likely to receive equal pay for equal work outside of the field of education (Hodgkinson, et al, 1990; Anonymous, 1999).

If hired in the field of education in the United States, Jane will receive seventy-one cents on the dollar compared to a non-Indian in the same position. Jane is three times more likely to work in a custodial/maintenance position than in a clerical, technical, or teaching position. If hired to teach in higher education, Jane is half as likely to receive a tenured position. Native Americans are least likely to have tenure of any ethnic group in higher education (Anonymous 1999).

If Jane obtains credentials in the field of higher education, she is, on a nationwide scale, twenty five times more likely to be professionally unemployed, compared to twelve times more likely in other professions. In addition, Native American staff and faculty in institutions of higher education tend to cluster in five states with the five highest Native American populations and then to cluster within regions and tribal communities in those states. The highest numbers of such employees are in Oklahoma and Arizona (Anonymous, 1999).

The majority of institutions hiring Native American staff are tribal junior colleges, most of which are scheduled to lose 100% of their federal funding under the Bush administration's proposed 2004 budget, potentially increasing underemployment for Native Americans with graduate degrees in the field of education. Further, the regional clustering of Native American employees in educational institutions with highest Native American en-

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rollment leads to counter-clustering of geographical areas with little or no Native American employment in the field of higher education.

The Reality in Michigan

This is especially true in the state of Michigan, where Native American employment in higher education not only clusters, but is already well below the national average. Michigan ranks ninth in the nation in terms of Native American population and ranks on the bottom in terms of Native American employment in higher education (Hodgkinson, et al, 1990).

In higher education in the state of Michigan, statistics begin to break down and become unavailable. There is a heavy reliance on word of mouth and speculation among Native American educators, writers, and activists. There appears to be only one full time Native American faculty member within Michigan's state university/college system, and the bulk of his duties includes strictly Native American related program work. He works at Michigan State University, in the southern third of the state. All other Native American academics work as coordinators or clerical staff in Native American student/studies/recruitment programs or in adjunct and part time capacities. A few have, over the years, appeared as guest speakers.

If Jane Wawauzhukgiishkwe obtains elementary or secondary teaching credentials in the state of Michigan, based upon an estimate of 200,000 teachers in the state, Jane is 200,000 times more likely to be unemployed than a non-Indian with equal or fewer credentials, if she does not relocate to one of three tribal schools. This number is further exacerbated by regional minority employment clustering within the public schools.

The highest number of minority teachers is located in urban areas in the southern third of the state. Jane is most likely to reside in the northern two thirds of the state, where Native American educational employment is zero and minority employment is rare. This void of Native American employees in northern Michigan's schools includes all employees, such as administrators, clerical and support staff, maintenance workers, and custodial personnel. The only exceptions are Title VII, or Indian Education program, employees.

There are approximately sixty Title VII, or Indian Education, Liaison/Coordinators in the state. About five of those individuals receive full time benefits and educational retirement. One receives a salary commensurate with teacher salaries within the district. All Title VII liaisons, coordinators, and tutors in the public schools are funded one hundred per cent by outside sources and grants. Fewer than half of these positions are filled by Native Americans.

Several federally funded Head Start programs exist on Michigan's Indian reservations, and these have a high percentage of Native American staff. Generally, Head Start positions pay less than equivalent public school and college employment, and positions are often temporary, part-time, without benefits, or pay minimum wage.

According to the Michigan State Board of Education, teaching staffs in the state's public schools are 89.3 per cent Caucasian (Michigan State Board of Education, 2000). Statistics are not available for further breakdown. At this point, numbers become available only by word of mouth within the community of Native American academics in the state. At three tribal schools, a handful of Native American teachers and aides work side by side with non-Indian teachers.

I have followed up on dozens of leads in regard to white teachers who are rumored to be partly of Native American "descent," but do not identify themselves as Indians. Outside of the tribal schools, I have been able to locate only two Native Americans who currently are teaching in public schools in the state of Michigan. One is located in the southern part of the lower peninsula. He is half black and half Indian.

A second Native American teacher works at an alternative school in the upper peninsula. The school is located within the historic area of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the second largest Indian tribe in the continental United States. Of the nine students enrolled in the alternative school, eight are Native American.

I have also located a secretary of mixed parentage who currently works in a public school district in northwest lower Michigan and is passing for white. She asks that her ethnic background not be revealed. There is also a handful of white teachers in the upper peninsula who are married to Native Americans and are therefore culturally linked to local Native American communities.

The National Picture

On a nationwide scale, eleven per cent of all Indians receive their bachelor's degrees in education, thirty four per cent get their master's degrees in education, and one half receive their doctorates in education (Hodgkins, et al, 2002). There are approximately fifty Native American educators residing in the state of Michigan who either currently have teaching licenses and endorsements or have let those credentials expire due to unemployment. They tend to cluster in northwest lower Michigan.

The socioeconomic repercussions of these numbers are arguable. Native Americans continue to have more college diplomas per capita than any other ethnic group in the state (Peer, 1990, 1999), and nationwide, except for Asians and whites (Hodgkins, et al, 2002). Dinesh D'Souza argues that this is because Asian Americans study harder than other ethnic groups (2001: 251-52). Glazer (2001: 94-95) puts the burden for this statistic upon whites, contending that Asians are often classified as "model minorities" as "allies" to whites.

In spite of leading the state in the number of college diplomas, Native American women continue to lead the state of Michigan in unemployment, followed by Native American men (Michigan State Board of Education, 1990, 2000). Continuing population growth in the northern two thirds of the state, along with increased use and exposure to mass media, has decreased the significance of rural isolation as a factor in high Native American unemployment. As well, more than half of Michigan's Native Americans now live in urban settings (Hodgkins, et al, 2002). Cultural modeling is a more likely factor.

From kindergarten through college and graduate school, young people in Michigan are exposed to a model of racial discrimination in hiring on the part of local and state public educational institutions. After going through the expense of education and long-term unfruitful job searches, many Native American college graduates are forced into the pragmatic reality of giving up on the non-tribal job market.

With the increased burdens of coming from lower economic homes, they simply don't have the time and resources to pursue hopeless job searches or to obtain two or three times the credentials of their non-Indian peers and follow up with legal procedures when discrimination occurs.

Examining Cause and Effect

Given the unbroken history of this model of racial inequality in hiring, it is difficult to discriminate between cause and effect. At what point does racial discrimination in educational hiring reflect the culture of the geographical area, and at what point does this model create and perpetu-

ate the cultural climate in which it flourishes? This model is mirrored in the general workplace (Lynch, 2001), although not as radically as it occurs in education itself.

In fact, education remains one of the least integrated professions in the United States, with regional pockets of excessively high racial discrimination. In Northern Michigan, areas with the highest rate of racial discrimination in educational hiring also coincide with areas with the highest density of Native Americans (and Native Americans with teaching credentials).

In essence, public schools and institutions of higher education in northern Michigan, and northwest lower Michigan in particular, are pockets of high discrimination against minorities in general and Native Americans in particular. With the exception of tribal jobs, these geographical areas also tend to be pockets of high racial discrimination in hiring in other professions, but on a lesser scale.

If one argues that behavior modeling in the schools is the culprit, then one must look for cultural factors outside of education to account for the discrepancy in discriminatory practices between educational institutions and other employers. One might argue that outside behavioral constructs, such as multicultural exposure, family, religion, social norms, or education, have somewhat better equipped the general population with the ability to integrate racially and socially than professional educators.

One must ask if professionals in our colleges of education are doing a sufficient job of teaching our teachers and exposing them to diversity, of screening out low performing non-minority education majors, or of placing minority graduates in equal jobs for equal pay. On the other hand, one might argue that, due to the open and vulnerable nature of public education as a whole, educators must be exceptionally cautious and receptive to the demands of the dominant culture over the needs of minorities.

On yet another hand, one might argue that full time jobs in public education are currently so desirable in terms of pay, benefits, and security, that educators must be exceptionally cautious and receptive to the demands of the dominant culture over the needs of minorities just to protect their own interests. Or, to quote the president of my local school board, who openly admits to moving to northwest lower Michigan to get away from people of color and associated school problems, "Why would we have to worry about lawsuits involving minorities? We've hardly got any to speak of."

Targeting the Victim

Remedial programs and potential solutions toward poor Native American achievement have traditionally targeted Native American students themselves (Dunham, et al, 1991; Edmo, et al, 1992; Melendez, 2001; Solomon, 1988), rather than the institutions that practice and model racial discrimination in hiring, frequently resulting in subsequent accompanying ethnic intimidation toward minority families.

One could argue that a first step toward providing better examples of social behavior in terms of racial discrimination would be to integrate the field of education itself. After all, school personnel often spend more waking hours with children than their own parents. By demonstrating to non-minority students that people of color can perform equally in the workplace and exposing them to different behavior models, integrated educational staff models might reduce discriminatory action by those students in adulthood. By demonstrating to minority students that people of color can actually achieve social and economic equality in a publicly sanctioned setting, integrated educational staff models might improve public school attendance and performance by minority students.

Solomon (1988) blamed non-achievement by minorities on a lack of appreciation for education. Ogbu (1986) suggested that minority students intentionally rejected academic success as part of a "culture of resistance," although he also acknowledged that they lost enthusiasm for schooling as part of an ongoing process of seeing no employment opportunities for their parents.

Yet Ortiz (1988), in a study of interaction between Hispanics and educators noted that teachers ranked themselves by the caliber of students that they taught, and ranked teachers who taught Hispanic children lower than other teachers, especially those who taught gifted students. Teachers resented having Hispanic students put into their classrooms and avoided eye contact with such students or refrained from asking them to read. Teachers and administrators were also distrustful when Hispanic students performed well on tests and responded with doubts and questioning rather than praise.

This, in turn, fostered resentment on the part of Hispanic students, because they were not given the benefit of the doubt and were not subject to the same standards of expectations (Ortiz, 1988). Were public school staffs integrated, and both students and adults provided with more appropriate role model interactions, these pitfalls could be avoided. Staff would learn from each other. Minority students would not have to look outside of education for hope of socioeconomic reward for academic achievement. They might develop an "appreciation" for education that models more culturally and economically appropriate sensibilities.

Operating from Fear

The most frequent objection I hear from educators in response to the notion of integrating educational staff is fear of anger and retaliation from local non-minorities. From a personal standpoint as a Native American female educator and as a parent, I've witnessed such retaliation. However, I believe that a culturally competent integrated staff can and should overcome community and individual objections to racial integration.

I've also experienced far greater discrimination within the field of education than outside of it, both in northwest lower Michigan and elsewhere. However, I've also experienced and witnessed so much more educational discrimination in northwest lower Michigan than elsewhere in the state or the country, that I've feared for the safety of my children every time I've put them on a school bus. There are no statistics to measure that fear and the impact it has on minority families, their educational goals, and their success in the workplace.

My own experiences as a minority seeking employment in the field of education, along with those of other Native Americans with teaching credentials in the state of Michigan, have not been documented, but echo statistics and studies quoted in this paper. My educational level is M.A. + 60, with an undergraduate degree from a highly competitive private college and a graduate degree and post-graduate work from a state university, with a 3.9 grade point average and a ninety-sixth percentile ranking on the National Teacher Exam.

I am an award winning children's author and illustrator. I have excellent references. I've developed educational materials for the state humanities council and contribute regularly to textbooks and children's literature for major publishers. I guest lecture in colleges, universities, and museums and on public radio throughout the Midwest. Yet my credentials remain suspect in northwest lower Michigan.

Returning home to the region with several years of experience in the field of education, I found myself unemployable as as teacher or even on a lower level as an aide

or a custodian. I worked as a part time substitute teacher for several districts for approximately six years.

Substitute teaching is usually a stepping stone for obtaining full time teaching employment. However, I was subject to repeated abuse, threats, assault, and mistrust on the part of administrators and other teachers, although I built a good rapport with students and parents over the years. In one case, I was told not to leave my classroom except to go to the bathroom, and to notify the building secretary in writing which hallway I would be walking down: "We have Indians in this building. You scare people."

One elementary school principal mistook me for a parent she had had a fight with and physically dragged me out of a classroom full of third graders, then threatened me if I complained to a supervisor. Another principal threatened to have my daughter taken away from me, because I had made a complaint. He continued to threaten me and stalked my nine-year-old daughter and me for several months. (No longer substitute teaching for the district, I asked the superintendent and members of the local school board to intervene for our safety, since my daughter was a student in that district. We were refused assistance, and I now drive my family to an adjacent school district.)

I once received a complaint from a teacher for whom I had not substituted, but whose family had lost their fishing rights to a local Indian tribe in a recent Supreme Court decision. She visibly balked when she saw me in charge of a classroom and, like the teachers in Ortiz's study, she refused to make eye contact with me or to talk with me throughout the day. She convinced her principal, without inquiry, to request that I no longer be sent to her school. The lack of benefit of the doubt I received as a minority professional mirrored the experiences of minority students in Ortiz's study.

Eventually, the stress took its toll, and I could not justify the time and expense of renewing my teaching certification. Out of fear of retaliation, I gave up seeking employment as a teacher. I finally obtained an interview for a position as a part time bus aide, a job for which a GED or a high school diploma was "preferred," but not required. However, upon entering the building, I was racially profiled, suspected of being a "Middle Eastern terrorist," and intercepted, saving the all-white staff and predominantly white student body (including my son) from imminent doom.

Discrimination

Like virtually all of my Native American peers in northwest lower Michigan, I continue to be told to look elsewhere for teaching employment. The most common response I receive to concerns about statistics that point to discriminatory hiring is, "Can't you just work in a tribal school?" The question belies an assumption that separate is, indeed, equal; or that it is acceptable that minority residents in northern Michigan be required to move elsewhere in search of equal employment opportunities at publicly funded institutions.

Age does not seem to be a factor in the discrimination. Young Native American teachers are even being turned away from substitute teaching, while local school districts continue to report shortages of substitutes and continue to hire white teachers with a fraction of the credentials of their Native American peers, often providing false information on the availability of qualified candidates to obtain teaching waivers from the state for preferred white candidates. (In one outstanding case, my local school district passed up several minority female applicants with language teaching certification to hire as a Spanish teacher a 21-year-old white male with no coursework in either Spanish or education; he did, however, have the minimum bachelor's degree required for the state waiver.)

This behavior pattern is counter to Bowen and Bok's contention that using race as a factor in college admissions helped erode segregation in students' lives after graduation (1988) or that minority admissions in institutions of higher education fostered "upward mobility of minority students into the mainstream and leadership of American life" (Bowen, et al, 1990).

Griggs (1987) argues that corporations have implemented programs to increase minority employment, because cultural sensitivity in the marketplace just makes good sense. While minorities continue to have higher unemployment than the general population in corporate America, the gap continues to be greater in the field of education.

This gap is unconscionable in specific geographic regions, such as northwest lower Michigan, where minority employment in public and higher education has never risen to more than a fraction of a per cent for brief periods of time, in spite of one of the highest densities of Native Americans in the nation. The Michigan Department of Education estimated the Native American population of the state as approximately 93,000 in 1990 (Hodgkinson, et al, 1990).

Not only does a gap exist, but it remains unacknowledged. In fact, while researching this paper, I shared my statistical findings with the librarian at the University Center of Northwestern Michigan College, who admitted her surprise, and that she had feared for her young sons' ability to obtain professional employment after college, due to assumptions about preferential treatment of minorities in educational institutions. Staff in Michigan's colleges and universities who continue to remain oblivious and unresponsive to racial discrepancies in education hiring legitimize illegal and damaging behavior for the educators and educational administrators who they are responsible for licensing.

Assessing Success

In a follow up study of two blocks of minority students graduating from college (Oberlin, 1976 and Yale, 1989), Bowen and Bok (1998) determined that encouraging minority enrollment in college had been a successful practice, because a significant number of the minority graduates went on to graduate school and were more likely to participate in civic and community activities (Lynch, 2001: 170).

I remember participating in Bowen and Bok's survey, noting at the time that the survey was flawed in that it did not address the issues of unemployment or underemployment by minority graduates, many of whom, like me, went on to graduate school because there were no professional jobs available to us. The survey did not have a place for comments, so I wrote comments in a margin on the form. As far as I know, I personally make up one hundred per cent of the Native American component of the graduating class of Oberlin College in 1976.

Bowen and Bok's survey results pertinent to Native Americans from Oberlin College were based on one individual — me — and the results of the study, subsequently published and well-publicized, did not take my comments or my actual employment history into consideration. In fact, my responses to the survey directly contradict published results. Lumping Native Americans together with other minorities is convenient for statisticians, but can be inappropriate, because Native Americans often cluster geographically and experience locally elevated levels of discrimination and segregation that go undocumented.

In 1976, Oberlin College only had about 1700 students, a body about the size of an average urban high school. The Native American component of Oberlin's stu-

dent body totaled five individuals, statistically half of Native Americans' representation in society as a whole. The entire minority block of students studied was quite small and represented a more affluent than normal minority base, including several children of college graduates, successful scholars, and government officials.

Bowen and Bok selectively reported partial data and used allegations of minority success as an argument for continuing to recruit minorities into college degree programs, in spite of a paucity of jobs for these minorities. This argument might keep classroom numbers swelled by influencing funding for minority recruitment and enrollment, yet in the long run, the greatest economic benefit will go to a predominance of non-minority instructors and staff in the field of higher education.

Bowen and Bok narrowed their study to successfully argue for their own economic security in the name of minority betterment. This abuse of power for system perpetuation is an issue that needs to be addressed in our institutions of higher education. More than public schools, institutions of higher education need to recruit their "customers."

Poor Social Sense

Recruiting minorities to purchase college diplomas that do not necessarily guarantee their usefulness in society makes good business sense for degree peddlers, but it makes poor social sense. Minority families pay into a system that rarely rewards them, often with borrowed funds, or borrowing against their own welfare in other ways, such as postponing preventive health care, in the hopes of providing their children with a better future.

The students themselves put in vast amounts of time and energy that could be used in gainful employment, and instead find that they are behind their less educated peers in terms of accrued job seniority and social security contributions. Even worse, they face denigration and emotional damage when they realize that the opportunities that were extended to them were not opportunities at all, but that they had been duped into being consumers in a racially unequal system of education into which they have no choice but to enroll their own children.

It is a common perception among Native Americans in northern Michigan that the gap between their average incomes and those of most public educators is so great, that public educators are unable to comprehend the level of sacrifice that lower-income minorities make to participate in higher education.

Modeling Integration

Modeling appropriate racial integration among staff on campus would be a step toward cultural competence for most colleges and universities. Expressing his concern that campuses are most guilty in perpetuating outdated thinking on diversity, Glazer points out that poor curriculum and programs as well as weak staffing underlie a disrespect for ethnic studies faculty and their work (2001: 88-91). Glazer points out the paucity of tenure track minority faculty at Michigan State University.

There is no plausible explanation for limiting Native Americans and other full time ethnic faculty to programs that are held in lower esteem or are poorly funded. To borrow from Glazer in another context, it is eerily reminiscent of the days of Jim Crow.

One of the greatest arguments for racial integration within the field of education is that the opposite side of the coin is racial discrimination in hiring, which is blatantly illegal. Arguments can be made against hiring in every individual case in which a Native American or any other minority or female applicant is passed up for a job in favor of a white male applicant; but no one can argue that all of the certified American Indian teachers in the state of Michigan have personality flaws that should keep them out of public schools, colleges, and universities, given equal or superior credentials.

Even if administrators in the field of education do not actively seek to discriminate against Native Americans and minorities, they appear to hold their academic accomplishments in lower esteem or as suspect. (While researching this paper, I applied for jobs at Northwestern Michigan College, a two-year institution which services a geographical area with one of the highest densities of Native Americans east of the Mississippi, and was deemed to be insufficiently qualified for clerical, custodial, or groundskeeping employment.) As with Hispanic students in Ortiz's study (1988), Native Americans with teaching credentials begin to feel animosity toward the educators and the system that treats them in such a dehumanizing fashion.

Cycle of Alienation

The cycle of alienation, distrust, and malfunction between Native Americans and public educators persists. Underemployed Native American educators cannot break this cycle. They have already put in unrewarded time and effort to become educated and certified, and they are forced into lower economic status, working more hours for less pay, by exclusion from non-Title VII educational employment. They have even fewer hours to volunteer toward solving the problem than white educators.

A greater share of the burden of breaking the cycle of racial discrimination in educational hiring in the state of Michigan needs to be put upon white educators and school boards who are often so afraid of people of color, that they break the law and falsify documentation to hire white applicants with significantly lower credentials and grade point averages. Cessation of discrimination is not happening voluntarily.

In view of the lack of enforcement of antidiscrimination laws, compliance may require civil litigation. There is ample documentation in favor of such effort. School boards might want to consider taking the preventive measure of termination of discrimination against minorities in the field of education, just because it makes good business sense.

With the advent of "school of choice" enough Native American parents are moving their children to schools with less discriminatory environments, that they are having an economic impact on smaller schools through the state and federal funding that follows their children. School districts increasingly look upon students and families as potential customers, rather than as a captive audience.

This market driven approach to "appeasing minorities" is a two-edged sword. In some districts closest to reservations, there are enough Indian students that economics is a factor. In others, there are so few minorities, that driving them out becomes a financial incentive, as all-white schools are perceived as superior schools, although nothing could be farther from the truth, if the schools are being staffed with less competent whites over minority applicants.

Perceived school quality is a strong factor in the residential real estate market. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of discrimination and poor social interaction training within geographical pockets. Such pockets do not exist in a completely isolated form, because people are mobile and cross geographical boundaries to shop, play, and work. They carry their discriminatory behavior across those boundaries with them and find themselves less culturally competent outside of a limited domain. As well, the very notion of expecting Native Americans to go elsewhere for

schooling or employment because they do not like an illegal and discriminatory behavior pattern in school is a crude continuation of the historic concept of Manifest Destiny.

Michigan's school board members and educators, who wouldn't dream of saying that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian," often behave as though the only good Indian is one who silently accepts the status quo and goes somewhere else. Native American leaders would contend that we've run out of "somewhere else."

Titles VII of the 1964 and 1972 Civil Rights Acts provided impetus for change in discrimination practices, but have remained unimplemented or overturned. Goldfield (2001) argues that labor unions (including the National Teacher Association and The American Federation of Teachers, an AFL-CIO affiliate) have done little to pick up the slack and have historically poor records of fighting for the rights of women and minorities.

Predominately White

The northern two thirds of the state of Michigan has for several generations been predominantly white, with small remaining pockets of linguistically related Woodland Indian groups, including Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), and Potawatomi, all of whom extend across the border into Canada and into neighboring states. Although there are large Native American populations in Michigan's upper peninsula, climate, geographical isolation by three of the Great Lakes, and loss of mining revenues have contributed to an economy that welcomes tribal revenues and programs. Racism is somewhat less harsh, but the field of education remains segregated for Native Americans outside of tribal programs.

The population of northwest lower Michigan is increasingly made up of white middle class families who have recently moved north to smaller cities, escaping from mixed race urban and suburban centers in the formerly heavily industrialized southern third of the state. As these small cities' populations have swelled, they have begun to attract a small number of non-Indian minorities.

The minority population of the region has skyrocketed, and even the American Indian population has increased. The Native American infant mortality rate is no longer greater than that of the rest of the population (Hodgkinson, 1990). Also, many first and second generation American Indians who fled the region for economic reasons have returned to the area for newly formed tribal jobs and services. Several of northern Michigan's Indian tribes have become federally recognized, although they still represent less than half of the Native American population of the state (Dunham, et al, 1991).

Educational institutions in northwest lower Michigan tend to align themselves with the culture of the region, which is especially segregated in nature. While "Jim Crow" laws mandating segregation are no longer legal, whites-only stores and restaurants persist in the region. As the face of racism takes on subtler features, these traditions remain more evident to the targeted racial groups than to the dominant population of the region.

Most whites, asked to identify such businesses locally, would be unable to do so. Most school or college administrators and board members, asked if they have a "whites only" staffing policy, would vehemently deny it, although the practice predominates in the region. The status quo is unquestionably endorsed with a passive tolerance that is comfortable to the region's white residents, just as segregated bus seating was acceptable in pre-boycott Montgomery, Alabama, during the early 1950s.

There are no minority educational professionals inside of the system suggesting alternatives to segregated staffing in northern Michigan's public schools. It is a closed loop of dysfunctional behavior modeling that mirrors learned patterns of domestic violence or substance abuse seen in smaller social units, like families.

Fear of Native Americans

Fears of Native American power in the region are exacerbated by the fact that area tribes have gained a small financial foothold through legalized gambling operations and subsequent business and human service investments. Indians do not appear as vulnerable as they did less than a generation ago, even though Indians still have the highest unemployment statewide.

Elevated segregation seems to be part of a regional knee jerk response to fears of power. Welfare myths abound, and high school counselors often refrain from considering Native American students for hundreds of local scholarships, on the assumption that "Indians go to school for free." Often, the local press contributes to myths and misunderstanding through incendiary language and selective content.

In northwest lower Michigan in particular, Native Americans are perceived to pose an even greater threat than other minority groups, due to on-going litigation and test cases involving previously unenforced treaty rights. Irrational fears abound that non-Indian people will be thrown off of their own homesteads, or that all natural resources will be gobbled up disproportionately. There is no distinction between Indians with regional tribal enrollment and those without; all are subject to the same prejudicial backlash against potential minority mobility away from traditional, submissive cultural and economic roles.

In September of 2002, local newspaper staff, affiliated with a former non-Indian fishing family filed a grievance with the northwest Michigan chapter of the ACLU, trying to discourage the use of Native American guest speakers in school and non-school activities on school premises, based upon a violation of the separation of church and state. Threatening to go to court, white members of the all-volunteer ACLU, including the husband of the president of that particular school board, bullied the small reservation-border school district into apologizing in the local paper and unoficially changing its "policy" on Native American guest speakers.

An argument was made by the northwest Michigan chapter of the ACLU that all Native American educational presence in the school is religious. It was based upon the statement that, "Native Americans draw no clear distinction between the spiritual and the secular and, therefore, the concept of 'separation of church and state' has only marginal relevance to their view of the world." The conclusion was drawn from *The Spirit World, Touching the Great Mystery*, a Time-Life American Indians Series book (1992), a source that would be unacceptable as a source for a term paper in an entry level junior college course, let alone in a federal courtroom.

Yet ACLU representatives and the local newspaper emphasized that they would sue over the issue, and that they sued only when they knew they had a sure win. A non-token Native American staff presence could have prevented the use of *Little Black Sambo*-quality literature as ethnic intimidation in the form of a legal threat used to keep Native Americans low profile and powerless in area schools.

The presence of Native Americans as trustworthy and competent role models would likely contribute to long-term community healing over issues like transfer of treaty-guaranteed resources. Whites only school staffing continues to have an economic base in northwest lower Michigan, with the status quo "supported" by poor quality alleged non-fiction library materials that continue to be produced for profit by non-Indian authors and publishers.

Problems with Literature

Children's literature, often the main source of multicultural education for educators themselves, continues to be a source of dehumanization of Native Americans in the public schools. Stilted language, loaded terms and content matter that suggests improvement of the North American status quo by the arrival of whites, and disproportional modeling of Native Americans as simple or less competent all promote a cultural tolerance of segregation in education and communities in general (Slapin and Seale, 1998).

Although Native American parents and community leaders in northern Michigan make efforts to educate librarians and teachers about particularly offensive books that come home with their children and offer alternative materials, librarians do not replace the offending materials. These same people would not dream of allowing titles such as *Little Black Sambo* in the classroom.

Mirroring the behavior noted by Ortiz (1988), regional educators continue to hold the skills and judgement of Native American parents as suspect. Such behavior on the part of public educators ends up regionally resuscitating racist and segregationist behaviors outside of the schools, contributing to a cycle that needs to be broken. In one large northwest lower Michigan school district, principals began instructing teachers to refrain from expending time and effort on teaching about Michigan's Indians, because the topic is not on the state achievement test.

If Native American schoolteachers were integrated into Michigan's classrooms, it would not always be necessary to stop teaching about other subjects to teach about Indians. Native American subject matter would be taught across the curriculum and shared with peers on a daily basis, during math, science, social studies, and language lessons, accomplishing a secondary goal of dislodging racist myths that past and present Native American cultures are simple… and the dependent racist notion that Indians themselves are less competent, less professional, less industrious, less valuable, even expendable to a successful American culture.

Airing Recommendations

In 1990, educators and Indian leaders gathered at the Michigan Pre-Conference to the White House Conference on Indian Education and made several recommendations for building quality schools for Indian students in the state of Michigan. Perhaps one of the most telling recommendations was the statement that, "School Districts and Tribal Communities must drive out fear." Concensus included increasing the number of Native American teachers and ongoing inservice for staff as "part of the normal work of the school" (Dunham, et al).

How can these goals be accomplished, if Michigan's public schools, colleges, and universities won't hire Native Americans? When are academics and public educators going to demonstrate to Michigan's young people that minorities have rights within the arena of publicly funded institutions to equal opportunities with equal pay for equal or superior academic achievements? That minorities can teach about non-minority subject matter and teach to non-minority students as competently as white educators? That Native Americans can make significant contributions to the culture and productivity of the region?

Asking Native American parents and educators to volunteer their time in schools in meaningless and decorative contexts in the name of cultural diversity, rather than participating as paid professionals, is asking them to model behaviors of subjugation as well as tolerance of segregation and denigration. It is a form of racial intimidation, and parents often are afraid to decline, because of the legal and psychological power that public educators have over them and their children; or they do so because they know it is the only option available to them to potentially provide a safer and more comfortable environment for their children.

Until educational institutions incorporate Native Americans as role models on equal socioeconomic footing, Native American students and parents will continue to feel like outsiders in Michigan's public schools. Michigan's schools and institutions of higher learning continue to model for its citizens a "Jim Crow" cultural pattern of discrimination and segregation that remains unsurpassed in other fields of employment.

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