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### **Voices among the Vulnerable: An Analysis of Native American Newspaper Articles**

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**Abstract:** Research confirms that Native Americans have a history of disenfranchisement. In addition to examining some of the structural forces that have shaped their experiences, this study considers contemporary ways Native Americans invoke agency to mitigate negative outcomes. Content analysis of Native American newspaper articles uncovers a pattern of documenting governmental and nativist mistreatment as well as agentic tribal responses. We endeavor to identify both how Native American writers directly or indirectly refer to governmental forces as influences on their lives and contemporary self-help initiatives. This study empirically considers how Native Americans document their past and make decisions about their present conditions and challenges to ultimately help mediate negative outcomes and tell their story. Themes involving restoring their collective cultural voice and speaking truth to power are directly evident in feature articles and embedded in seemingly mundane advertisements, community update reports, and reader commentaries and reflect concerted efforts to emphasize their cultural heritage.

**Key Words:** Native Americans, culture, Structure versus Agency, discrimination

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A history of negative experiences including exposure to European diseases, forced migration, land theft, the Trail of Tears, and forced assimilation via government-run boarding schools have taken their toll on the Native American population (Heape & Richie, 2008; Matthiessen, 1983; Sale, 1990). Studies also show the long-term negative impact of these deleterious experiences (Bohn, 2003; De La Rosa & Lowe, 2004). However, increasing numbers of Native Americans have reasserted their cultural pride, joining Native American organizations, learning native languages, and pursuing economic stability (Fost, 1991; Heape & Richie, 2008). In light of both triumphs and trials among Native Americans, this study seeks to answer the following two questions – What are some of the structural forces that have influenced Native Americans' agency? What specific ways have they attempted to reassert their cultural heritage? Content analysis of Native American newspapers is used to respond to these questions and assess some of the ways the Structure versus Agency discourse can help understand aspects of the Native American experience. This research note will not examine every historic abuse or present day response, but rather selects and considers historic governmental and cultural influences and present day examples of adaptivity and resilience presented in select Native American newspapers. Results will hopefully add to existing academic literature as well as document some of the ways historically vulnerable groups strive to rebound from negative circumstances.

## **NATIVE AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN THE UNITED STATES**

According to 2010 United States (U.S.) census figures, there are approximately 2.8 million Native Americans in the U.S. (2.3

million additional persons self-identity as American Indian/Alaska Native in addition to other races). This same source documents 334 federal and state recognized American Indian reservations or similarly defined areas.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an estimate 22 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in such areas. When cultural heritage is considered, there are 565 federally-recognized Indian tribes. Moreover, about 28 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives aged 5 years and older speak a language other than English at home. Educationally, 77 percent of Native Americans and Alaska Natives 25 years old and older have at least a high school diploma or equivalent credential; 13 percent have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. These figures are dramatically lower than the 86 percent of persons in the U.S. in general within this age range who have earned a high school diploma and 28 percent with a bachelor's degree or higher. When socioeconomic status is examined, the median income of American Indian and Alaska Native households is \$35,062; this value is \$50,046 for the U.S. as a whole. Approximately 29.2 percent of Native Americans/Alaska Natives lacked health insurance coverage in 2010 (the rate is 15.5 percent in the U.S. in general). Lastly, in 2010, about 28.4 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives were poor as compared to an overall U.S. poverty rate of about 15.3 percent. The aforementioned figures illustrate some of the challenges many Native Americans face and provide the context for the current study.

A history of oppression is linked to continued challenges in Native American populations. Young (1988) finds that socioeconomic disadvantage increases the likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse among Native Americans. Malcoe & Duran (2004) also suggest that low-income Native

American women experience inter-personal violence at more than four times the rate of more economically stable individuals. Also, Bohn (2003) shows a direct correlation between sexual abuse and the use of drugs and/or alcohol. Another possible outcome appears to be a deep-seated sense of anger among some Native Americans due to their mistreatment by the U.S. government. An argument can be made that some Native Americans have responded to years of mistreatment nihilistically, defined as “the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world” (West, 2001: 22-23). West discusses this concept in the context of the African American experience, but it may be appropriate to apply it to some members of the Native American population who have similarly had to cope with a history of degradation. For example, studies on the plight of Native Americans point to the federal government as the main source of the devastation and destruction (Remini, 1999; Rutland, 1995). According to Malcoe & Duran (2004);

Western imperialism and its concomitant devaluation, exploitation, and abuse of Native peoples and Native American women, are largely responsible for the present day problem of violence against Native American women. Native peoples in the U.S. have been subject to a long, brutal history of colonization by the U.S. government, resulting in massive loss of lands and resources, and in severe disruption of traditional gender roles and family structures. (P. 200)

Yet have Native Americans responded in more proactive, resilient ways that go against the above noted challenges? Is there evidence of self-efficacy and resilience?

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE STRUCTURE VS. AGENCY DISCOURSE**

This research is informed by the Structure vs. Agency discourse. According to this theoretical framework, numerous negative outcomes from structural forces can undermine the life chances of Native Americans. Structural forces are macro-level institutions, organizations, and ideologies that influence people at a micro-level. Acting in opposition to such structural forces is our sense of agency or free will. Structural forces influencing Native Americans (and people in general) are too numerous and complex to describe in this paper. However, this analysis considers two influential structural forces, the government and societal cultural ties to nativism as well as how some Native Americans are agentic despite obstacles.

Since European settlers “discovered” the Americas, indigenous people—Native Americans—have been exploited, driven out of their homes, and slaughtered (Heape & Richie, 2008; Matthiessen, 1983; Sale, 1990). For example, one particularly traumatizing abuse committed by the federal government against Native American communities took the form of Indian boarding schools. Initiated in the late 1800s, these institutions were designed to assimilate Native American children into “mainstream” American culture. These institutions resulted in traumatizing many Native American children, disrupting families, and undermining cultural retention. Although these and other abuses such as mass slaughters during relocations and wars were committed long ago, many Native Americans are still experiencing their effects. In addition, Native Americans continue to struggle with state and federal governments to establish their civil rights. For example, land disputes between

surrounding areas and reservations are still common (Fost, 2009). The overarching force of governmental interventions resulted in a loss of culture for many Native Americans. Because their identity, morals, and family roles are embedded in cultural traditions, cultural loss has far-reaching implications. This dynamic is particularly intriguing because the *loss* of culture, rather than the culture itself, acts as a negative force against Native Americans. Studies also show how many Native Americans struggle to determine whether they should acculturate or assimilate into mainstream U.S. society or if they should attempt to re-establish their traditional ways (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Negative governmental responses to Native Americans were informed by broader cultural beliefs and stereotypes about the inherent inferiority of indigenous people. Nativism was used to justify governmental sanctions and general ill treatment (Fost, 2009; Remini, 1999; Rutland, 1995).

According to Jessor et al (1969), both Native American and U.S. cultural traditions can undermine the quality of life and lived experiences of Native Americans. Yet literature shows that many of the cultural struggles Native Americans face are a direct result of beliefs, values, and norms in the broader U.S. culture that ignore, diminish or devalue the vitality and benefits of Native American cultural traditions (Fost, 1991; Heape & Richie, 2008). The above literature review and theoretical summary are not intended to place blame, but rather to provide an historic context to examine contemporary efforts among Native Americans to give voice to their experiences. By empirically studying articles from Native American newspapers, this study considers how Native Americans document their past and make decisions about their present conditions and

challenges to ultimately help mediate negative outcomes and tell their story.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

Data are derived from a random selection of Native American newspapers. Editions were examined from the following four newspapers from four different states: *Muscogee Nation News* (published in Oklahoma); *Tribal Observer* (Michigan); *Navajo Times* (Arizona); and, *Red Lake Net News* (Minnesota). A brief profile is provided for each newspaper. The *Muscogee Nation News* is a semi-monthly news publication that features stories and photographs by staff reporters covering programs, services, community activities, as well as church and ceremonial events. It is a 16-page color newspaper with a circulation of about 8,500 and an estimated readership of at least 21,250 persons. Subscriptions are free to Muscogee (Creek) Nation members (refer to <http://www.muscogeenation-nsn.gov>). The second source, *The Tribal Observer*, is published by the Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribe (refer to <http://www.sagchip.org/tribalobserver/index.asp>).

Third, *The Navajo Times* was organized in 1959 by the Navajo Tribal Council as a newsletter. Its first issue as a newspaper was published in 1960. The newspaper's mission is to inform Navajo people about events, news and issues of importance to them, both inside and outside their community. The *Navajo Times* has headquarters in Window Rock, Arizona, and is circulated via subscriptions. It exists under the umbrella of The Navajo Times Publishing Co., Inc., a for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the Navajo Nation (refer to <http://navajotimes.com/>). The fourth source, *Red Lake Net News* is an on-line newspaper published on the Red Lake Indian Reservation in Redby, MN. Organized in

2003, *Red Lake Net News* is the official Native American news and information source of the Red Lake Indian Reservation and surrounding Native American communities in Minnesota. It publishes local and national news about and for Native Americans. The newspaper is in its seventh year of publication. *Red Lake Net News* receives more than 5,000,000 hits per month (refer to <http://www.rlnn.com/about>).

Three different monthly editions were randomly selected from *Muscogee Nations News* and *Tribal Observer*. "Opinion" sections from the most recent available month (November 2011) of the *Navajo Times* and *Red Lake Net News* were also analyzed. This selection process provides a cross-section of information from the four papers such that we have confidence that the thematic patterns that emerge are reliable examples of how some Native Americans intentionally incorporate information about their culture, history, and families, as well as comments about negative historical events in the selected editions. Content analysis was used to derive the most common themes found in each edition and "Opinion" section. This analytical approach reflected a close reading of verbiage to uncover experiences, beliefs, and behavior relative to the research questions. The goal is to identify broad themes and present thick descriptions rather than to count the number of times certain words or themes are mentioned using statistical tools such as Nvivo.<sup>2</sup> In particular, the objective was to identify how Native American writers directly or indirectly referred to governmental forces as influences on their lives as well as contemporary self-help initiatives.

#### **THEMATIC RESPONSES: CULTURAL AND GOVERNMENTAL FORCES**

It is not surprising that newspapers created and produced by Native Americans

would stress their lived experiences. That is not considered a find here. Our interests are in instances when specific responses to historical negative governmental forces and slights on Native American culture are evident. Of equal interest is the manner in which newspaper articles and ads reflect proactive initiatives against some of the negative outcomes associated with long-term trauma such as alcoholism, child neglect, and family turmoil (Bohn, 2003; Jessor et al, 1969). Two themes emerge across the randomly selected editions. The first focuses on conscientious efforts to restore and regain Native American culture. The second focuses on documentation of governmental maltreatment and proactive tribal responses to negative outcomes. These two themes and corresponding sub-themes are detailed in subsequent sections.

#### **Getting Voice to a Great Culture: Tradition, Language and Positive Lifestyles**

The most common theme reflects attempts by Native American communities to re-establish their traditional culture. It also includes three sub-themes. The centrality of Native American culture for the healthy continuation of the collective was part of focal articles, smaller op-ed pieces, and embedded in ads, community updates, and other seemingly mundane inclusions.

#### ***The Role of Tradition for Cultural Restoration***

The article, "And Still the Waters Run: A Major Discovery" does more than chronicle the experiences of a recently discovered family in 1835 Indian Territory in Oklahoma that survived forced relocation. In addition to photographs and stories of their travels, family additions, and rustic life, the author summarizes the discovery's broader import: "how wonderful it is, when

our people go out of their way to leave a 'welcoming trail' for those who follow along. It is the way of Muscogee Creeks and true genealogists. Mvto!" (*Muscogee Nation News*, 2010: B2). The article describes the trials and triumphs of a tribal family whose experiences were almost lost to historical annals. The article also re-positions the process and remembering and documenting Indian history with that of formally trained, recognized keepers of mainstream history. And in doing so, the article provides a subtle testimony to the varied, many skills found among Muscogee Creeks. The re-establishment of traditional culture is a common theme. Each newspaper includes coverage of programs that immerse youth in traditional culture. For example, in "Keeping Our Traditions Alive" (*Tribal Observer*, 2010), a contributor describes a tribal Performance Circle where reservation youth and young adults can join;

The mission of the Anishinabe Performance Circle is aimed at promoting and enhancing positive self images of Anishinabe children through the use of traditional Anishinabe arts (storytelling, dance, music, and language), and preparing our youth as Anishinabe leaders in a multicultural society. (P. 7)

The above 12 week emersion reinforces tribal heritage to students ages 3 to 20 years old. In addition to more direct emphasis on Native American culture and heritage, more subtle reminders and depictions are also evident in the newspaper articles that reinforce a similar message. In doing so, readers are exposed to direct and indirect messages about the importance of the past. The following representative quotes illustrate this tendency;

Being named Miss Muscogee (Creek) Nation gives me an opportunity to share our culture with tribes all over the country and be a motivator to our native people to continue to learn more about our traditions

and language. (*Muscogee Nation News* 2010: B4) [statement made by the 2011-2012 reigning Miss Muscogee in a four paragraph article on her selection]

Not only are the roots of the indigenous cultures of Alaska beautifully acknowledged and displayed there, the museum also maintains a gallery of contemporary native artists. (*Muscogee Nation News* 2010: B2) [article about a tour of the Anchorage Museum in Anchorage, Alaska]

Another common sub-theme that emphasizes cultural transmission points to the importance of spirituality. For example, the annual Spring Feast among the Anishinabe community commemorates the continued influence of ancestors. Since 1996, tribal representatives feast together, engage in reburial ceremonies, and participate in storytelling. According to the author, "in the spirit of the feast it is a time to recognize family members, community members, friends who have left and went on to the spirit world. The night in a way was to celebrate life, gifts and the words or the teachings that those who have passed on taught" (*Tribal Observer*, 2010: 15). Other shorter articles in this same edition remind readers of the need to determine their spirit name as a source of honor and power.

### ***The Role of Language for Cultural Restoration***

Each of the four newspapers includes multiple articles about the importance of restoring Native languages to common usage as well as advertisements for Native American language-learning programs. This emphasis reflects, in part, the reaction to past experiences that have undermined cultural elements such as language, clothing, dance, and cultural identity. However, a focus on restoring cultural traditions also appears to reflect more proactive rather than reactive efforts to inform Native Americans

and the broader society of the inherent value of their culture. For example, the article, "Why Anishnaabemowin Language is Important", in the June 2010 Edition of *Tribal Observer* is particularly telling;

Our Native language embodies a value system about how we ought to live and relate to each other. It gives a name to relations among kin, to roles and responsibilities among family members, ties with the broader clan group. Now if you destroy our language, you not only break down these relationships, but you also destroy other aspects of our Indian way of life and culture, especially those that describe man's connection with nature, the great spirit, and the order of other things. Without our language, we will cease to exist as a separate people. (P. 14)

In addition to emphasizing the theme of cultural restoration, the above quote illustrates the far-reaching effects when culture is lost. Furthermore, it specifically suggests that Native languages undergird group identity, community and family relationships, clan ties, values that encourage stewardship of nature, and the overall way of life. According to the author, the loss of such cultural components is tantamount to the loss of *peoplehood* itself (Swidler, 1986, 1995). The importance of language for tribal survival is also evident in the article "Mvskoke Country: Participating with Nature" that emphasizes the importance of remembering indigenous languages as part of the process of remembering and stewarding nature;

Native languages echo the natural reality of a universe that is alive and creative...intimately tied to the landscape that has inspired their development...the Mvskoke language is an organized element of a living landscape....this ancestral awareness has often manifests in languages that stress actions than objects, connections rather than separations. While modern Mvskokes have mostly adapted to consumer

culture, a more viable means of participating with nature can still be found in the language of Mvskoke country. (*Muscogee Nation News*, 2010: B2)

The thematic pattern continues in the above article as the writer reminds readers of the salience of Native American culture, specifically languages, makes distinctions between their culture and negative aspects of the broader U.S. culture, and finally challenges readers to recommit to Native American traditions. Furthermore, the writer contends that embracing native languages is central to one's ability to appreciate the cultural ties between nature and people.

In the November 2011 "Opinion" section of *Navajo Times*, a contributor writes that there is no time to waste to preserve Native American languages. He emphasizes language as a crucial part of the Native American tradition. It brings their culture to life and is an important aspect of their identity. Finally, the author also specifies that the teaching of Native languages to the next generation will instill the self-esteem they need to overcome the socioeconomic disadvantages that so many Native Americans face. In addition to traditional mechanisms to inform readers about the importance of Native American culture and traditions, an advertisement in the *Muscogee Nation News* illustrates more contemporary efforts to reinforce this message through the use of technology. A three-quarter page advertisement promotes Mvskoke language CDs. Persons can purchase a set of nine CDs containing audio of over 600 Mvskoke words and phrases for \$15.00 or one CD Rom that includes the above noted audio material as well as corresponding written words and phrases for \$5.00. According to the advertisement, buyers will learn words for concepts such as greetings, numbers, commands, colors, money, as well as phrases related to church,

school, and holidays. This announcement encourages both learning the Mescalero language and appears to be targeted to markets including younger, technology savvy readers and adults who are unfettered by the Digital Divide. Language acquisition is also the central theme of the 2010 edition of the *Tribal Observer* and includes memories about language usage among tribal elders, translation contests, language classes, and actual translated words – with the overall goal of helping young Native Americans find balance between their former identities and life in the U.S. (Portes & Zhou, 1993).

### ***The Role of Positive Lifestyles for Cultural Restoration***

Part of the above noted theme alludes to the reality that segments of the Native American population are facing challenges associated with poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, and inter-personal violence (Bohn, 2003; Young, 1988; Malcoe & Duran, 2004). Although much of such angst and nihilism has been attributed to centuries of macro-level abuses and micro-aggressions (Bohn, 2003; Heape & Chip, 2008), the selected newspaper articles illustrate concerted efforts at self-help and self-efficacy. The articles are also telling in their ability to convey the tensions between the Structure versus Agency discourse. In addition to experiencing and responding to dynamics such as discrimination, poverty, segregation, and ethnocentrism, the articles evidence how certain Native Americans have intentionally fought back, empowered each other, and mobilized. For example, articles in the 2011 *Muscogee Nation News* describe upcoming child abuse awareness month, a sexual assault awareness walk, and local canvassing for the Head Start educational program. Other related updates in this same edition inform readers about an

upcoming tobacco control conference, immersion school curriculum review process, a mobile food unit, and workshops to promote increased nutrition for the elderly.

The *Navajo Times* (2011) section that includes letters from readers describes concerns about unequal educational opportunities for Navajo girls and boys, comments about educational neglect of male Navajo students, limited governmental funds for public safety, domestic violence, and drunk driving initiatives, as well as debates on usage of Native American symbols and images. The latter response is due to a prior article in this same source that challenges continued concerns about use of Native American attire such as “Pocahontas” outfits and “Indian” headgear by Whites. The author contends that Native Americans should focus instead on the disproportionate percentages of their communities that live in poverty, have identity issues, and contend with substance abuse and mental health challenges (Zah, 2011). These types of articles and news clips reinforce the centrality of personal accountability and initiative to combat problems – whether they are systemic and individual in origin.

The above findings support a theme of restoring the historic voice of Native American culture in contemporary spaces. These findings show that writers are intentional about documenting Native American history, its value, and its unique place in American history. Equally important is the tendency to embed more subtle messages about empowerment and cultural pride in seemingly mundane articles and updates. These tacit messages also help reinforce a general message of cultural pride. Both direct and indirect approaches are strategic responses to combat remnants of vulnerability from the Native American past.



### **Speaking Truth to Power: Governmental Aggressions and Native American Responses**

Newspapers articles continually refer to abuses committed by the U.S. federal government against the Native American population. More particularly, articles or advertisements indicate that the general community is aware of these abuses and are explicitly trying to overcome their effects. Sub-themes related to cultural and practical responses to abuses and their implications inform our understanding of this overall theme.

#### ***Cultural Responses to Grievances***

In an edition of *Muscogee Nation News* (2010), the front-page article focuses on tribal attempts to re-claim ownership of the Creek Council Center, which was taken over by federal government in 1908. The author refers to continuous violations of tribal sovereignty committed by the federal government, which "...never did trust the tribes to 'handle' their own affairs" (p. 6). Moreover, the article refers to "selfish and blatant violations of human rights" committed against tribes (p. 6). This same theme is evident in the November 2011 "Opinion" section for *Navajo Times* in which a contributor describes how the federal government committed genocide against Native Americans as he describes horrific acts committed against women and children. The author refers, in particular, to boarding school experiences, which he compares to concentration camps in their systematic attempts to strip Native American children of their identity, culture, and agency. However, he emphasizes that despite such travail, their people have somehow survived. Yet, repercussions exist as reservation families and communities are divided as a result of their past. Similarly, an article in *Tribal Observer* (2011) describes

genocide and ethnic cleansing, especially for boarding school residents who experienced intergenerational trauma that continues to linger; "the unresolved grief and historical trauma among school survivors and their descendants is evident in the tears we shed today" (p. 1).

Several other articles in this same edition continue the discourse about boarding school atrocities as well as the need to develop and implement school curricula to provide counter-narratives for Native American children. Interestingly, a *Red Lake Net News* article attempts to correlate present-day forms of autism with the historic trauma among Native Americans. The author suggests that epigenetics has scientifically identified social connections to biological maladies;

For natives, intergenerational trauma has presented itself in the form of genocide, disease, poverty, forced assimilation via removal of children from their families to boarding schools, the seizure and environmental destruction of homelands, and other routes of European colonization. The effects of intergenerational trauma include substance abuse, depression, anxiety, and a variety of other emotional problems... we can use epigenetic inheritance to restore the action of our genetic code from one generation to the next. Once environmental stressors are removed and behavior is corrected, our DNA will revert to its original programming. (Hopkins, 2011: 2)

The above article provides several insights into a theme of speaking truth to power. The author points to the source of her grievances (i.e., European colonization), the deliberate process of abuse, and the resulting negative economic and non-economic outcomes. For her, such a domino effect of trauma must be combated similarly (Hay, 2008; MacLeod, 2008). However, this writer suggests that it will take changes related to both structure (i.e., removing environmental stressor) and

agency (i.e., altering individual behavior) to combat intergenerational trauma and ultimately restore aggrieved Native Americans to their former selves. Without establishing the credibility of the proposed process, the author's candor about past negative outcomes, present obstacles, and future opportunities is evident.

The article, "Reclaiming our Past" (*Muscogee Nation*, 2010), describes the celebration of a documentary about the experiences of the Muscogee filmmaker's grandfather whose land and oil rights were stolen from him at gun point. The film, "The Osage Tribal Murders" chronicles the disenfranchisement of his and other Muscogee citizens at the hands of the government. The writer comments, "our goal in making the documentary was to educate all tribal people about the things that happened to different tribal members" (p. A1). In addition to providing an historical account, the film has another equally important objective, "we hope that through education, people will avoid problems in their life and I'm here to tell you that is you dream something and you work real hard, you can do it" (*Muscogee Nation*, 2010: A1). Thus the article informs readers how to gain access to the documentary. It also reminds them that knowledge about their cultural past is correlated with future success.

### ***Practical Responses to Grievances***

One of the more practical examples of speaking truth to power is illustrated in the numerous challenges for political involvement presented in the newspapers. Readers are charged to get involved in politics, minimally by voting, as well as by speaking up about issues germane to current conditions on reservations and in the broader society that affect Native Americans. For example, the caption of volume 41, issue 11

of the 2011 *Muscogee Nation* reads, "The Mvskoke Vote 2011". Much of the edition focuses on political issues and elections of council members. In addition to reminding readers of the importance of self-governance, writers remind them of sacrifices other Native Americans have made to enable current generations to participate in local and national political processes. For example, an article in this same edition attempts to convince readers to participate in an upcoming election. According to the writer, a member of the Muscogee Veterans, the military arm of the tribe;

We have fought and served in the military all over the world, and sometimes we were just unable to vote. It's a privilege and an honor, but more importantly it is a duty that we have sacrificed for and earned... Muscogee (Creek) Nation tribal elections are forthcoming: democracy only works when we participate. If you haven't registered to vote, register now...In recent years, our voter turnout has been abysmal...We all know the right to vote has been earned with blood, sweat and tears....God bless and be thankful for our Muscogee Veterans, our tribe and our vote. (P. A4)

A call for increased voter participation is expected during election years. However, the above article is important because in its charge from a military veteran, the initial, subtle request for participation in response to past injustices (i.e., "sometimes we were just unable to vote") ultimately transitions into a more direct challenge for more specific reasons associated with the many physical sacrifices made by their ancestors to secure the right to vote (Fost, 1991; Remini, 1999; Rutland, 1995). In doing so, the short article recalls governmental abuses and complicities, reinforces the need for collective political response, and reminds readers that they too are U.S. citizens. It also

reminds readers of the over 156,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives who served in the U.S. armed forces (U.S. Census, 2010). Furthermore, the embeddedness of the call for political empowerment is evident in seemingly mundane articles like the Muscogee Veterans' motorcycle ride and subsequent march and commemorative coin sale to raise awareness about political involvement. Like the previous piece, this article's ending reinforces the tribe's ties to the U.S., the government, and to its Native American heritage; "God bless our Muscogee Veterans, our Muscogee (Creek) Nation and our continued peaceful political process" (*Muscogee Nation News*, 2011: A4).

***Implications of Governmental and Nativist Sanctions: President Andrew Jackson***

Lastly, when describing governmental aggressions, it is common for writers to specifically reference the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. President, Andrew Jackson – particularly when describing some of the more egregious episodes in Native American history. Although credited for helping to create the Democratic Party, some historians, particularly those of Native American descent provide less favorable descriptions based on his aggressive enforcement of the Indian Removal Act that resulted in the forced relocation of thousands of Native Americans to what is now Oklahoma (Indian Territory) (Remini, 1999; Rutland, 1995). For example, an additional article, "And Still the Waters Run: Fort Toulouse," in a series in the *Muscogee Nation* (2010) includes references to both Native American culture and governmental altercations. The author describes a series of battles between the Creeks and militia over land. Central to the story are forts dating back to 1717 that served as trading posts, military outlets during the French-Indian War, and homes

for White militia who often intermingled with local Creek women. The author provides heart-wrenching descriptions of a myriad of battles and lives loss by Native Americans;

Fort Toulouse served as a trading post until the end of the French and Indian War in 1763. One of the commanders of the fort was Captain Marchand. He met a pretty Native girl, Sehoy (I), who lived at the nearby Native Village of Tuskegee. They had one children, a daughter also named Sehoy (II). Her father is said to have died a few years later in a mutiny. All the French eventually left. The old fort collapsed into ruin...The Creeks retreated to a place called the Holy Ground (Ikanatchaka). Prophets had said they would be safe there. But safety is aloof in times of war. Jackson's army came to the Holy Ground and the Creeks lost badly. ...Before and after Holy ground, other battles occurred. Their names should not be lost: Tallasseehatchee, Talladega, Hillabee, Auttossee, Emuckfau, Emitachopco and Calabee Creek. Obviously I cannot tell all the stories here. Suffice it to say, some were won, but most were lost....After the epic battle [the final Battle at Horeshoe Bend], Jackson [President Andrew Jackson] took his troops to the ruins of old Fort Toulouse. He built his new fort on the ruins of the old. He began to devise penalties he would exact on a defeated people...Andrew Jackson was known as the great American Indian hater...throughout his long career. (P. B4)

The article from which the above quote is taken depicts the violation of sacred lands as well as strategic efforts to decimate entire tribes emanating from the highest ranking U.S. political leaders – the President (Mills, 2008; Remini, 1999; Rutland, 1995). The author provides a frank summary of the ravages of war that might leave some readers angry. In addition to its objective to inform, the article is intended to evoke readers' responses to some of the travesties experienced by the Creeks. However, it

appears that it also intends to convey the adaptive, resilient nature among the Creek who lost many members in attempts to remain stewards of the land and its legacy (Matthiessen, 1983). The *Muscogee Nation News* (2011) article, "Letting It All Out" focuses on an upcoming documentary based on the Trail of Tears. The governmental decree by this same President forced "many Muscogee (Creek) and other Native American tribes to walk on-foot across the country, and relocate to Indian territory during the Manifest Destiny era...these was a lot of information missing in the public school system regarding the Muscogee and other tribes that were forcibly removed" (A1). The article also describes filmed reenactments and the intent of the filmmaker to introduce the documentary during the centennial year. Articles in separate editions of the 2011 *Red Lake Net News* ("Time for the United States to Apologize" and "Genocide and the Native American Experience") describe political indiscretions against Native populations as well as the U. S. government's continual violation of treaties and unseemly military tactics – and call for U.S. political responses from the Obama Administration.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The above analysis of articles from four Native American newspapers suggests that speaking truth to power must take place across multiple arenas from a myriad of avenues in order to effectively remind readers about their past, restore cultural heritage, and rebuke persons who try to ignore or downplay the atrocities from Native American history. Moreover, these methods are believed to be part of the healing process needed for aggrieved Native Americans to reconcile their pasts, avoid negative attitudes and actions, and proactively chart the futures of their tribes.

These newspapers also potentially inform broader audiences about less discussed aspects of U.S. history. These findings indicate that structural forces of the government and nativist cultural norms have had a significant, negative impact on the lives of Native Americans in general and those living on U.S. reservations in particular. Systematic abuses of the Native American population via governmental agencies have undermined traditional culture and familial dynamics and resulted in long-term negative consequences (Bohn, 2003; Fost, 1991; Heape & Richie, 2008). Intergenerational trauma has been a common result (Hopkins, 2011). However, these findings also illustrate how many newspaper writers are actively combating challenges in their communities by documenting past abuses and contemporary forms of empowerment to re-establish traditional culture and family ties. Through the written word, efforts exist to restore often silenced Native American voices as well as speak truth to powerful entities such as governmental agencies about the needs and concerns of this population. Each source recognizes the continuing importance of historic structural forces. However, they also indicate that Native American communities are openly, actively engaged in restoring cultural traditions that resonate with their current context. By reaffirming their past, Native American writers and their readership are actively engaged in efforts to strengthen both their presents and futures.

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<sup>1</sup> Figure excludes Hawaiian Homelands.

<sup>2</sup> Content analysis is an iterative process during which the researcher scours and cross-checks the data for common concepts, themes, and phrases. Yet the process differs from use of a computer identification program because candidate themes are based on both frequency of occurrence as well as the context in which they emerge. Moreover, the process relies heavily on the researcher's knowledge and expertise of the subject matter and specific research context. The researcher's skill is required to provide a succinct thematic title that does justice to both the content and the *spirit* of the newspaper article. This analytical process relies heavily on lengthy, continual review of words and phrases as well as the considerable use of this method by this research team to substantiate the existence and validity of primary themes. However, we acknowledge the inherent difference in this analytical process as compared to approaches that are dependent on more traditionally quantifiable measures of reliability and validity.