

Roger,

This is an excellent article. I would recommend that you submit it to newspapers & magazines for publication. However, I would also recommend that you cut it down to separate areas, such as the NTC schools problem ~~and then~~ or the Cornell or Dartmouth programs. Also, contact Jose Barreiro and show him a copy for his publication.

A

Roger Smith

Indian culture - 1/26/87

An American Indian child ~~who lives~~ in New York City brought

a treasured family heirloom to school. She planned to show the

object, a feather hair-tie, to her classmates as part of ~~the~~ their

scheduled activity. But the child's teacher was not impressed.

"What are you doing with that?" the teacher said. "You're not

a real Indian."

redundant since most family heirlooms are treasured

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2.
The sentence is correct,
but you could use a
stronger way of saying
it.

The incident illustrates a problem experienced by many American Indians today, the difficulty of preserving a sense of ethnic identity and cultural awareness.

The problem is compounded by widespread indifference and insensitivity to American Indian culture on the part of ~~non-Indians~~ ^{the general population} by the pressures Indians feel to become assimilated into American society, and by ~~the fact that there is~~ ^{a continuing} controversy within the American Indian community over the question of ~~whether to~~ ^{preserving} Indian traditions.

~~The problem is especially acute for~~ ^{especially affects hurts} American Indians in the Northeast, where there is a relatively small and dispersed American Indian population and ~~where the few remaining tribal groups, tend to be isolated and fragmented.~~ Most Indian

tribes east of the Mississippi River were forcibly removed from their homelands during the nineteenth century.

LATER.

- more -

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In New York State, ~~which has by far~~^{with} the largest American Indian population of the states east of the Mississippi, ~~North American~~ Indians comprise only two-tenths ^{one} percent of the population. ~~There are~~^{lie} ten Indian reservations scattered throughout the state, but over half of the state's 40,000 to 50,000 American Indians live off the reservation.

About 600 American Indian children in the New York City school system are participating in the Native American Education Program, ^(NAEP) a federally funded program ~~that is~~ designed to meet the special cultural, educational, and social needs of American Indian students. [There are an estimated 14,000 North American Indians living in New York City.]

A staff member of the ~~Native American Education Program~~^{NAEP}, Yvonne Beamer, a Cherokee Indian, said in an interview that American Indian children living in New York City often have difficulty making an adjustment to school because of the lack of "a strong cultural basis."

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"They may have never lived on a reservation, they may not have grandparents living in the home, so they go to school and they feel completely alienated," Ms. Beamer said. Others have noted that Indians generally attach great importance to the maintenance of family and kinship ties.

This seems contradictory

Ms. Beamer pointed out that education has always been very important to Indians as a way of passing on traditions to the next generation and teaching survival skills to children. (Indians often insisted that provisions for education be included in the hundreds of treaties they negotiated with the federal government.)

Ms. Beamer ~~enumerated~~ ^{criticized} several major problems with the way American Indian culture is presented in the New York City schools, ~~These include~~ ^{especially} the use of demeaning stereotypes to portray Indians, a lack of curriculum materials dealing with Indian culture, and a distorted and biased view of the role played by Indians in American history.

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By using the word
"non-Indian" you are referring
to everyone who isn't an
Indian. This is far too broad since
many non-Indians are sensitive
to the Indian's plight.

According to Jose Barreiro, Editor of the Northeast Indian
Quarterly, a journal published by Cornell University's American
Indian Program, it is customary for ~~non-Indians~~ ^{officials} to apply
demeaning stereotypes to Indians (such as expecting Indians to
live on a reservation or wear headdresses) and to deny the
"Indianness" of Indians who do not fit the stereotype.

Mr. Barreiro said that the problem of stereotyping is
caused in part by a tendency to view Indian culture as something
"static" and "frozen in time," when there is actually a great
deal of diversity and cultural ferment among Indian communities
today. There are over 300 federally recognized tribes
(excluding Alaskan natives) and about 250 extant Indian
languages in the United States.

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Ms. Beamer said that teachers in the New York ^{City} schools tend to ignore American Indian culture for the most part. She said that Indian-related activities in the lower grades are usually confined to having children sit on the floor "Indian style," singing the song "One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians," or discussing the role the Indians played in the first Thanksgiving.

Ms. Beamer said that "One Little, Two Little, Three Little Indians" is "really a song about genocide" and that it was "a real insult" to deal with Indians only on Thanksgiving, an American holiday.

Educators have pointed out that games in which children pretend they are Indians are demeaning to Indians because they reinforce the idea that all Indians are alike and that anyone can become an Indian simply by "playing Indian."

First of all, I don't agree. Second, does this really help your story?

Roger Smith

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Ms. Beamer said that she has repeatedly tried to meet with New York City Board of Education officials to discuss ways of including more American Indian materials in the curriculum but has made little progress so far other than getting a few Indian poems included in the social studies curriculum.

Ms. Beamer said that the Board of Education's curriculum committee, which has no American Indian members, has shown no interest in input from American Indians. She that the committee tended to be more sensitive to the concerns of larger and more powerful ethnic and religious groups.

"They don't feel we are a scholarly people, I guess, or since we're all dead, we can't criticize the curriculum anyway," Ms. Beamer said.

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The deputy director of the Board of Education's Office of Bilingual Education, Angela Bazley, said ~~in response to Ms.~~

~~Beamer's criticisms that~~ she would like to see the Native

American Education Program expanded but that obtaining

additional funds is a problem because of the relatively

of
small number of Indian students. She did not directly address

the curriculum issue.

why not?

Ms. Beamer said that the study of American Indians

at the junior and senior high school levels is

usually confined to social studies classes and that the

achievements of Indians in fields such as science and

literature have been completely neglected.

"We're not mathematicians, we're not scientists, we just exist on the social studies pages," she said.

Roger Smith

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Asked to name some scientific achievements of American Indians, Ms. Beamer pointed to the fact that much of the world's food was first grown by Indians, the development by Indians of ingenious methods of food preservation, the Indians' discovery of botanicals (drugs prepared from bark, roots, or herbs) that are still used today in their natural or synthetic form, the invention of the number zero by the Mayan Indians, and the recent discovery of ^{what appears to be} a prehistoric Indian observatory in the state of Wyoming.

Ms. Beamer pointed out that there are a number of highly respected contemporary American Indian writers, such as Pulitzer Prize winner N. Scott Momaday and children's book author Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, whose works would be appropriate for use at the elementary and high school levels. But she said that works by Indian authors are almost never included on school reading lists.

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Scholars have recently begun to study traditional North American Indian literature, which was recited orally because the Indians did not have written languages.

Long regarded as consisting mainly of primitive tales and superstitions, Indian oral narratives are now being taken seriously as literature.

Historians and anthropologists have also been rewriting the history of the American Indian in an attempt to reconstruct events from the Indian's point of view.

But there are still serious distortions and omissions in the treatment of Indians in American history textbooks, according to Fred Hoxie, Director of the D'Arcy McNickle Center for the History of the American Indian in Chicago.

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I don't really understand this.

I
"Authors have great difficulty shaping the Native American
experience to ^{fit} the upbeat format of their books," Mr. Hoxie
wrote in a study of widely used American history textbooks

that was published in the American Historical Association's newsletter.

Ms. Beamer said that the New York City school system's social studies
materials pertaining to Indians were outdated and "racist" in content. She said that the Board
of Education's catalogue of educational films has "pages and
pages" of films about the Holocaust but "only one little page
on Indian culture and it's not on all the different holocausts
that happened to Indian people."

The director of Cornell University's American Indian
Program, Ron LaFrance, a Mohawk Indian, said in an interview
that he is sympathetic to the New York City program's goals,
but that he feels the program has not gone far enough.

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"Indian educators need to go a lot deeper in terms of the culture," Mr. LaFrance said.

The Cornell program is designed not simply to promote the study of Indians from a historical or anthropological perspective, but also to train students to apply a distinctly Indian world-view to the problems of the modern world.

The problem of keeping the Indian world-view intact is most apparent on the reservations, where televisions and bingo halls coexist side by side with ancient tribal practices such as the Iroquois Midwinter Festival, a ceremony of songs, dances, games, and speeches that lasts for several days.

The Iroquois are a group of New York State tribes (Mohawks, Senecas, Oneidas, Cayugas, Onondagas, and Tuscaroras) that have managed to keep their culture and traditions remarkably intact. They are one of the largest and most extensively studied groups of Indians in North America.

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The Iroquois today are at the forefront of the Indians' struggle to maintain a sense of identity and cultural autonomy.

In his recently published book, The Iroquois Struggle for Survival, Laurence Hauptman, a history professor at the State University of New York College at New Paltz, pointed out that much of the Iroquois political activism over the past two decades "has been directed against educational administrators and institutions in the United States and Canada for historically 'de-Indianizing' them through assimilationist policies, ignoring the worth of their culture, and even denying them the sacred religious objects, such as wampum or medicine masks, housed in museums."

"What many outsiders interpret as militancy," Mr. Hauptman explained, "is in part a strategy of cultural survival to protect a rather conservative way of life."

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The principal center of Iroquois activism is the St. Regis Mohawk Indian reservation, which straddles the border between upstate New York and Canada. The reservation covers an area of six square miles and has about 7500 residents.

The St. Regis reservation is the site of a radical educational experiment by Indian traditionalists, a "Mohawk Immersion Program" for students at the pre-kindergarten through junior high school levels.

About 35 students are enrolled in the program, which was begun in the fall of 1985. The low enrollment may in part be accounted for by the program's tuition fee of \$1,000 per year, which is high by reservation standards.

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Some of the earliest European settlers commented on the beauty of the Iroquois languages, which are notable for their complexity, their rootedness in the natural world, and the practice of using a composite word to signify an entire idea.

But Iroquois leaders have noted that the languages are dying out, with fewer and fewer native speakers each generation, and that their loss would be a serious detriment to the preservation of Indian culture.

The Onondaga artist and chief Oren Lyons, an outspoken advocate for Indian causes who teaches in the American Studies Program at the State University of New York at Buffalo, has that said language "is the soul of the Iroquois nation. Without it, we do not have a nation; because there is a knowledge in a language that does not translate into English." (The Iroquois refer to their tribes as "nations," a status which they ^{say} is recognized in treaties made with the government after the Revolutionary War.)

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According to Mr. Lyons, the English language is much more "technical" and "restrictive in its definitions" than the Iroquois languages, which he calls "picture" languages.

The Mohawk immersion program on the St. Regis reservation provides for the Mohawk language to be used as the medium of instruction in all classes, including mathematics and science. Students do not begin to study English until they have reached the fifth grade.

In an editorial published in the reservation's local newspaper, a writer complained that the Mohawk immersion program is "not working" and that when students leave the confines of the school they immediately start speaking English.

The writer blamed parents for thinking that it was a waste of time to learn Mohawk and for ridiculing their children's attempts to speak the language.

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A teacher in the program who is a native of the reservation, Elizabeth Maracle, said that the editorial was incorrect and that students are learning to speak Mohawk.

"If you're talking in English away from the school, they'll correct you in Mohawk," Ms. Maracle said. She ^{said} that neither the students nor their parents spoke Mohawk before the program was initiated (adult education courses in Mohawk are also given on the reservation).

Ms. Maracle said that parents have been very supportive of the program.

Ms. Maracle pointed out that there are subtle ways in which teaching a child to speak an Indian language can reinforce distinctions between the Indian and non-Indian world-views.

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When students learn to count, for example, they count objects from nature, such as trees, rather than products of modern society, such as cars.

Some Indian leaders have been critical of programs such as the one on the St. Regis reservation.

The director of Dartmouth College's Native American Program, Bruce Duthu, said that Indian students are being "disserved" if they "are not ^{being} prepared to deal with both cultures, their own and mainstream."

Mr. Duthu said that Indian students "can't totally hide out in their own culture and expect to survive in today's world."

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Ms. Maracle acknowledged that students who have been enrolled in the Mohawk immersion program for the past year and a half have lost some of their English grammar skills, but she defended the program's goals of reviving the Mohawk language and of ensuring "that children know who they are before leaving the community."

"Having two languages expands the mind, rather than just seeing things in one language and seeing things one way," Ms. Maracle said.