

Multicultural History and the Native American

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I. Christian teachers should give adequate treatment to Native Americans.

Christian "Correctness"

Christian teachers must look beyond their own culture to give their students sympathetic insights into their multicultural communities. We are on this earth to proclaim God's message of salvation to all people. We must be sensitive to others who have a culture different from our own. Our cultural differences should not be a stumbling block in our teaching ministry. This will require a deliberate effort if we are to be truly successful. We may feel less secure and comfortable in a setting where we recognize other "social realities" than our traditional one, but our true security and comfort do not come from cultural traditions. Our ultimate reference point is God's Word which transcends cultural differences.

Our Christian integrity would compel us to be fair and honest in our treatment of others, both in the presentation of the past and in our treatment of the present. We must attempt to give others their rightful place in history and in society.

What better opportunity is there in our curriculum for becoming acquainted with and for respecting other cultures than when we teach social studies? Given that our schools and communities are fast becoming multicultural, our approach must be multicultural. Fortunately, we no longer have the label of having the "German schools". Even if we have no native Americans in our immediate classrooms, we in the midwest have sizeable native American communities around us, either in urban neighborhoods or on reservations. We also have close synodical ties with our Apache brothers and sisters in Arizona. Let's be more sensitive to native American culture. To treat others and their cultures with fairness and objectivity is compatible with Christianity. We do well to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Political "Correctness"

The multicultural approach does not necessarily mean we have to deny our cultural debts to Europe. I believe it is true that here in the United States we do have strong cultural debts to Europe—to the heritage of western civilization. I confess that in my history lectures at DMLC I stress cherished political roots and constitutional developments that have come mainly from English traditions. Some may argue that this approach is currently not in vogue, or not "politically correct," but I disagree. I also believe that the Christian mission efforts from Europe were a blessing to this nation, and that those who did mission work among the Indians were not all uncaring or insensitive people. It may be "politically correct" to denounce early Christian missionaries and to make sport of them, but they deserve fair objective treatment, too. In retrospect we now see the errors of these churchmen as they worked among Indians. Clearly errors were made; but the sincere motives of these missionaries and the personal hardships they endured should not be overlooked. Cultural baggage interfered with their efforts and no doubt they could have profited from a multi-cultural orientation. However, the message of salvation they preached was really the Water of Life needed by all people, including the Indians.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. recently expressed his fear of the attack on the "Eurocentric" curriculum. He was concerned that "Europe—the unique, source of the liberating ideas of democracy, civil liberties, and human rights—is portrayed as the root of all evil." (See "The Cult of Ethnicity, Good and God," *Time*, July 8, 1991). I share some of his concerns. I will have to concur also with Professor Theodore Hartwig when he stated in his 1990 symposium address that "the story of western civilization is essential for knowing ourselves, our own institutions, our own way of life."

Yet at the same time we must recognize the need for a multicultural vision that includes other cultural influences. We, Americans, though of various ethnic groups, are all Americans. I think we all agree there is a need to present a more balanced account, a broader view of history, rather than a too simplistic view that

ignores the varied influences of others. The Lord has brought people here from many lands, including the early "Indians" from Asia, and the flow of immigrants from other lands is still taking place. Our country is a mosaic of different cultures, and in this modern age we are becoming more and more mindful that we are citizens of the world. Americans are quite multicultural. Americans are increasingly marrying across ethnic and racial lines. Our neighborhoods and congregations are becoming multicultural. The current trend in our nation toward a multicultural approach to history is, therefore, a healthy trend. It is a strong movement and merits our serious attention.

To be sure the multicultural approach has its critics who fear such teaching will cost us our social cohesion. But people of other cultures have made an impact on this nation and their influence and contributions should not be slighted. If we have Native Americans, or Blacks, or Hispanics in our schools, churches, and neighborhoods, we can actually strengthen our unity by acknowledging and seeking to understand the various contributions of these groups. We will be richer for it. And among the peoples we surely would want to include are the very people who inhabited our land before Europeans even dreamed there was a new world.

Historical "Correctness"

Native Americans deserve considerable treatment in our history classes and they deserve to be treated with respect. In the past they have been maligned, or at best ignored. It is historically correct to say these first Americans have been the victims of abuse from ambitious incursions into their lands. Historian John Garraty of Columbia University reminds us: "Don't forget the most flagrant example of unprovoked aggression in human history." We who teach history should be unflinchingly honest. As Christians, especially as Christian teachers, we want to be as truthful and honest as possible. We respect truth simply because it is truth. John Quincy Adams understood that American historians could all too easily write a nationalistic history that overlooked, explained away, or sugarcoated past misbehavior. Adams insisted that a good historian "has no country." He added: "For otherwise, how can a country profit and learn salutary lessons from past error?" (OAH Newsletter, February, 1988).

Earlier history textbooks have often been blatantly unfair to American Indians. Fortunately the sixties and the seventies were years when more objective and scholarly works came out on Native Americans. Much of this can be attributed to increasing awareness of "minorities." With the civil rights movements came more sensitivity toward minorities. Old entrenched ideas and stereotyped images, however, continue to plague us. Bias and prejudice against people like Native Americans still exists.

Cultural "Correctness"

Do we ourselves harbor feelings that Native Americans are lesser or inferior people than we? Do we have hearts filled with prejudice? Are we patronizing or condescending when we teach about other cultures? No doubt our WELS has many spirit filled students and teachers who strive to free themselves from bigotry or prejudice or a condescending attitude. Yet, from my experience of twenty years of teaching at DMLC, I would have to say that I have heard students express negative feelings about Indians and "their ways". Some students have even resented the class time allotted to the role of Indians in history. I have also heard the statement: "Why study Indians? We are not Indians!" Perhaps students see the early native Americans as less important because some tribes were less complex in social structure and organization than we are familiar with.

A case could be made that the Native Americans have cultural traditions that are not "inferior." Some characteristics that anthropologists and, historians attribute to Native Americans are worthy of emulation, such as respect for the environment, non-materialism, a spirit of freedom and independence and close kinship ties (Note the positive tone of a 10/13/91 article from the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, "Indian Ways Inspire Children to Love the Earth").

As Lutherans we naturally cherish our own ethnic heritage. There is nothing wrong with that. Actually, to know and to appreciate your roots and customs makes your life richer. Perhaps though, this brings about an ethnocentrism that obscures a broader understanding of others. This may be a bigger problem for us Lutherans than for those who live with a greater mixture of nationalities. Our students, and even we teachers, may judge

others only by our culture, from our own narrow perspective. We treasure our Biblical value system, and rightly so. We do not want to question God's norms. However, there are areas of culture that remain relative. Other cultures differ from ours, but they are not necessarily inferior because they are unlike our own. We need to be aware of the need for objectivity in the study of history and culture of the native Americans. God created these people and permitted them the honor of being the first inhabitants of this land—to be the First Americans. The Native American culture is worthy of study.

II. Christian teachers can give adequate treatment to Native Americans

Use Pre-history Sources

That the Indians, including the Aluts and Eskimos, came originally from Asia is now almost universally accepted. These people began coming over in Old Testament times and had established diverse cultures, well before any Europeans in the New World.

Now that our nation is giving much attention to the 500th anniversary of the expedition of Christopher Columbus, we have great opportunities to bring in the Native Americans who were there to greet him. See newspaper article "A Year to Discover Rich History of the Very First Americans" in the appendix. When we begin our study of the New World, we should have our students seek an understanding of these people as they were before the West intruded upon their lives. By taking this approach, students may gain a greater sense of the changes that occurred, both good and bad, after Christopher Columbus landed at San Salvador. A study of this kind will likely bring out the wide variety found among the various tribes in the New World. If we divide our class into small groups, each assigned to explore different pre-Columbian cultures (Aztecs, Incas, Navahos, Anasasi, Mississippians of Cahokia, etc.), this would help bring out the richness and diversity prevalent among the tribes. This assignment could be easily carried out with issues of past National Geographic magazines. All of the above pre-Columbian cultures have received considerably attention by anthropologists and archeologists and the listing of related articles can be easily found in the National Geographic index volumes.

True we lack written records of these people before the Europeans came here, but much can be learned about these people through archeological ruins and oral traditions. When we plan high school class trips we might include Cahokia, Illinois to study the mound Indians who had developed a massive community and trade center just east of St. Louis. Teachers who intend to visit St. Louis on a field trip could very easily stop at Cahokia enroute since it is right off the Interstate. Possibly your choir tours or band excursions that travel into the southwest could schedule stops at Pueblo dwellings in Arizona and New Mexico—or better yet the Mesa Verde in southwestern Colorado. Our DMLC travel study tours found all of the above sites worthwhile visiting.

Seek Scholarly Authors

Native Americans have experienced "bad press" in the past that we should try to correct with the help of more recent studies.

Since the Native Americans did not have a written language, the first historical accounts were written only from the white man's viewpoint, by latecomers from Europe. The Indians were naturally relegated to the role of savages or just simply a topic for romantic literature. Later historians did little better using one-sided sources in one-sided historical accounts. Textbooks, until recently, introduced us to the American scene by starting with the European incursion. Some historians chose to ignore the Indians or to treat them as a problem encountered by settlers. Frontier historian Frederick Jackson Turner failed to appreciate these people. Turner celebrated the 400th anniversary of 1492 a century ago with his famous essay on how the frontier keeps recreating "new worlds" overcoming the "savages" who originally were there. Historians who look at the records will find evidence that "savages" on the frontier were whites as well as Indians. All people of all races have a sinful nature and all groups of people have their element of excess. But surely if historians looking for objectivity seek to find "savages" and savage behavior, they will not come down one-sided against those who were defending their homelands and a way of life. I believe that recent books by authors like Wilcomb Washburn, Reginald Horsman, R. David Edmunds and the like are a healthy remedy to previous

misconceptions. Sensitive treatment of Indians can also be found in a timely film release "Dances With Wolves." Here Indians are treated as real people and as people with a real culture.

If you would like a very readable single volume paperback on the American Indian I would recommend *The Indian in America* by Wilcomb Washburn (Harper and Row, The New American Nation Series, 1975, ISBN 0-06-096436-4). According to the preface, "this volume seeks to give a general impression of the character and experiences of the many tribes and nations of the New World before, during, and after the shattering impact of their involvement with European settlers and their descendants." Book reviews from historians have been quite favorable. Alden Vaughan concedes that some specialists may challenge some of Washburn's generalizations, "but few readers, if any, will deny that *The Indian in America* is the best volume on the subject."

There is no shortage of qualified historians who are well versed on Indians. One of the nation's best historians on frontier Indians is Reginald Horsman of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Those of you who are in the Milwaukee area might consider taking a graduate course from Professor Horsman. You might also enroll in a course with Francis Prucha of Marquette University. He is a leading frontier historian and has written many books on white/ Native American relations.

Possibly you may spring yourselves free to attend the forthcoming (November 7-9, 1991) Indian cultural conference at the Radisson Inn-Green Bay where various scholars from around the nation will discuss topics relating to Indian culture and history. Guided tours of the Wisconsin Oneida reservation will be available. See the appendix for more information on this conference.

Experience Indian Culture

One of the best ways to study Native American culture is to experience it. What better way to gain an Indian perspective than to live outdoors in a natural setting and have all of your instructors be Indians who teach you traditional Indian ways. I heartily recommend such a hands on experience. Back in 1978 I enrolled in a six-week live-in seminar offered by the University of Wisconsin. (See appendix for program cover.) Since the University attempted to create a natural Indian community in the "wilds" of northern Wisconsin we were required to park our cars and campers elsewhere and to pitch a tent in the woods. More ambitious students chose to construct their own wigwams. The seminar directors encouraged us to bring our wives and children to create a natural village setting. One lady even brought her goat. Over fifty of us, including some Indian students, participated. We made our own medicine, gathered plants for food and teas, cooked meals on an open fire, built a canoe, made baskets of birch bark, constructed our own moccasins, learned Indian dances and customs, and so on. Our family learned firsthand that Indians are people who could teach us a lot—including humility.

If you are interested in this kind of activity you might check with Professor John Boatman (Ojibwe Indian) at UWM to see when the live-in seminar will be offered again as a summer course. UWM has a strong American Indian Studies program to acquaint all kinds of students with the American Indian heritage. John Boatman's phone number at UWM is 414-229-6686. The American Indian Studies department is located in rooms 181 and 179 of Holton Hall on the UWM campus.

A good way for you and your students to become a little better acquainted with Indians is to attend an Indian pow-wow in your area. The Menominee Indians of Wisconsin often host pow-wows in Menominee county. Of course there are many others. In the state of Minnesota the Dakota nations meet annually in Mankato for three days of festivities. These pow-wows are open to the public. The last one offered in September of this year was attended by about forty of my DMLC students. When you as a teacher express an interest in Indian ways, you are helping to cultivate understanding and good will toward the culture of native Americans. Usually pow-wows have exhibits of Indian artwork and crafts as well as foodstands that may have Indian fare such as fry bread. Students will enjoy the music set to a drumbeat and the rhythmic dances. Some pow-wows, such as the ones in Mankato, encourage visitors to join in the dances, most of which are easily learned by simple observation.

Use Indian Sources

Go to the sources. I think students would profit from reading accounts of Indians found in various anthologies. Have students read some of their speeches aloud and have them try to visualize the setting and the emotions that prompted the speeches. There are a number of really moving speeches. Your class might try Chief Logan's Lament of 1774, which Thomas Jefferson offered as proof "of the talents of the aborigines of this country, and particularly of their eloquence." Or, Chief Seattle's Oration of 1854, often referred to as the "swan song" of his people. Both of these speeches may be found in *The American Reader*, a multicultural anthology of history and literature edited by Diane Ravitch (Harper, 1990). Better yet, you might want to select readings from *Great Documents in American Indian History*, edited by Wayne Moquin (Praeger Publishers, 1974, Library of Congress ppnumber 72-80583). This book contains not only famous speeches, eyewitness accounts to historical events and interviews, but also statements on the Indian hunting activity, family life, courtship and marriage, and the creation legends.

Introduce yourself, and your students, to books with personal accounts by Native Americans. Since many of you are from Wisconsin you might want to have your students read *The Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* by Paul Radin (Library of Congress number 63-17914), or *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder, the Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian* edited by Nancy Lurie (ISBN 0-472-06109-7 paperbound). These Winnebago Indians were from Black River Falls, Wisconsin. *Mountain Wolf Woman* is especially interesting since it relates Indian life from a feminine perspective. Try to have your students see life from another's moccasins.

If we have native Americans available to use as resource persons we should tap that source. Ask these Indians if they would be willing to share their knowledge of Indian language, music, dances, food recipes, artwork, or reservation life.

Public speakers from Indian communities are often available for engagements. A number of our schools might pool resources to obtain speakers such as tribal chairman David Larson of the Lower Sioux reservation in Minnesota. This year he has been giving a presentation "1862, the Dakota Conflict." A group of teachers might want to form a car pool to hear well known Indian leaders like Clyde Bellecourt when they speak at nearby cities. I heard Bellecourt speak at evening meetings at both Mankato State University and the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Clyde Bellecourt, one of the founders of AIM, now serves the government as an advisor in native American education and is knowledgeable on Indian Survival Schools.

Use Biographies of Indian Leaders

Students are often fascinated with the lives of Americans. Why not acquaint them with the lives of some Indian leaders (including Red Bird, a Winnebago of Wisconsin)? R. David Edmunds has edited a paperback: *Studies in Diversity, American Indian Leaders* (ISBN 0-8032-6705-3pbk), which includes twelve leaders or Indians of influence. Students will not be familiar with all of the leaders, although they may recognize some names like Joseph Brant, John Ross and Sitting Bull. We may want to observe days of commemoration for individuals or events in native American history and possibly develop a teaching unit for the occasion. We could construct a documentary on the Cherokee Trail of Tears, the plight of Chief Joseph, the life and times of Chief Osceola, etc. The events might be depicted by a series of drawings or reenactments.

Use State and Federal Sources

A good source of information on Native Americans is from your state government or state historical society. Study the history and present status of tribes within your own state. Each state has an agency of some kind that puts out information booklets. Have students locate the reservations and find former treaty lines (see appendix attached for Wisconsin and Minnesota). Note the economy of the reservations, health problems, average income, etc. The students may then understand why the Wisconsin Commission on Human rights concluded: "Bound by generations of poverty, the Indians have met the deafening defeat of the spirit which joblessness and paternalism bring." The following booklets may be helpful for Wisconsin and Minnesota:

Handbook on Wisconsin Indians, published with the cooperation of the University of Wisconsin Extension, 1966, compiled and written by Joyce M. Erdman, Governor's Commission on Human Rights, Madison, Wisconsin. Library of Congress 66.64334

Wisconsin Indians, published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, 1982, compiled by Nancy Oestreich Lurie. E787.W817 977.600497 ISBN 0-87020-195-6

Indians in Minnesota, published by the League of Women Voters, 1974, North Central Publishing Company in St. Paul. Library of Congress 77-169118 E78.M7 L37

All of the above conclude with a bibliography, selected references or a select reading list.

Use Classroom Activities

If you are looking for classroom activities you may find the following book from British Columbia helpful: *The NESAs-Activities Handbook for Native and Multicultural Classrooms* by Don Sawyer and Howard Green (ISBN 088978-186-9pbk). According to the authors "the games focus on and develop attitudes necessary for multicultural awareness and sensitivity." They believe these experiential exercises can lead to considerably social awareness and can have significant impact on attitudes. Each activity is introduced with stated goals, group size, time required, grade a level and materials needed. Procedures are then outlined and followed by debriefing questions. The twenty four exercises all extend to grade twelve. The first given are for grades one through twelve; the last ones are for high school grades only.

Use Current Events

Have your students discuss current event situations that involve Native Americans. Here in states like Wisconsin and Minnesota we often find articles in the daily newspapers about conflicts between area residents and Native Americans over local issues. Often racism is a major part of the issue. Before you begin a topic ask the student to think about the situation from the perspective of the Indians, area residents, the government and outsiders. The instructor could use a debate format. No doubt you have seen recent Associated Press newspaper articles about Indian religious practices and peyote (AP, "Indians want protection for peyote use," *New Ulm Journal*, p. IA. September 22, 1991), the renaming of the Custer Battlefield National Monument to the Little Bighorn Battlefield (Scripps Howard News Service, *Star Tribune*, July 26, 1991), bingo casinos, spear fishing under treaty rights, mineral and lumber resources on Indian land, toxic waste disposal sites on Indian land, etc. Some of these issues are also treated from an Indian perspective in *Great Documents in American Indian History*, edited by Wayne Moquin. The problems are often extremely complex and your discussion may end up inconclusive, but encourage your students to be sensitive toward others, to avoid stereotypes and quick prejudgments. As a follow-up assignment have students do writing assignments in which they are to seek reasonably possible solutions to the issues whereby both harmony and justice are achieved.

Use Scripture

Our sinful nature makes it easy to become self centered or to develop negative stereotypes of people from other races or ethnic background. We, as Christian teachers, will want to help students develop a Christ-like attitude towards others. Finally, Scripture is the best and most effective teaching aid we can use to help develop that attitude.