Part Two:
Colonial Foundations and Legacies: Conquest, Exploitation, Eradication, Assimilation, Racism

“Certifiably Indian? The Problem of Purity/Authenticity”

The Paradox of Demographic Resurgence

→ **Canada:** more than twice as many people self-identify as Aboriginal than those who are registered as “Status Indians.”

→ **Brazil:** Indigenous identification has grown more than 300% in 50 years (Warren 1996:11-12).

→ **Central America:** states have officially recognized Indigenous communities in a break with previous narratives of amalgamation (Hooker 2005; Stocker 2005; Tilley 2002).

→ **The Caribbean:** resurgence of people claiming the identities of Indigenous nations that were long thought to have been extinct, and some are using DNA testing services to prove their ancestry (Guitar et al. 2006; Martinez Cruzado 2002).
→ The U.S.: According to 2000 US Census data, self-identified American Indians are becoming the US’ fastest-growing minority, growing by more than 400% since 1960 (Shoemaker 1999:4; Nagel 1996:114)

→ Enumerated American Indians rose from 237,000 in 1900 to at least 947,500 people in 1980

→ children of racially intermarried couples are more likely to identify as Indian than previously

→ birth and death rates favoring rapid population growth

→ A paradox:

“during the past few decades, research has shown decreases in reported tribal affiliation, increased English language usage, decreased use of Indian languages, continued widespread intermarriage with non-Indians, increased urbanization, and rising levels of Indian education and income”
“researchers have also reported much evidence of **Indian ethnic resurgence**: increased ethnic identification in census data, increased ethnic mobilization in the form of organizational formation, activism, and litigation, and increased social and cultural revitalization on reservations and in urban Indian communities”

“the rise of American Indian ethnic identification, Indian ethnic mobilization [and] Indian cultural revival occurred **because** of assimilation processes. In other words, the very processes thought to reduce or destroy ethnic distinctiveness can, ironically, become the means by which ethnicity is regenerated and renewed”

→ “new claimants,” self-definition, self-determination

→ Biotechnologies and commercialization: DNA testing for cultural identities?
(i) genealogical research

(ii) reversing the suppression of family history

(iii) DNA testing

Inventing the Invented Indian?


→ James A. Clifton (*Being and Becoming Indian* and *The Invented Indian*): “hundreds of thousands of... [people] with obscure antecedents who, in the past twenty years, have swapped their ethnic identities for Indian.” Such individuals seek only “the stamp of federal approval on and specially privileged political economic support of their resuscitated or contrived identities.” In this understanding of racial identification, claims to Indian identity function as “a sturdy crowbar ... to gain leverage in the play of interest-group politics.”
William Quinn, Jr., the “Southeast Syndrome”

essentialist anti-indigenism and instrumentalism

The Licensing Process

Federal Acknowledgment Process (FAP):

“that a single Indian group has existed since its First sustained contact with European cultures on a continuous basis to the present; that its members live in a distinct, autonomous community perceived by others as Indian; that it has maintained some sort of authority with a governing system by which its members abide; that all its members can be traced genealogically to an historic tribe; and that it can provide evidence to substantiate all of this.”

Makes no distinction between “people who left[the community] voluntarily and those who were forced to leave.”

Indian Non-Indians

required to produce documentation of their identity
→ tribes have the exclusive right to create their own legal definitions of identity

→ “blood quantum,” or degree of Indian ancestry

→ About two-thirds of all federally recognized tribes of the mainland United States specify a minimum blood quantum in their legal citizenship criteria, with one quarter blood degree being the most frequent minimum requirement

→ The remaining one-third of Indian tribes specifies no minimum blood quantum. They often simply require that any new enrollee be a lineal (direct) descendant of another tribal member

→ Certain tribes require that citizens not only possess tribal ancestry but that this ancestry come from a particular parent

→ Federal legal definitions of Indian identity vary widely

→ Many individuals who are recognized by their tribes as citizens are nevertheless considered non-Indian for some or all federal purposes
Tribal blood quantum criteria can produce non-Indians out of Indians

Licensed Non-Indian Indians?

While the question of “Who is an Indian?” is probably one of the most enduring and prominent questions one encounters over the centuries, especially among people concerned with reducing their numbers, it is probably one of the worst questions to have ever been asked.