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Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education

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In this article, I outline the central tenets of an emerging theory that I call Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to more completely address the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the United States. TribalCrit has it roots in Critical Race Theory, Anthropology, Political/ Legal Theory, Political Science, American Indian Literatures, Education, and American Indian Studies. This theoretical framework provides a way to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians' liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals.

KEY WORDS: higher education; American Indians; Critical Race Theory.

Recently, I attended a celebration for the graduating cohort of the University of Utah's American Indian Teacher Training Program (AITTP).[1] The AITTP is a program that prepares American Indians to become teachers with the stipulation that they teach in Indian-serving schools upon their graduation. The program is rooted in the idea that American Indians can engage in the process of educating themselves, and can do so through both Indigenous wisdom and knowledges often found in dominant society. The eight graduates had worked for two years in an institution that often devalued their presence. They were joined by 180 family members and supporters for the celebration. During the course of the evening, each graduate had an opportunity to speak to the assembled group. Every graduate thanked the many family members who contributed to their academic successes, and each told a story about why they wanted to be a teacher and what it meant for their communities. One of the graduates said, "I struggled in school for a long time, not knowing whether or not I was able to do this work. Now I know I am." She continued by stating, "Now, I

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see a need in our community to have our students read, have their parents read with them, and to recognize that there is power in both the written word, and [our] stories. We can, and must, do both.'' Still other graduates of the teacher training program spoke that evening of the need for teachers in their communities and the contribution the program participants would make to those communities upon graduation from our teacher education program. One teacher said, ''We need teachers who look like us, talk like us, and think like us. To know what it means to be [tribal name] is an important part of this. We can change the ways our children think about schools.'' The stories conveyed a foundation for what the graduates and other AITTP students were doing and why, and outlined a theory of what self-education in American Indian communities should be like. Many of the stories were dominated by the fact that individuals are parts of communities that they serve in order to make the community more complete. One man said, ''I am only one person, but I'm one more [tribal name] teacher than we had. I have to give back; there is no other way.'' The newly licensed teachers also pointed to the fact that the knowledge and skill sets they acquired at the institution, combined with their Indigenous ways of knowing, would help them better meet the educational and cultural needs of their communities. One student, for example, stated, ''We have to make sure that our people know how to read and write, and that they have someone in front of them who understands what it means to be Indian. This program has given me an opportunity to do the work I was born to do.'' In this statement, the new teacher highlighted the importance of making connections between different types and forms of knowledge in order to meet larger, community goals of self-education and sovereignty.

As students spoke, I was reminded of my own conflicts with academic colleagues regarding the knowledge sources necessary to do rigorous research and to be theoretically sound. I once had an encounter with a colleague who told me that people like me ''told good stories'' and later added that because I told good stories, I might not ever be a ''good theorist.'' I was struck by the seeming disconnect between community stories and personal narratives and ''theory.'' After this encounter with my colleague, I returned home to Prospect, North Carolina, one of the communities of the Lumbee tribe of which I am an enrolled member, and told several of my relatives and elders about my colleagues' comments. My mother told me, ''Baby, doesn't she know that our stories are our theories? And she thinks she's smarter than you because she can't tell stories?''[2] My mother clearly hit on the reason why locating theory as something absent from stories and practices is problematic in many Indigenous communities and in the work of anthropologists who seek to represent Indigenous communities.

The eight American Indian graduates who spoke of their commitments to community and told stories of elders, family members, and their children were, in fact, outlining theories of sovereignty, self-determination, and self-education. They were not simply telling "stories;" rather, they had clearly shown me that for many Indigenous people, stories serve as the basis for how our communities work. For some Indigenous scholars (and others), theory is not simply an abstract thought or idea that explains overarching structures of societies and communities; theories, through stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities. These notions of theory, however, conflict with what many in the "academy" consider "good theory." At the heart of this conflict are different epistemologies and ontologies. In this article, I want to make connections between different forms of knowledge and their application through a community-oriented theoretical lens.

Much of my academic career has been spent in search of an acceptable theoretical frame that allows me to analyze the problems encountered by American Indians in educational institutions and the programs that are in place to uniquely serve American Indian communities. In the past, I have relied on theorists like Bourdieu, Fordham, Giddens, and Willis, but I feel that my analyses have yet to be complete because these scholars do not explicitly address issues that are salient for and to American Indians. In this article, I intend to outline the central tenets of an emerging theory that I call Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to more completely address the issues of Indigenous Peoples in the United States. I have constructed this theoretical framework because it allows me to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians' liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals. It is this liminal space that accounts for both the political/legal nature of our relationship with the U.S. government as American Indians and with our embodiment as racialized beings. I wish to emphasize the liminality of our position (legally/politically and socially); I do not offer one expression of it at the exclusion of another.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY: AN INFLUENTIAL FRAMEWORK

TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities. Though they differ depending on time, space, place, tribal nation, and individual, there appear to be commonalities in those ontologies and epistemologies. TribalCrit is rooted in these commonalities while simultaneously recognizing the range and variation that exists within and between communities and individuals.

Critical Race Theory evolved in the mid-1970s as a response to Critical Legal Studies (CLS). CLS is left-leaning legal scholarship that argues that the law must focus on how it is applied to specific groups in particular circumstances. CLS exposes contradictions in the law and illustrates the ways that laws create and maintain the hierarchical society in which we live (Gordon, 1990). CRT is ''a form of opposition scholarship'' (Calmore, 1992: p. 2161) that grew from a discontent that CLS was not moving fast enough in its attempts to critique and change societal and legal structures that specifically focused on race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). While CRT centers race and racism, it also focuses on other areas of subordination. Solorzano (1998) writes, ''Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, they are also viewed at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination'' (p. 122). CRT values experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research. As a result, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data by CRT scholars. Listening seriously involves an ability to make connections between ''traditional'' community values and those of larger societal institutions like courts or schools. Like CRT, TribalCrit values narrative and stories as important sources of data.

In the mid 1990s, CRT was applied to research in education as an alternative way of viewing educational institutions and the difficulties facing people of color within these institutions[3] (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CRT in education posits that racism is endemic in society and in education, and that racism has become so deeply engrained in society's and schooling's consciousness that it is often invisible. CRT confronts and challenges traditional views of education in regard to issues of meritocracy, claims of color-blind objectivity, and equal opportunity (Crenshaw, 1989, 1993; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a; Villalpando, 2003). Finally, CRT in education is activist in nature and inherently must contain a commitment to social justice. Embedded in this notion is a ''liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression'' (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 8). Those who rely on CRT ''integrate their experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as 'other,' with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony'' (Barnes, 1990, p. 1865). Scholars utilizing CRT in education explicitly argue that their work must move toward eliminating the influence racism, sexism, and poverty have in the lives of students and faculty (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Parker, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b).

While CRT serves as a framework in and of itself, it does not address the specific needs of tribal peoples because it does not address American Indians' liminality as both legal/political and racialized beings or the experience

of colonization. CRT was originally developed to address the Civil Rights issues of African American people. As such, it is oriented toward an articulation of race issues along a "black-white" binary (much the way *Brown v. Board* is), and, until recently, other ethnic/racial groups have not been included in the conversation. As a result, Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) have been developed to meet the specific needs of those populations. For example, LatCrit emphasizes issues that affect Latina/o people in everyday life, including immigration, language, identity, culture, and skin color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Espinoza, 1990; Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994, Villalpando, 2003). AsianCrit emphasizes and critiques the nativistic racism embedded in the model minority stereotype, immigration and naturalization, language, and disenfranchisement issues that relate to Asian people in the United States (Chang 1993, 1998). While these theories have developed to meet the specific needs of Latinos/as and Asian Americans, they largely maintain the basic premise of CRT that racism is endemic in society. In contrast, the basic tenet of TribalCrit emphasizes that colonization is endemic to society (Brayboy, 2001).

AN OVERVIEW OF TRIBAL CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE BEGINNING

In the following pages, I will outline nine tenets of TribalCrit, which can be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.
6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation.
7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.
9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change.

While CRT argues that racism is endemic in society, TribalCrit emphasizes that colonization is endemic in society while also acknowledging the role played by racism. Much of what TribalCrit offers as an analytical lens is a new and more culturally nuanced way of examining the lives and experiences of tribal peoples since contact with Europeans over 500 years ago. This is central to the particularity of the space and place American Indians inhabit, both physically and intellectually, as well as to the unique, sovereign relationship between American Indians and the federal government. My hope is that TribalCrit can be used to address the range and variation of experiences of individuals who are American Indian.[4] Furthermore, TribalCrit provides a theoretical lens for addressing many of the issues facing American Indian communities today, including issues of language shift and language loss, natural resources management, the lack of students graduating from colleges and universities, the overrepresentation of American Indians in special education, and power struggles between federal, state, and tribal governments.

The primary tenet of TribalCrit is the notion that colonization is endemic to society. By colonization, I mean that European American thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society in the United States. Battiste (2002) argues, "Eurocentric thinkers dismissed Indigenous knowledge in the same way they dismissed any socio-political cultural life they did not understand: they found it to be unsystematic and incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world" (p. 5). Additionally, Lomawaima & McCarty (2002) illustrate this point in the context of American Indian education:

> The goal has been "civilization" of American Indian peoples...[which] assumes that what is required is the complete and utter transformation of native nations and individuals: replace heritage languages with English, replace "paganism" with Christianity, replace economic, political, social, legal, and aesthetic institutions. (p. 282)

In this way, the goal, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, of interactions between the dominant U.S. society and American Indians has been to change ("colonize" or "civilize") us to be more like those who hold power in the dominant society. For example, boarding schools were intended to "kill the Indian and save the man"; more recently, American Indians' status as

legal/political groups has been called into question with the goal of simply making them a "racial" group. The everyday experiences of American Indians, the Indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, have essentially been removed from the awareness of dominant members of U.S. society. These viable images have instead been replaced with fixed images from the past of what American Indians once were. The colonization has been so complete that even many American Indians fail to recognize that we are taking up colonialist ideas when we fail to express ourselves in ways that may challenge dominant society's ideas about who and what we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to behave, and what we are supposed to be within the larger population. Smith (1999) is particularly useful here when she discusses the ways that Indigenous identities have become regulated by governments to meet their interests rather than those of the people who take up these identities. She writes, "legislated identities which regulated who was an Indian and who was not...who had the correct fraction of blood quantum, who lived in the regulated spaces of reserves and communities, were all worked out arbitrarily (but systematically), to serve the interests of the colonizing society" (p. 22). This process of colonization and its debilitating influences are at the heart of TribalCrit; all other ideas are offshoots of this vital concept.

Second, TribalCrit builds on the notion that colonization is endemic in society and explicitly recognizes that the policies of the United States toward American Indians are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain. Williams (1987, 1989) has methodically examined the early policies set forth by the U.S. and its treatment of American Indians. He argues that these policies were rooted in a self-interested reading of legal concepts that allowed White settlers to rationalize and legitimize their decisions to steal lands from the Indigenous peoples who already inhabited them. This process highlights a divergence in the ways that White settlers and Indigenous peoples viewed the relationship between people and land. Semantically, this plays out in a distinction between the concepts of habitation and ownership, which is evident in the actions of White settlers. It appears that because a group of people were rooted to lands on which they lived, they did not necessarily properly "own" those lands, leading to a series of events that left many Indigenous peoples dispossessed of lands that held not only life sustaining crops, but also spiritually sustaining properties.[5] Moreover, this "removal" of tribal peoples by the U.S. government was justified by arguing that Indigenous people needed to be moved "for our own good." For example, the U.S. government claimed that Indians were not only underutilizing the lands on which they lived, but that they would be unmolested in the new Indian Territory (which is present day Oklahoma). Tribal nations, of course, were molested and land rich in oil and natural

resources was stolen for the monetary benefits of its "new owners." In essence, American Indians were being saved from themselves by being moved off their lands.

At the heart of the removals were the concepts of Manifest Destiny and the Norman Yoke, used as arguments in favor of the dispossessing of people from their tribal lands. Manifest Destiny posited that it was God's destiny for the new settlers to have the land. This concept gave European-Americans the moral authority to take the lands through whatever means necessary. Similarly, the Norman Yoke, originally established by Adam Smith as an economic term, was extended to justify taking lands and property from Indigenous people. Loosely defined, the concept argues that not only do individuals have a right to utilize and exploit natural resources on lands that are considered "vacant," but they also have a moral obligation to do so.

Manifest Destiny and the Norman Yoke are both concepts rooted in White supremacy. In this context White supremacy refers to the idea that the established, European or western way of doing things has both moral and intellectual superiority over those things non-western.[6] White supremacy has a long history and is still pervasive in the U.S. For example, the modern-day canon that revolves around an established set of readings or "classics" (Shakespeare and Dickinson are classics, but Louis Owens and Zitkala-Sa are not) is one way White supremacy gets played out in colleges and universities. White supremacy is viewed as natural and legitimate and it is precisely through this naturalization that White supremacy derives its hegemonic power.

An examination of the attack on affirmative action points to the ways that hegemonic power is played out in the academic and larger public discourse. Affirmative Action that "benefits" people of color is attacked, while that which benefits White women (the group which has benefited the most from affirmative action), the children of alumni (often called "legacies" which is, in and of itself, telling of how institutions think about these students' entitlement regarding potential admission to an institution), athletes who raise large sums of money for institutions even as they fail to graduate at record levels, and veterans of the United States Armed Services is either naturalized and made invisible or celebrated.

The third tenet of TribalCrit is that Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the legal/political and racialized natures of our identities. That is, we are often placed between our joint statuses as legal/political and racialized beings.[7] My intent here is to argue that American Indians are both legal/political and racialized beings; however, we are rarely treated as such, leaving Indigenous peoples in a state of inbetweeness wherein we define ourselves as both, with an emphasis on the legal/political,

but we are framed as racialized groups by many members of society. The racialized status of American Indians appears to be the main emphasis of most members of U.S. society; this status ignores the legal/political one, and is directly tied to notions of colonialism, because larger society is unaware of the multiple statuses of Indigenous peoples. Currently, the different circulating discourses around what it means to be Indian as well as what constitutes American Indian education establish a context in which American Indians must struggle for the right to be defined as both a legal/political and a racial group. Even though our status as a legal/political group has been repeatedly articulated in government policy, legal code, and the everyday lives of American Indian individuals and communities, it remains a point of debate and contention in most popular settings. For example, conservative groups who have attacked federally funded programs for American Indians invoke arguments—by utilizing the fourteenth amendment and the Civil Rights Act of 1964—that position American Indians solely as a racialized group. In fact, these programs are rooted in what President George W. Bush stated in an April 30, 2004 Executive Order:

> The United States has a unique legal relationship with Indian tribes and a special relationship with Alaskan Native entities as provided in the Constitution of the United States, treaties, and federal statutes. This Administration is committed to continuing to work with these federally recognized tribal governments on a government-to-government basis, and supports tribal sovereignty and self-determination.

This Executive Order clearly outlines that American Indians have a unique relationship with the federal government. The idea that the U.S. government has a unique relationship with *federally* recognized tribes is an important one for this argument. I recognize that there are Indigenous Peoples who may not be federally recognized and are state recognized. These groups need not be excluded from the conversation; as Deloria & Lytle (1984) and Wilkins (2002) have argued, these American Indian groups were nations before the Constitution was signed, and therefore their status as nations should be without question. The idea that there are tribal groups who are federally recognized and those who are not is constructed by the federal government and ignores what Deloria & Lytle (1984) call the "extraconstitutionality" of "non-recognized" groups.[8]

Fourth, TribalCrit is rooted in a belief in and desire to obtain and forge tribal autonomy, self-determination, self-identification, and ultimately tribal sovereignty. Tribal autonomy is the ability of communities and tribal nations to have control over existing land bases, natural resources, and tribal national boundaries. Autonomy is also linked to the ability to interact

with the U.S. and other nations on a nation-to-nation basis. Self-determination is the ability to define what happens with autonomy, how, why, and to what ends, rather than being forced to ask permission from the United States. Self-determination rejects the guardian/ward relationship currently in place between the U.S. government and tribal nations.[9] Knowledge of these current relationships allows researchers ways to better analyze interactions between Indigenous students and the institutional structures. Ultimately, these analyses may lead to a reconceptualization of the parameters for engaging Indigenous students within institutions. Finally, self-identification is the ability and legitimacy for groups to define themselves and to create what it means to be Indian. As such, self-identification may or may not reject the "sign" Indian—or that which signifies what a "real Indian" is or looks like (often an ecology-loving, bead-wearing, feather-having, long-haired, tall, dark man or woman)—and its meanings to others (e.g. see Vizenor, 1994, 1998; Vizenor & Lee, 1999). This call for self-identification influences the way that colleges and universities examine issues of identification in the admissions process and may push for stricter ways of determining whether or not potential students and faculty members are committing "ethnic fraud." Additionally, this requires institutions to keep better records of who has identified as American Indian, rather than placing the figures under the dreaded catchall "Other" category.

Fifth, TribalCrit problematizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power and offers alternative ways of understanding them through an Indigenous lens. In so doing, TribalCrit migrates away from western/European notions of culture, knowledge, and power and moves to notions that have been circulating among Indigenous peoples for thousands of years. In TribalCrit, culture is simultaneously fluid or dynamic, and fixed or stable. Like an anchor in the ocean, it is tied to a group of people and often a physical place. For many Indigenous people, culture is rooted to lands on which they live as well as to their ancestors who lived on those lands before them. However, just as the anchor shifts and sways with changing tides and the ebbs and flows of the ocean, culture shifts and flows with changes in contexts, situations, people, and purposes. Like all humans, Indigenous people are shaped by their cultural inheritance, and they engage in cultural production.[10]

Knowledge is defined by TribalCrit as the ability to recognize change, adapt, and move forward with the change. There are at least three forms of knowledge that TribalCrit addresses, and they exist in accord with one another. Cultural knowledge is an understanding of what it means to be a member of a particular tribal nation; this includes particular traditions, issues, and ways of being and knowing that make an individual a member of a community. Knowledge of survival includes an understanding of how and in what ways change can be accomplished and the ability and willingness to

change, adapt, and adjust in order to move forward as an individual and community. Finally, academic knowledge is that acquired from educational institutions. In many of our communities this is often referred to as ‘‘book knowing’’ or ‘‘book smarts.’’ While Indigenous ways of knowing and ‘‘book smarts’’ are often seen as diametrically opposed, these different forms of knowledge do not necessarily need to be in conflict (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Harrison & Papa, 2005; Kawagley, 1995; Medicine, 2001). Rather, they complement each other in powerful ways. This blending of knowledges—academic and cultural ones—creates knowledge that is key to survival (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2004, 2005; Deloria, 1970; Medicine, 2001). The exercise of these various forms of knowledge is always context-specific and the different forms must be integrated with one another in order to achieve successful resistance and, thus, survival. For example, knowledge learned in school can be used in conjunction with tribal knowledge toward social justice for these communities. This strategic use of multiple forms of knowledge generates power that is situated, dynamic, and historically influenced.

Among Indigenous intellectuals and others, the notion of power is elusive and complicated but certain themes do emerge. Power is not a property or trait that an individual has to exercise control over others; rather, it is rooted in a group's ability to define themselves, their place in the world, and their traditions (Deloria, 1970; Stoffle & Zedeño, 2001; Vizenor, 1998; Warrior, 1995). Deloria (1970) argues, ‘‘Few members of racial minority groups have realized that inherent in their peculiar experience on this continent is hidden the basic recognition of their power and sovereignty’’ (p. 115). There is a clear link here between knowledge—in the form of experience—and power. Power through an Indigenous lens is an expression of sovereignty—defined as self-determination, self-government, self-identification, and self-education. In this way, sovereignty is community based. By this I mean that the ideas of self-determination, -government, -identification, and -education are rooted in a community's conceptions of its needs and past, present, and future. Deloria (1970) extends and crystallizes this point when he writes, ‘‘Since power cannot be given and accepted...The responsibility which sovereignty creates is oriented primarily toward the existence and continuance of the group’’ (p. 123). Power, as I define it, is the ability to survive rooted in the capacity to adapt and adjust to changing landscapes, times, ideas, circumstances, and situations. However, for Indigenous peoples, survival is more than simply staying together as a group. Vizenor's (Vizenor, 1998; Vizenor & Lee, 1999) concept of survivance is useful for articulating the uniqueness of the American Indian experience with persevering in hostile contexts. Survivance, which combines survival and resistance, calls for adaptation and strategic accommodation in order to survive and develop the processes that contribute to community growth (Deloria, 1970).

Power for many American Indians leads to that which Deloria advocates regarding the process of sovereignty for individual tribal nations. Of Deloria, Warrior (1995) writes:

> [Deloria] also advocates a position that is not merely a call for the United States to break down into tribes closed off from the rest of the world. Rather he recognizes that the withdrawal of a group to draw on its own resources does not cut it off from other groups' influences on its future...they need to confront a set of challenges for which no culture has all answers. (pp. 91–92)

In other words, the ability to determine a place in the world (power) is enabled by knowledge American Indian communities have that is rooted in both Indigenous and European sources of knowing. Thus, a group's own sense of themselves governs decisions regarding how to best attend to issues of tribal sovereignty and its critical components of tribal autonomy, self-determination, -identification, -government, and -education.

There is a dialogical relationship between culture, knowledge, and power: culture is the base for knowledge that ultimately leads to power. While I believe that culture serves as a basis for the relationship, there are reciprocal ties to knowledge and power. Culture reminds individuals, in a group, who they are. Its dynamic nature allows for adaptability to change. Knowledge relates to culture in that it offers links to what people know. Ultimately, knowledge is important in the process of recognizing that no single culture has solutions to the myriad problems encountered by groups. Knowledge also allows groups to change, adapt, and move forward in a vision related to power in the form of sovereignty. The ways that groups define themselves, their places in the world (at least in part, recognizing that places are co-constructed by many things), and their cultures is a form of power. Importantly, an Indigenous conception of power defines power as an energetic force that circulates throughout the universe—it lies both within and outside of individuals; hence both the tribal nation and the individual are subjects in the dialogic.

The sixth key component of TribalCrit is a recognition that governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples have, historically, been oriented toward a problematic goal of assimilation. While I have, up to this point, argued that the governmental relationship between tribal peoples and the U.S. allows for the possibilities of self-education and -determination for American Indians, the way in which these policies have been interpreted and carried out has instead been rooted in assimilation. According to Klug and Whitfield, "early treaties emphasized that education 'appropriate' for Indian students was to be provided" (2003, p. 31). While trust responsibility and sovereignty were supposed to be the guiding principles of Indian education, "appropriate" is a relative term whose meaning

was left to officials at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to define. Often "appropriate" education was assumed to be that which eradicated Indianness or promoted Anglo values and ways of communicating. All of these attempts at assimilation through "appropriate" education failed.

TribalCrit explicitly rejects the call for assimilation in educational institutions for American Indian students. Deyhle's (1995) work on cultural integrity highlights the fact that individuals, in order to be successful as both academics and as Indigenous people, must maintain a strong sense of their Indigenous identity as distinctive and as a source of pride. By cultural integrity, I mean a set of beliefs (and actions directly linked to these beliefs) that are typically shared among a group of people. The beliefs are "distinct and independent tradition[s]" (Deyhle, 1995, p. 28). Maintaining cultural integrity means that experiences in school certainly affect a person, but they need not do so at the expense of their home culture (Fordham, 1996; Ogbu, 1987, 1993). TribalCrit rejects the past and present rhetoric calling for integration and assimilation of American Indian students in educational institutions because, rather than cultivating and maintaining cultural integrity, assimilation requires students to replace this cultural knowledge with academic knowledge.

Today, TribalCrit would argue, education for American Indians is not always rooted in the goal of assimilation, although some assimilation seems to be an inevitable outcome of education that occurs through the formal structures of western schooling. Education, according to TribalCrit, might also teach American Indian students how to combine Indigenous notions of culture, knowledge, and power with western/European conceptions in order to actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy. The University of Utah's American Indian Teacher Training Program attempts to do this by combining Indigenous ways of knowing and being with the courses necessary for teaching licenses. The students highlighted at the beginning of this article are products of this program; each of the newly licensed teachers from the program is required to teach in Indigenous communities as part of a payback agreement for the funding they receive. Their role is to assist young American Indian elementary and secondary students in participating in the formal schooling structures while maintaining and valuing their cultural heritage. In this way, schooling and students' sense of Indigenous self do not necessarily conflict.

The seventh tenet of TribalCrit emphasizes the importance of tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future; it honors the adaptability of groups and recognizes the differences within individuals and between people and groups. Growing out of a foundation in culture, knowledge and power, the beliefs, thoughts, philosophies, customs, and traditions of Indigenous individuals and communities serve as a foundation from which to analyze the schooling practices, self-education, and

experiences of Indigenous peoples. These concepts must be recognized as being viable and important for the lives of the individuals and members of the group. This recognition leads to different ways of examining experiences and theoretical frames through which to view the experiences. There must be recognition that the ways of knowing for American Indians are vital to our self-education and self-determination (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002).

The debate around the place of Indigenous ways of knowing in Western educational institutions is often framed is through discussions of competition and cooperation. A host of studies illustrate that Indigenous students are enculturated into a way of cooperation rather than the competitive nature of schooling (Brayboy, 1999; Deyhle, 1992, 1995; Deyhle & Margonis, 1995; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Foley, 1995, 1996; Philips, 1983). Cooperation is then viewed—by the institution and its powerbrokers—as an inability to work alone or to be self-sufficient, rather than a potential source of strength and a way to more fully address issues of concern to both individuals and communities (Burkhart, 2004; Deloria, 1969/1988). The notion that American Indians should be more rooted in individualism is one of the key factors that led to the creation of boarding schools in the late 19th century (Lomawaima, 1994, 1995). In my own work, Indigenous students in Ivy League universities struggled against being perceived as "not being self-motivated" and "unable to be independently successful" (Brayboy, 2004a, 2005). These students were guided to Ivy League universities by the requests and needs of their communities, suggesting that success is never independent but instead tied to communal conceptions of power and survivance (Brayboy, 1999, 2004a, 2005). This cooperation is not only tied to working on projects together, but also to the utility and necessity of community cooperation in assisting students in their academic quests. The idea and purpose of the students' attendance was for them to gain skills and credentials at the institution that they could use in ways that would benefit the community. These sentiments were also echoed by the American Indian graduates of the University of Utah in the opening vignette. In this way, formal, western education becomes a tool of empowerment and liberation for the community. A concrete example rests with a woman named Heather who told me in the spring of 1995, when she was an undergraduate student at an Ivy League university, "I have always wanted to be a lawyer; my father and mother and my elders told me that's what I was going to be, so I wanted it...I do this because it will mean a better life for my people, my siblings, my cousins and nieces and nephews...I can handle anything for those reasons; and I have." Heather's experiences in both undergraduate and law school were harsh and oppressive. She managed, however, to utilize her skills and credentials in powerful ways. She worked for her tribe's law firm and was a key

litigator and negotiator in a new deal around the use of natural resources on her tribal nation's reservation. In the process, she blended her knowledge as an attorney with her knowledge as a tribal member to benefit her entire society.

Thus, within many tribal communities, individuality is devalued while contributing to the success of a community is valued. There is a clear discrepancy here in terms of what is valued in the context and situation of colleges and universities and what is valued in an individual's community. Burkhart (2004) puts it more simply when he writes, "Native philosophy tells us, 'We are, therefore I am'" (p. 25). Individuals are parts of communities rather than individuals alone in the world. TribalCrit, then, recognizes the importance of tribal philosophies, values, and beliefs—such as community and cooperation—in the experiences of American Indian peoples.

Contrary to recent calls for "scientifically based" research as being the only justifiable form of research, the eighth tenet of TribalCrit honors stories and oral knowledge as real and legitimate forms of data and ways of being. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory. As in the opening vignette, stories serve as a way to orient oneself and others toward the world and life. Cora Weber Pillwax (cited in Battiste, 2002) says, "Stories...are to be listened to, remembered, thought about, meditated on. [They] are not frivolous or meaningless, no one tells a story without intent or purpose" (p. 25). Likewise Basso (2000) argues that stories serve a central purpose in orienting Western Apache to what it means to be an "Apache." Stories are, he argues, moral tools with psychological implications, in that they remind individuals of particular ways of being, and they "stalk" those who step out of line in perpetuity. These stories do not have to be told by accomplished academics or writers; rather, the stories valued by TribalCrit are the foundations on which Indigenous communities are built. Many Indigenous people have strong oral traditions, which are used as vehicles for the transmission of culture and knowledge. The form and content of these stories, however, differ from the types of knowledge privileged by educational institutions. As a result, American Indian students have often struggled with acquiring the academic language of educational institutions and have been viewed as deficient. In contrast, TribalCrit recognizes that the legitimacy given to ways of communicating (written and verbal) prioritized by schools, colleges and universities does not necessarily mean that oral story-telling should be devalued.

Oral stories remind us of our origins and serve as lessons for the younger members of our communities; they have a place in our communities and in our lives (e.g. see Basso, 2000; Battiste, 2002; Olivas, 1990). They also serve as guideposts for our elders and other policy-makers in our tribal communities. Additionally, for researchers in institutions of higher education, there is a saliency in stories. TribalCrit recognizes that the statistical

power of the "n" is not necessarily the marker of a "good, rigorous" study. Stories may also be informative of structural barriers or weaknesses. In this respect, "proof" is thought of in different ways.

Stories as "data" are important, and one key to collecting these data is "hearing" the stories. There is a difference between listening to stories and hearing them, and this is central to TribalCrit. Listening is part of going through the motions of acting engaged and allowing individuals to talk. Hearing stories means that value is attributed to them and both the authority and the nuance of stories are understood. When stories are heard, they lead the hearer to explore the range and variation of possibilities of what can happen and has happened (Basso, 1996, 2000; Battiste, 2002, Burkhart, 2004; Medicine, 2001, Williams, 1997). Stories often are the guardians of cumulative knowledges that hold a place in the psyches of the group members, memories of tradition, and reflections on power. Hearers ultimately understand the nuances in stories and recognize that the onus for hearing is placed on the hearer rather than the speaker for delivering a clearly articulated message. Additionally, one must be able to feel the stories. You tell them, hear them, and feel them—establishing a strong place for empathy and for "getting it."

The final component of TribalCrit is that there must be a component of action or activism—a way of connecting theory and practice in deep and explicit ways. Building on what Williams (1997) has called Critical Race Practice, TribalCrit must be praxis at its best. Praxis involves researchers who utilize theory to make an active change in the situation and context being examined. For TribalCrit scholars who embrace this line of thinking in their work, we must expose structural inequalities and assimilatory processes and work toward debunking and deconstructing them; it also works to create structures that will address the real, immediate and future needs of tribal peoples and communities (Burkhart, 2004). Deloria (1969/1988) is particularly useful here when he writes, "Abstract theories create abstract action. Lumping together the variety of tribal problems and seeking demonic principle at work is intellectually satisfying. But it does not change the real situation" (p. 86). Later he, argues, "Academia, and its by-products, continues to become more irrelevant to the needs of the people" (Deloria, 1969/1988, p. 93). Utilizing a TribalCrit lens, I would argue that no research should be conducted with Indigenous Peoples that is not in some way directed by a community and aimed toward improving the life chances and situations of specific communities and American Indians writ large. The research must be relevant and address the problems of the community; there is little room for abstract ideas in real communities. Ultimately, then, we have come full circle because TribalCrit research and practice—or better still, praxis—moves us away from

colonization and assimilation and towards a more real self-determination and tribal sovereignty.

CONCLUSIONS

TribalCrit endeavors to expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions—like colleges and universities—and make the situation better for Indigenous students. TribalCrit practitioners take part in the process of self-determination and in making institutions of formal education more understandable to Indigenous students and Indigenous students more understandable to the institutions. The tenets I discuss above should serve as a starting point for future dialogue on what I have named Tribal Critical Race Theory.

There are a number of tenets within TribalCrit that are important for the experiences of and issues faced by Indigenous Peoples. Aspects of TribalCrit could certainly be taken up by scholars in other disciplines and applied more generally; however, my focus is on education. Further, I want to acknowledge that many of the tenets are intimately linked to others. In the context of this article, I discussed them as distinct ideas for heuristic purposes.

Ultimately, TribalCrit holds an explanatory power; it is potentially a better theoretical lens through which to describe the lived experiences of tribal peoples. TribalCrit is based on a series of traditions, ideas, thoughts, and epistemologies that are grounded in tribal histories thousands of years old. While I draw on older stories, traditions, ontologies, and epistemologies, the combination itself is new. As such, I hope that this article will initiate a process of thinking about how Tribal Critical Race Theory might better serve researchers who are unsatisfied with the theories and methods currently offered from which to study American Indians in educational institutions specifically, and larger society more generally. TribalCrit has the potential to serve as a theoretical and analytical lens for addressing the educational experiences of American Indian students, teachers, and researchers in the areas of classroom participation, language revitalization, lack of Native students graduating from high schools and colleges, multiple literacies, overrepresentation of Native students in special education, pedagogy, teacher-training, and many other areas. My hope is that, in addressing these issues and experiences through a TribalCrit lens, research will lead both to a better understanding of the needs of Indigenous communities and to changes in the educational system and society at large that benefit Indigenous communities.

I also hope that TribalCrit helps to further a larger conversation about methods of conducting research and analyzing data in ways that center Indigenous ways of knowing and lead to American Indian sovereignty and

self-determination. As one of the American Indian teachers at the graduation celebration said, "We can change the ways our children think about schools." It is my hope and belief that TribalCrit begins to allow us to change the ways that Indigenous students think about schools and, perhaps more importantly, the ways that both schools and educational researchers think about American Indian students.

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NOTES

1. I am the founder and principal investigator of a program that is now 4 years-old. I am also an Indigenous man (Lumbee) who is a former secondary social studies teacher.
2. In my community, regardless of how old we are or what degrees we hold, we are often still referred to in the diminutive by our parents and elders. It is illustrative of how our community works and how knowledge is created by the older generation. It is also a clear indication of who holds power in these issues.
3. For a comprehensive overview of the introduction of CRT to education see, Parker, Deyhle, and Villenas (1999), Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001), Solorzano and Yosso (2002), and Yosso, Parker, Solorzano, and Lynn (2004).
4. Elsewhere, I have addressed how complicated this is, because American Indians are so widely diverse (Brayboy, 2004a, b). Missing from this analysis, too, are the complicated demarcations among groups who are federally versus state recognized, landed groups versus non-landed groups, and those who have economic development activities (like casinos and natural resources management) and those who do not. Space does not allow me to fully delve into the nuances of these differences; however, I have begun to address them elsewhere (Brayboy, in progress).
5. I am grateful to Kristin Searle for pointing out this important distinction. Feld and Basso (1996) outline and highlight the importance of rootedness to place.

6. For example, see Hall (1997), hooks (1995), Ladson-Billings (1998, 2000), Richardson and Villenas (2000), Spivak (1988), Thompson (1999), Villalpando (2003), and Villenas and Deyhle (1999).
7. There are certainly times in which American Indians may place themselves in one of these roles at the potential exclusion of the other. These moments are often strategic in nature, or come from individuals who are not aware of the unique legal/political status that American Indians hold.
8. This argument deserves a significant amount of time and space. I have addressed it more fully elsewhere (Brayboy, in progress).
9. I find the guardian–ward relationship problematic and wrongly taken up. Rather, the fiduciary relationship of trustee and beneficiary may be more appropriate in dealings with the U.S. government. Wilkins and Lomawaima (2002) more fully address issues of an Indigenous view of trust.
10. For a fuller discussion of the culture concept, see Borofsky et al. (2001). The article in *American Anthropologist* highlights the contested nature of culture. I recognize the term is contested, however, I choose to utilize it in this article (Wagner, 1981).

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