**CHAPTER 7**

**Native Americans**

**Classroom Activities and Suggestions for Discussion**

1. Depending on your location in the United States, ask your students if they have lived on, visited, driven through, or had any contact with Native American Indians who live on reservations. Ask those who have experiences to share them with the class. Now ask the students to compare their experiences on the reservations to experiences of other places of living in the United States—big cities, rural life, suburbs, etc. What is significantly different about the reservations?
2. Watch and analyze the film *Smoke Signals* (Buena Vista Home Entertainment), a film based in part on Sherman Alexie’s stories from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues.* The film garnered attention as the first full-length feature film written, directed, and performed by American Indians. What ideas from the text emerge throughout the film? How does the film use personal narrative to illustrate the social problems endemic to reservation life? What bits of cultural information are in-group humor and what does a person need to know about reservation life and Native American Indian culture to “get” them? (For instance, ask students why the characters Velma and Lucy drive their car in reverse. Although the transmission is broken, the car still works according to Rez philosophy).
3. Have students watch the PBS film series *We Shall Remain*. Ask them how the series confronts what they have been taught about the first contact between Europeans and American Indians. Given what they have learned, is it necessary to revise the story of American history? Why or why not?
4. Have students watch the film *Surviving Columbus: The Story of the Pueblo People.* What does this documentary add to their understanding of how American history has unfolded for Native American Indian people? Does this documentary expand their notions of who and what Native American Indian people are? About how Native American Indian people live? Why the title *Surviving* Columbus? What is unique about the Pueblo experience of colonialism?
5. Leonard Peltier is a Native American Indian activist and part of the Red Power and American Indian movements. He has been imprisoned since 1977 for the deaths of two FBI agents, despite the fact that it has been proven that much of the evidence against him was manufactured or is inconsistent with witness testimony. Show students the film *Incident at* *Oglala* and discuss. Why has every sitting president since the time of Peltier’s imprisonment refused to pardon him or have him released for humanitarian reasons (Peltier has a number of serious medical conditions which are not being well treated in prison)?
6. Historic images of American Indians involve at least three perspectives: the viewer who sees the image, the producer who creates the image, and the subject of the image. Ask students to watch old westerns or research images available online (e.g., “before” and “after” photos showing American Indian children “civilized” by being placed into boarding schools). What do they think is the perspective of the producer, consumer, and subject? What are their motives in helping create such images? How did such images work to reinforce or change stereotypes of American Indians? Excellent sources for still photos from the Indian Schools can be found at:

* <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/erdrich/boarding/gallery.htm>
* <http://www.hanksville.org/sand/intellect/gof.html>
* <http://www.californiaindianeducation.org/indian_boarding_schools/>

Other photographic sources include:

* [https://www.facebook.com/pages/Native-American-Indian-Old- Photos/10150102703945578?sk=photos\_stream](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Native-American-Indian-Old-%20%20%20Photos/10150102703945578?sk=photos_stream)
* <http://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/pictures/>
* <http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Pictures/American-Indians-00.html>
* <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Curtis>
* <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2309215/Native-American-Indian-pictures-influence-settlers.html>

1. Ask students to compare and contrast images of American Indian women in *Lakota Woman* and *Pochahantas* (Disney, 1995). How accurately do these films portray American Indian life in general and American Indian women in particular? Discuss them in relation to what students have read about these issues [ok?]in their text.
2. Ask students to analyze slang terms for Native American Indians. For example: Red, Squaw, Apple (i.e., “red” on the outside but “white” on the inside), Casino-owner, Chug (possibly refers to alcoholism), and Tontos. Research the derivation of these terms? To what areas of life do they pertain (e.g., religious beliefs, food eaten)? How do these terms reinforce stereotypes about American Indians? How do they blur differences between American Indian tribes? How do they help shape people’s perceptions of American Indians? What are key themes that emerge in the students’ analyses of slang terms[ok?] as they relate to the book? A good and fairly comprehensive discussion of slang terms for Native American Indians can be found at: <http://www.rsdb.org/race/native_americans>.
3. Watch the movie *Rabbit Proof Fence* and read Mary Crow Dog’s essay again. Discuss similarities and differences between the situation of Australian Aborigines and American Indians.
4. There has been considerable controversy over when and how Native American Indians migrated to North America. Estimates of arrival range from more than 30,000 years before the present to 14,000 years ago. Have students discuss the political and social implications of the various theories of Native American Indian migration (the Land Bridge theory and the Solutrean theory[lowercase ok?] are two of the most widely recognized). Why is it important that history recount a story where Native American Indians migrated to North America rather than originating in North America.
5. Have students discuss the concept of coercive acculturation as outside agents practiced it in the Indian Schools and on reservations. Are there any programs or practices that continue the coercive acculturation of Native American Indians today? You can discuss the issue of Indian gaming here, particularly the point that non-tribal non-reservation interests control most profits and management. Some good sources for information online include the following:

* <http://www.indiangaming.com/home/>
* <http://www.nigc.gov/>
* <http://www.narf.org/pubs/misc/gaming.html>
* <http://melbams.lili.org/files/melbams/Presentation%201.pdf>
* <http://www.bluecorncomics.com/gaming.htm>

1. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of considerable activism on the part of many groups of Native American Indians; however, that activism has become fragmented and bureaucratized since the 1980s. Have students research some of the Native American Indian activist groups and discuss how and why activism has changed form. What is the nature of Native American Indian activism today? How is today’s Native American Indian activist different from the activist of the 1960s or 1970s? How are activist groups and social movements different? For instance, the American Indian Movement (AIM), which was powerful and well-integrated in the 1970s, had become fragmented into two major competing groups. Some good online sources of information include:

* <http://culturalpolitics.net/social_movements/indian>
* <http://www.civilrights.org/resources/civilrights101/native.html>
* <http://www.historyandtheheadlines.abc-clio.com/ContentPages/ContentPage.aspx?entryId=1171695&currentSection=1161468>
* <http://www.narf.org/about/about_whatwedo.html>
* <http://www.knowitall.org/roadtrip/cr-html/facts/timelines/na/index.cfm>
* <http://www.framingredpower.org/narrative/aim/>

1. Have students compare and contrast the American Indian/Red Power movement with the Black Power movement. What are the critical elements the movements share? What are the critical differences? Why would there be these specific differences? Using the ideas from the book of how assimilation occurs and is determined by the moment in time when contact occurs, can the differences in these groups’ approaches to social justice and economic freedom be explained by the dominant themes that Healey introduces in Chapter 5 (noted below)?
2. “The nature of dominant-minority group relations at any point in time is largely a function of the characteristics of the society as a whole. The situation of a minority group will reflect the realities of everyday social livesand particularly the subsistence technology” (p. 102).
3. “The contact situation—the conditions under which groups first come together —is the single most significant factor in the creation of minority-group status. The nature of the contact situation has long-lasting consequences for the minority group and the extent of racial or ethnic stratification, the levels of racism and prejudice, the possibilities for assimilation and pluralism, and virtually every other aspect of the dominant-majority relationship” (p. 102).
4. This chapter presents information about the contemporary problems facing Native American Indian groups. Many of these issues surround land and water, particularly as some of the richest mining, timbering, and natural resource supplies lie on and under tribal land. How are the tribes handling the demands for access to their resources? Are social problems such as poverty on the reservations being addressed using the resources generated by grazing, mineral, and water rights being rented out to non-Native interests? What are the most critical issues facing Native American Indians in the 21st century? Are these problems restricted to North American Indians or are they pan-tribal or global in scope?