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Author(s): Thomas D. Peacock and Donald R. Day

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Nations Within a Nation: The Dakota and Ojibwe of Minnesota

IN 1967, WHILE TAKING A MANDATORY COURSE in Minnesota history in seventh grade, Don Day asked the teacher why he never mentioned American Indians in his lectures. The teacher told Don, and the class, that “Indians did not contribute to the social, political, or cultural development of the state of Minnesota.” Although Don knew the teacher was wrong, he did not have the courage to stand up to him. The cognitive dissonance Don felt that day many years ago still exists within many American Indian students’ daily lives. Today, many American Indians are still struggling to exist in two worlds: the professional, fast-paced, technological world of high finance and instant communication, and the traditional world of their ancestors, which involves native languages, sweat lodges, pipe ceremonies, spirit names, fasting, and other traditional customs. Although we have come far in our teacher-training efforts, we still have far to go to better understand the indigenous people of this country.

Tribal nations called Minnesota home for many thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans to the region. To indigenous people, the land on which they live and the communities of which they are a part have deep meaning. Home is more than a city or state of residence. It is the whole of a place—its lakes and woods, animals, sounds, spirit, and cycles. It is the sacred

Thomas D. Peacock is associate professor in the department of education at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

Donald R. Day is assistant professor in the department of education at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

place of ancestors. This deeper meaning is why tribal people have such a deep and abiding veneration for this land many know as Turtle Island, or North America. In this sacred land, all things are interrelated. All things are part of the great circle that is life:

Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun goes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life cycle of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and they were always in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.¹

—Black Elk, Oglala Lakota holy man

Misconceptions abound about the indigenous people of North America. Foremost is the mistaken notion that all “Indians” are alike. There are, in fact, over five hundred unique tribal groups, each with its own history, culture, language, and beliefs. Another common misconception is that the indigenous people have disappeared, that their cultures have died and the people been assimilated into a larger American culture. Most tribal nations, however, still possess sovereignty as a result of treaties with the United States and continue to maintain their identities, cultures, and communities.

For many hundreds of years, two different tribal nations, with different languages and cultures, have lived in the area now known as Minnesota (a Dakota word for “sky-tinted water”). The Dakota (“friends” or “allies”), also called the Sioux (from *Nadouessioux*, a French corruption of the Ojibwe word *Naudoway*, or “enemy”), preceded the Ojibwe. The Ojibwe migrated into Minnesota soon after contact with the French, acquiring firearms as a result of the fur trade, which were used to push the woodland Dakota from Greater Minnesota to the southern prairie.

THE DAKOTA AND OJIBWE PEOPLES

All stories have a beginning, and this one goes back to the time of creation. While Western culture promotes the idea that ancient people migrated to the Americas nearly twelve thousand years ago over a land bridge across the Bering Sea, which now separates Siberia and Alaska, the indigenous people of this continent have their own stories of how they came to be here. In the Ojibwe story of creation, the Creator made the people here. The Creator had a vision in which he saw all the things of the universe—stars and star clusters, galaxies, moons, planets, and Earth. On Earth he saw oceans, lakes, rivers, streams, ponds, meadows, grasses, flowers, mountains, deserts, and forests filled with many different kinds of trees, plants, and animals.²

After he had visions of these things, he brought into existence all that he had dreamed. He created the materials in which all physical things are based—wind, rocks, water, and fire. With these materials he created all the wonders of the universe—the galaxies, suns, moon, planets, and the great voids between worlds. Then he created the earth and all the things of the earth, and to each of these things he gave its own soul-spirit.³

He created plants and put them on the earth in the places where they would be most useful to other plants, animals, and people, and he gave each of them a purpose—growing, healing, and beauty. Next he created our elder brothers the animals—the fish, the four-legged creatures, the birds, and those that walk on two legs. Each was created for a reason, given unique powers and a place in the world. Last in the order of creation were people.

The Early People of Minnesota

Much of Minnesota was covered with a sheet of ice several miles thick nearly twelve thousand years ago during the last glacial period. With the retreat of the ice came the return of plants, trees, grasses, and flowers. Our elder brothers the four-legged and the birds called this home. Then the people of other nations, the Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Fox, and Menominee, lived there. The Dakota, and later the Ojibwe, then settled the area.

The Dakota people were once the primary tribal nation in what is now Minnesota, calling all of Minnesota and western Wisconsin their homelands. The seven bands of the Dakota formed a political alliance called the Oceti Sakowin, or Seven Fires.⁴ The Yankton and Yantonai (Dwellers at the End Village and Little Dwellers at the End) spoke a dialect of the language called Nakota. The Teton (Dwellers of the Plains) spoke and continue to speak the Lakota dialect.

The four other bands—the Mdewakanton (Dwellers of the Spirit Lake), Sisseton, Wahpeton, and Wahpekute bands of Isanyanti, or eastern Dakota—once lived along the shores of Mille Lacs in central Minnesota, where the mounds of their earth lodges can be seen today.⁵ These bands were expelled from that area in the early eighteenth century by advancing Ojibwe, and they were forced to settle in the prairie lands of southern Minnesota. Fearing disruption in the lucrative fur-trade industry, the U.S. government negotiated a treaty between the two tribes, leaving the Dakota with the land south of the Minnesota River. This treaty with the Ojibwe, negotiated at Prairie du Chen in 1826, established a geographical boundary between the Dakota and Ojibwe people.⁶

The ancestors of the Ojibwe were the Lenni Lenape (the Grandfathers, known today as the Delaware), who migrated across this great continent from the west to the east.⁷ The epic story of that journey is known as the Wallum Olum. Recorded on bark tablets and song sticks (sticks with songs, historical events, and pictographs inscribed on them), this written record is the oldest recorded account of people in North America, dating before 1600 B.C. The Ojibwe lived on and near the Atlantic Ocean nearly six hundred years ago near the mouth of the St. Lawrence River.⁸ Basil Johnston suggests that they lived there for so long that most forgot that their true origins lay in the West.⁹ The westward migration began as a journey as one people with the Ottawa (*Odawa*, or “traders”) and Potawatomi (Keepers of the Perpetual Fire). Separation of the three peoples came at the Straits of Michilimacinac (where Lake Michigan converges with Lake Huron). At that point some Ojibwe proceeded north and became the First Nation Ojibwe of Canada

and the ancestors of present-day Ojibwe of Grand Portage Reservation. Another group went south and west to what is now Minnesota.

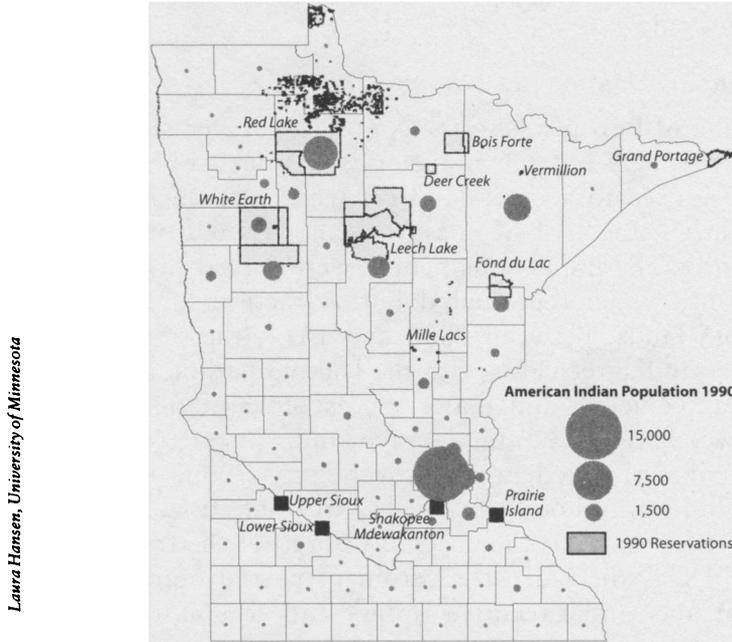
The Taking of Dakota and Ojibwe Land

The coming of Europeans to the continent forever altered tribal life. Treaties between the indigenous nations and the United States were used to acquire land for white settlement. In these treaties, large tracts of Minnesota land passed from tribal to white hands. The indigenous people were forced to move onto reservations, which represented but a fraction of their traditional homelands. Between 1826 and 1871 (the treaty period) six treaties and agreements with the Dakota nation, and sixteen treaties, agreements, and major pieces of legislation affecting the Ojibwe, were used to take native land.¹⁰ As a result of these treaties, tribes retained limited sovereignty (rights of self-governance and nationhood) and rights to hunt, fish, and gather (treaty rights) on lands they ceded. Even after the treaty period ended in 1871, the federal government passed numerous congressional acts and executive orders and the Supreme Court ruled on a variety of court cases that reaffirmed the U.S. government's special relationship with American Indian tribes.¹¹ This relationship, although constantly challenged by conservative antitreaty organizations, still exists.

Dakota Communities and Ojibwe Reservations

The majority (over thirty thousand) of the indigenous people in Minnesota now live in the urban areas of Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and Bemidji, where they have established their own supportive educational, human services, and cultural programs. The Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis has the largest concentration of American Indian people in the state of Minnesota. Approximately 17 percent of the city of Bemidji is comprised of American Indians, and many make their home in the central hillside area of Duluth.

Four Dakota communities were created through treaties, legislation, and federal proclamation. The Lower Sioux and Upper Sioux communities, located along the Minnesota River

American Indian Population by County in Minnesota, 1990.

Total American Indian population for Minnesota in 1990: 49,909 (1.1%). The eleven reservations in the state are shaded and labeled (Deer Creek and Vermilion are part of the Bois Forte reservation).

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, tape STF-1A, 1990.

in southwestern Minnesota, once encompassed an area 150 miles long and 10 miles wide on either side of the river, but were reduced to less than half that size, and only the southern side of the river, by subsequent treaty.¹²

The Dakota Conflict

An uprising of Dakota in 1862 because of starvation and overcrowding resulted in the death of over 1,200 whites and Dakota, and led the federal government to abrogate its treaties with the Dakota and force their removal from Minnesota. The Prairie Island and Shakopee-Mdewakanton communities, considered “friendly” by the U.S. government because they had not participated in the uprising, were given back some of their lands in 1866.

The Dakota Conflict resulted in the hanging of 38 Dakota men on December 26, 1862, in Mankato, Minnesota. This is the largest mass execution of Americans the U.S. government ever condoned. Abraham Lincoln gave the orders to have the Dakota executed, but granted pardons to 269 other Dakota warriors. The major result of the Dakota Conflict was the dispersal of the majority of Dakota people out of Minnesota to Nebraska and South Dakota, among other areas.

Establishment of the Dakota Communities and Ojibwe Reservations

All of the Ojibwe reservations were established by treaties and are considered separate and distinct nations by the U.S. government. The seven Ojibwe reservations are Grand Portage, Bois Forte, Red Lake, White Earth, Leech Lake, Fond du Lac, and Mille Lacs. An outline of Dakota and Ojibwe communities is as follows:

Reservation	Treaty	Approx. Land (acres)	Population
Mille Lacs	1837	10,500	1,300
Fond du Lac	1854	24,000	1,100
Grand Portage	1854	56,000	500
Leech Lake	1855	29,600	4,700
Red Lake	1863	637,000	5,400
Bois Forte	1866	42,000	500
White Earth	1867	67,000	4,500
Shakopee-Mdewakanton	1887-1893	650	250
Prairie Island	1887-1893	534	—
Lower Sioux	Congressional Acts of 1888, 1889, 1890, and Indian Reorganization Act of 1934	1,743	612
Upper Sioux	1938 Proclamation	746	150

Source: American Indian Learner Outcome Team, *American Indian History, Culture and Language* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, 1995), 43.

FEDERAL INDIAN POLICY: 1887-1953

One of the most important pieces of legislation passed by Congress regarding American Indians was the General Allotment

Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Severalty Act, or simply the Dawes Act.¹³ Although the author of this act, Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts, may have had the best intentions for American Indians when he proposed the legislation, this act turned out to be one of the most damaging pieces of legislation ever inflicted upon American Indians. The Dawes Act authorized the federal government to survey Indian lands, divide them into small tracts, and assign ownership of the pieces to individual American Indians.¹⁴ As a result of the Dawes Act, land occupied by American Indians for centuries was broken up and parceled out, with the vast remaining amounts of land sold to non-Indian people.¹⁵ With the passage of the Dawes Act, American Indians lost the majority of their homelands.

The history of the United States is filled with pendulum swings regarding American Indians. At times, government officials wanted American Indians to be fully assimilated into American society; at other times, government officials believed that American Indians were uniquely diverse and could add strength to a multicultural country. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 recognized, for the first time, the communal cultures of American Indians everywhere, including Minnesota. The most important consequence of the act was the establishment of modern tribal governments. In the 1950s, government officials acted in the belief that American Indians were in the way, that their cultures were inferior, and that the best resolution was to assimilate them as quickly and efficiently as possible.¹⁶ This was the mentality of many policymakers when Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108 and Public Law 83-280 in 1953. House Concurrent Resolution 108 sought to cancel the federal government's trust responsibility with American Indian tribes as had been specified in most treaties. Public Law 83-280 conferred upon certain designated states full criminal and civic jurisdiction over Indian reservations. Individual states were given the authority to deal with American Indian tribes as state leaders wished rather than having to abide by the federal government's protectionist policies.¹⁷ The 1950s highlighted a long history of government officials breaking treaty after treaty with American Indians.

THE EDUCATION OF MINNESOTA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Before the arrival of Europeans, the purpose of education was twofold: to teach practical life skills to young people, and to enhance the soul and encourage spiritual growth. Each was important and relied upon the other to balance the life journey. To possess only the skills of living without knowledge of the spirit would be to live a life without purpose, depth, or meaning. To focus solely upon inner growth would be to ignore the customary skills of survival necessary in earlier times. Traditionally, Ojibwe education was in three phases.¹⁸ The first phase lasted until a child was about seven years old, during which the child was cared for and nurtured by grandmothers, aunts, and elders. The second phase began when the young boys went with their fathers, uncles, and older cousins to learn the ways of men in providing sustenance by hunting and fishing. At this time, the young girls went with their mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and older cousins to learn the ways of women in providing for the home and tending a garden. The third phase of education was the search for wisdom, which would consume the rest of an individual's life. The search for wisdom was a quest to know the whole story of things—to know things in their simplicity and in their complexity, and to know the many layers of meaning.

The coming of Europeans to North America touched the core of nearly every aspect of the Dakota and Ojibwe cultures: language, family and social structure, customs, values, insights, spiritual beliefs and practices, and institutional and governmental structures. Tribal people still suffer from the effects of the undeniable oppression of that period and its accompanying internalized dysfunction. This dysfunction still manifests itself in high student dropout rates (around 40 percent) and low scholastic achievement, a mistrust of formal schooling, high rates of adolescent pregnancy, poverty, and high rates of crime throughout Indian country.¹⁹

Formal Education of Tribal People

With the arrival of the early French traders came Jesuit and Franciscan missionaries. It was their purpose to convert people

they believed were pagan, devoid of any knowledge of God, to Christianity. The formal education of Dakota and Ojibwe children was initially done in immigrant homes and churches. Many of the first formally educated Indians were half-breed children—from intermarriages of white and Dakota or Ojibwe people—many of whom were educated at home. Soon, however, church missions and schools were opened in Indian communities throughout Minnesota. Although these schools were operated by Christian missionaries, they were paid for by the federal government.

The federal role in Indian education grew markedly with the passage of the Indian Civilization Act of 1824, which provided federal funding for formalized schooling of Indians. Mission schools were soon complemented by federal manual (trade) and boarding schools. By 1838, the federal government was operating six manual and eighty-seven boarding schools for American Indian students.²⁰ Dakota and Ojibwe people were being sent to off-reservation boarding schools in Pipestone, Minnesota; Flandreau, South Dakota; and Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The use of education to remove the tribal cultures and traditions from the lives of young Indian people, coupled with the banning of their religious practices, resulted in the loss of languages and parenting skills and contributed to low self-esteem in generations of Indian people.

Missionary Schools and Boarding Schools

When Europeans first arrived in North America and made contact with American Indians, they gave little consideration to aboriginal cultures, heritages, or lifestyles. Europeans had two main views regarding American Indians during their initial contacts: (1) American Indians were a race doomed to extinction because they could not or would not adapt to an “advanced” European lifestyle, and (2) American Indians were simply a product of their environment and would assimilate European-American values if they had enough opportunities to be exposed to “superior” influences of white society.²¹

The primary purpose of mission schools was to “Christianize” American Indians into becoming “American.”²² Many federal policymakers supported the belief that unless American

Indians converted to Christianity and acquired European-American values, white and Indian cultures would forever be incompatible.²³ Missionary schools have been cited as the main means used to eliminate American Indian cultures so that the assimilation of American Indians into the larger society would take place more efficiently.²⁴

When the federal government began to dominate the education of American Indians in the late 1800s, the need for missionary schools was significantly reduced.²⁵ The main objective of federal policymakers was to convert the American Indian into their image of the ideal self-reliant American individual.²⁶ Boarding schools were created to separate American Indian children from their parents and their “inferior” cultures.²⁷ In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the federal government implemented a forced assimilation policy by which young American Indian boys and girls were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools across the country.²⁸ Assimilation in those schools took two major forms: industrial training and the inculcation of values. Half of each student’s day in boarding school was devoted to some form of manual or industrial training.²⁹

Self-Determination Through Education

With the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, American Indian parents had a greater voice in their children’s education. The act modified the curriculum—providing teachers with special training in American Indian cultures and traditions—and acknowledged the traditional and religious backgrounds of American Indian people.³⁰

As Americans became more tolerant of cultural pluralism in the 1960s, there came a resurgence of ethnic pride in Minnesota’s Dakota and Ojibwe communities. A cultural and spiritual awakening spread throughout Indian country. As more Indian people went into higher education, Indian studies departments developed in the colleges and universities of Minnesota that had significant American Indian student populations. With the enactment of the Indian Education Act in 1972 and the funding appropriated for its implementation, a new cadre of American Indian school employees entered the public schools as home

school coordinators, Indian youth advocates, social worker aides, language and culture teachers, and tutors. For the first time in many schools, Indian students had an Indian adult to advocate for them in school matters. Indian associations and clubs were formed in many schools, and efforts were made to add tribal culture, language, and history to the curriculum. Perhaps most importantly, the Indian Education Act empowered Indian parents by mandating the creation of American Indian parent committees in all schools having Indian education programs.

This new attention to the educational conditions of American Indians in public schools sometimes led to conflict between reservation communities and nearby public-school personnel. Many Indian students continued to score lower than their non-Indian student peers on standardized achievement tests, had higher dropout rates, were more likely to be referred for special educational services, and were more likely to be targeted for both in-school and out-of-school suspension. American Indian parent committees often demanded changes in the way schools provided education to their children and requested that districts hire American Indian teachers and administrators. Parent committees also sought representation on local school boards and pushed for a curriculum that was inclusive of tribal culture and history. Frustrated with the unwillingness or inability of local school officials to respond to their demands, some parents pulled their children out of school and set up all-Indian schools. What began as a student walkout with little funding and few books is now the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School, located on the Leech Lake Reservation in the town of Cass Lake, one of the largest tribal schools in Indian country. Similarly, Indian parents in the Onamia school district set up their own tribal school on the Mille Lacs Reservation.

Urban schools like the Heart of the Earth Survival School in Minneapolis and the Red School House in St. Paul began under the leadership of urban Indian parents and the American Indian Movement, a nonviolent activist group. Tribal schools, operating under the auspices of local tribal governments, were founded at Cass Lake (Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School), White Earth (Circle

of Life School), Mille Lacs (Nay Ah Shing School), and Fond du Lac (Fond du Lac Ojibwe School and the Little Black Bear School). These schools combine conventional academics with a solid tribal curriculum.

Tribal colleges were founded to serve unique functions in Indian communities by providing certificate programs that allow graduates to enter the work force after two years, regular two-year transfer programs, and a host of language and cultural programs. More importantly, tribal colleges provide the kind of support many Indian students need to succeed in higher education, such as personalized financial aid services, culturally sensitive Indian faculty, staff, and administrators, and a focus on serving the local community. Minnesota's tribal colleges include the Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet, the Leech Lake Tribal College in Cass Lake, and the White Earth Reservation Tribal College in White Earth.

The important point in all these recent developments is that tribal people have gained significant control of and input into the educational decision-making process, and the result is that Indian people have more and better choices. Minnesota's American Indian students from preschool through postsecondary school have a range of options, including local Head Start programs, K-12 tribal schools, tribal colleges, and four-year colleges and universities.

TRADITIONAL TRIBAL ECONOMIES

For many hundreds of years, the Dakota and Ojibwe of Minnesota lived in bands of 300 to 400 people. Each group used the resources of its area. Both the Dakota and Ojibwe relied extensively on the forests, rivers, and lakes for food, materials for clothing, tools, housing, and transportation. In the spring the maple trees were tapped and gardens were planted. In the summer the gardens were tended, and blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and cranberries were harvested. The women and girls boiled down the berries and spread them in the sun to dry for use during the long winter months. Fishing, which was done year-round, was especially productive in the summertime.

When the weather cooled in the fall, the Dakota and Ojibwe began preparing for the cold winter ahead by stocking up on food and building and reinforcing housing shelters. The Ojibwe were, and still are, famous for the harvesting of wild rice from the lakes and rivers of northern Minnesota. Once processed, wild rice could be stored and used years later. During the winter, the men spent much of their time hunting and trapping. They used snowshoes and sleds for travel. Later on, with the advent of the fur trade, the men and women of the Dakota and Ojibwe worked hard trapping and processing the furs of beavers, mink, rabbits, bears, and other animals to trade for goods the Europeans possessed, such as knives, pots and pans, and salt and other food items. Although there were some lean times and an occasional dispute between the Dakota and Ojibwe, the tribes lived in relative accord with each other. To a great extent, American Indians did not pursue technological advances or the domination of the land, choosing instead to live a spiritual existence in harmony with nature.

CONTEMPORARY TRIBAL ECONOMIES

With the arrival of European-Americans in Minnesota and elsewhere, American Indians became one of the most economically depressed groups in the country. This status still holds today. With shrinking land bases due to treaty negotiations and wars, American Indian resources became more and more limited. Even though government policy changes afforded American Indian tribes a greater measure of economic self-determination in the 1960s, their business development initiatives were relatively unsuccessful. Like African-Americans after the Civil War, American Indians in the 1970s and 1980s were systematically denied loans to begin businesses or invest in capital ventures. With no financial assistance and limited resources, economic enterprises often ended in failure.

In addition to a lack of access to capital, Indian reservations are often limited by geographical location. In the early 1990s, Grand Metropolitan of Minneapolis was interested in developing a food processing plant on the Leech Lake Reservation, but

withdrew because of the transportation costs of shipping materials and goods to and from the reservation, which is located approximately two hundred miles north of Minneapolis.³¹

A major roadblock in developing successful American Indian businesses and enterprises is the lack of educated, qualified, and committed American Indian personnel to administer them. People who are born and raised in a community are often more committed to that community than people who are hired from the outside. Realizing this, tribes have begun to dedicate significant sums of money for scholarships, grants, and loans to their tribal members so they can acquire the education and training needed to make good employees, administrators, and businesspeople.

The Dakota and Ojibwe have tried many economic development initiatives over the years. Although some of the economic initiatives had some success (logging, wild-rice harvesting, commercial fishing, and tourism), most did not succeed, because of untrained personnel or a lack of resources—both natural and financial.

INDIAN GAMING AND CASINOS

Without a doubt, the most significant development in the history of economic stability within Indian tribes in Minnesota and nationally is the evolution of Indian gaming and casinos. Before the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, unemployment rates on Indian reservations in Minnesota were extremely high. According to Marge Anderson, former chief executive officer for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, unemployment on the Mille Lacs Reservation was approximately 60 percent in 1991, but has shrunk to much more tolerable levels since then.³² Although the unemployment rates on Indian reservations still exceed the state and national averages, the rates have decreased significantly where casinos are located.

Gaming and casinos are controversial. Economic, moral, philosophical, and social arguments can be, and have been, made about the impact of gaming on society. Despite these arguments, many states, including Minnesota, have legalized gaming. Thirteen out of the first seventeen gaming compacts in

the United States were signed in Minnesota. In Minnesota there are eighteen casinos, which employ approximately eleven thousand people, 75 percent of them non-Indian.³³ Indians and non-Indians employed at casinos pay all taxes required by state and federal law, including income taxes, FICA, and social security taxes. Nationally, Indian gaming is a business now valued at \$9.6 billion annually. In Minnesota in the early 1990s, Indian gaming paid wages of \$80 million a year and earned revenues of about \$900 million a year.³⁴

The economic benefits of gaming and casinos in Minnesota have been incredible. Within the past ten years, Minnesota's Indian reservations with casinos have made tremendous economic strides in developing their infrastructures, establishing businesses, providing educational, social, and health-care services to their members, and supporting a variety of social, cultural, and educational endeavors in their respective communities. Marge Anderson, in an address to the Minnesota legislature on April 9, 1998, stated:

Prior to 1991, the only employment on the reservation was within the tribal government or for a government program. Even then, salaries were barely at or above minimum wage. Most of the homes on the reservation were broken down, and many were unfit for habitation. Our children attended school in a building unfit for learning, and our water supply system was plagued with pollution. Life on the Mille Lacs Reservation was one of extreme hardship and despair. Today, you would never recognize our community as the same reservation. . . . Never again will a child live in substandard housing as most of us did. Never again will a child be denied quality, state-of-the-art health service as many of us were. Never again will a child be afraid to drink the water as we all were. Never again will a child go to bed hungry as too many of us did.³⁵

The Dakota and Ojibwe are two of many tribes across the country that are benefiting from tribal gaming. After decades and decades of oppression, the Dakota and Ojibwe are slowly recovering from the neglect and hopelessness that engulfed them for so many generations. They are building new houses, roads, schools, and community centers as well as creating new businesses and investing in their tribal education initiatives.

Now more than ever, the Dakota and Ojibwe people are taxpayers as well as recipients of government assistance where Indian gaming operations are located. Local governments and the state are enjoying increased tax revenues, which contribute significantly to the overall economy of Minnesota and the nation.

The positive aspects of Indian gaming are significant to the great majority of Indian and non-Indian people throughout the state. For some, however, there is a dark side to this “new buffalo.” Gambling-related problems have increased exponentially along with legalized gambling. Problem gambling is identified as a behavior in which a person suffers some loss of control over his or her gambling activities, with negative consequences.³⁶ Gambling problems range from minor (the gambler loses more money than he or she can afford to) to serious (the gambler loses his or her home, family, and friends).

A major downside to Indian gaming is the misconception that all Indians are now rich. Although some American Indian tribes in Minnesota and nationally have done extremely well financially, most tribal members do not receive profit shares from their tribe’s gaming efforts. The three largest tribes in the state of Minnesota—Red Lake, Leech Lake, and White Earth—all have casinos. None of their members receive per capita payments from their gaming enterprises. These tribes are benefiting from Indian gaming profits by hiring tribal members who are unemployed or under-employed. Although a job at \$7–\$10 per hour may seem minimal to many, it is significant to a family with a history of unemployment. As stated earlier, gaming profits are being used for tribal infrastructure development, education, and tribal business initiatives that benefit everyone.

The stereotypical notion that gaming has brought great wealth to all Indians also influences the views and decisions of legislators and corporations regarding Indian tribes. Too often, those seeking funding for social, health, or tribal education programs are denied because legislators and corporate leaders think they should simply go to their tribal representatives and secure whatever funds they need from their tribal councils. In 1998, Carl Pohlad, the billionaire owner of the Minnesota Twins

baseball team, recommended (with significant support from a variety of legislators) that Minnesota's Indian tribes should buy the Twins a new stadium costing many hundreds of millions of dollars using their Indian gaming profits.³⁷ Fortunately, the majority of Minnesota's state legislators are aware that Indian tribes are still trying to put together their own infrastructures with Indian gaming revenues. Consequently, the suggestion that the tribes should build the Twins a new stadium subsidized.

The rationale for supporting tribal gaming is twofold: the revenues will help the tribes and surrounding communities become self-sufficient, and the tribes should have a right to govern their own lands. Except for a minority of compulsive gamblers, Indian gaming in Minnesota has been a boon to Indians and non-Indians alike since its legalization a decade ago.

POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Indian gaming is the first successful enterprise Indian tribes have had to "kick start" their economies since the arrival of Europeans in Minnesota. Because tribes now have some revenues that are owned and managed by the tribes themselves, which they are investing wisely, they are becoming more significant players educationally, socially, culturally, and politically in Minnesota. Although American Indian tribes are treated as sovereign nations by the United States, their actual relationship with the federal government could be viewed more as semi-sovereign because of their huge dependence on government assistance for social, health, and educational programs.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when American Indians began entering institutions of higher education in significant numbers, many began to study the treaties their people had signed with the U.S. government and realized the concessions they had been granted for signing away their lands. Today, Indian tribes are confronting the state and federal governments in court in order to legally fish, hunt, trap, and initiate gaming enterprises on behalf of their people. Almost all court cases are being won by the tribes, because the concession agreements are clearly articulated in the treaties and have been approved and

incorporated by the Constitution. It is ironic that education, a tool intended to eliminate tribal cultures and heritages and thus assimilate American Indians into the mainstream of American society, is, in actuality, helping to preserve them.³⁸

The relationship between Minnesota's Indian tribes and the Minnesota legislature can be described as one of highs and lows. For many years, most Minnesota legislators treated Indian tribes as second-class groups. In the 1970s, however, Indian tribes began to develop positive relationships with many Minnesota legislators. To a great extent, these positive relationships still exist. With the advent of Indian gaming revenues and the expansion of Indian treaty rights, this relationship is more important than ever. Considering the great financial impact Indian gaming and treaty rights have had on all aspects of Minnesota's economy, it is prudent for both the Minnesota legislature and the tribes to have a close working relationship.

In a backlash against the fighting between Democrats and Republicans in Minnesota, the people elected a Reform Party candidate to the governorship in 1998—a former pro wrestler named Jesse Ventura. The people of Minnesota are relatively split about their views of Governor Ventura. He has made remarks offensive to many, including about American Indians. Governor Ventura also stated that if American Indian tribes wanted to consider themselves sovereign nations, they should not ask the government for financial assistance. On the other hand, he is developing a special relationship with some Indian tribes by inviting tribal council members along on some of his education endeavors. For Indian tribes in Minnesota, Jesse Ventura's tenure as governor should be an interesting and closely watched one.

A REMARKABLE RENAISSANCE

American Indians in Minnesota are living in exciting times. Tribal people have the financial seeds of prosperity planted and the knowledge to use them wisely for the betterment of all humanity. One of Minnesota's most influential American Indian leaders was Marge Anderson. Her words reflect the thoughts and beliefs of most American Indian leaders in Minnesota:

Our culture teaches us that the things of greatest worth in this world are our Elders, our children, our natural resources, and our sovereignty. These are what we strive to protect, at all costs. Every decision which we make as a Nation, especially every decision relating to economic development, must be based upon cultural beliefs, and result in the protection of these precious gifts. At Mille Lacs, we always look seven generations ahead. We know that if we do not keep the protection of our resources and the needs of future generations at the center of each decision we make, even the most seemingly certain of economic plans will surely fail.³⁹

Not only is there a renaissance in the way tribal officials are leading American Indians into the twenty-first century, but there is also a renaissance forming in the classrooms, where American Indian students are acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for the economic, social, political, and cultural preservation of their people. This movement is creating a new type of warrior, who carries not bows and arrows but books and degrees. Through education, the American Indian warriors who are emerging today will be the salvation of their people tomorrow.

Contemporary American Indian men and women in Minnesota live in two worlds. Many are members of Christian churches, and English is the primary language spoken at home. Many American Indians have felt ambivalent about their heritage at some point in their lifetimes, but at the same time they are proud to be American Indians, and contemporary American Indians do not believe that attaining an education will force them to lose their "Indianness."

Throughout Minnesota, tribal members are returning to the sweat lodge ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, and big-drum societies of the past. Dakota and Ojibwe languages, once near extinction, are being taught in homes and schools. The Dakota and Ojibwe people in Minnesota have learned that they do not have to give up their Indian identities to live and prosper in modern society. With so much conflict, violence, and turmoil in the world, American Indians are finding peace and strength in the ways of their ancestors.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁵Ibid.
- ⁶Elizabeth Ebbott, *Indians in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
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