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The World's Oldest On-Going Protest Demonstration: North American Indian Drinking Patterns

NANCY OESTREICH LURIE

The author, a member of the anthropology department in the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, offers in this article valuable insights to historians.

WHEN I READ Craig MacAndrew and Robert Edgerton's *Drunken Comportment*, I felt a bit as Alfred Russell Wallace must have felt upon learning about the work of Charles Darwin. I had presented an initial version of this paper at an anthropological meeting shortly before receiving a copy of *Drunken Comportment*. The book validates beyond question some of my early speculations and documents in detail my historical generalizations. However, it concentrates on one item of "conventional wisdom" while my paper is directed at another.

The apparently self-evident common sense which MacAndrew and Edgerton systematically demolish is the widely held notion of the public and temperance societies—and even many medically and psychiatrically oriented researchers—that alcohol disinhibits and causes

I want to thank John Boatman, a sociology graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1968-1969, who brought to my attention a number of the sources cited and inspired me to work up the ideas that resulted in this publication. I would also like to thank other Indian friends who commented on the first draft of this paper and helped me to clarify some of the concepts. Of course, any shortcomings and misinterpretations are my responsibility.

what they term personality "changes-for-the-worse." In case after well documented case from all over the world, MacAndrew and Edgerton demonstrate conclusively that the unquestioned physiological effect (i.e., sensorimotor dysfunction) which accompanies the ingestion of alcohol is given different cultural interpretations by different peoples. These interpretations are manifested in different kinds of locally patterned, learned forms of drunkenness ranging from changes-for-the-worse to changes-for-the-better.¹ The authors also point out that the widespread occurrence of drunken disinhibition and changes-for-the-worse are not evidence of any inherent quality of alcohol, as conventional wisdom assumes; alcohol has merely been diffused to many peoples across the world by the adventurers of western society who also introduced their own cultural patterns of drunken behavior.

Accepting MacAndrew and Edgerton's findings, I would like to challenge the conventional wisdom concerning American Indian drinking that starts out with the assumption that real American Indian identity is only preserved in museums and that Indians drink because of an identity crisis. According to such thinking, Indian culture has just about phased out, if it is not entirely gone, and excessive drinking by the minority group that still persists as Indian must be due to low self-esteem, feelings of rejection, and the effects of prejudice and material deprivation *vis à vis* white, middle-class culture and society. It is only common sense, according to this argument, that Indians get drunk to escape into a glorified, romanticized past and try to regain a sense of identity as Indians, at least temporarily, because they encounter so many difficulties in assimilating into and being accepted by the dominant group and its culture. This layman's view is even shared by scholars as a recent publication of the Canadian Alcohol and Drug Addiction Research Foundation demonstrates: "drinking . . . activities are explicable as responses to acculturation anxieties and as substitutes for previously institutionalized interaction."² Similar arguments are advanced by J. H. Hamer and Bernard J. James.

. . . drinking . . . permits persons temporarily to assume desirable status positions when there has been interference with, and inadequate substitutes for, the traditional social structure. . . .³

¹ Craig MacAndrew and Robert B. Edgerton, *Drunken Comportment, A Social Explanation* (Chicago, 1969), 13-36.

² *Culture and Alcohol Use: A Bibliography of Anthropological Studies* (Ottawa, 1966), 1.

³ J. H. Hamer, "Acculturation Stress and the Functions of Alcohol Among the Forest County Potawatomi," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, XXVI (1965), 285.

... Ojibwa culture ... has become deculturated and ... its minimal appropriation of new cultural traits has produced a "poor White" type of sub-culture. ... The anxiety that casts it[s] shadow across the entire gamut of Ojibwa behavior is a product of both the physical deprivations that attend reservation experience ... as well as the conflicts and uncertainties that characterize status inferiority. ... Alcohol acts to reduce the sense of isolation and to permit the ventilation of anxieties. ...⁴

Marshall Clinard draws the same general conclusion when he insists that "the primary problem from which 'problem drinking' has its genesis is the strain which structural barriers or prohibitions put upon the realization of success goals." ⁵ Perhaps he is right, but it is pertinent to ask in the case of Indian drinking whether we know which success goals are being thwarted.

As Indian people struggle for a workable cultural and social pluralism, adapting contemporary American economic necessities and some of the amenities to their own systems of values, their strivings seem to be frequently misunderstood. Although at the present time Indian spokesmen are gaining a wider hearing, their insistence that they want to be *Indians* still tends either to be dismissed by "practical" whites as being as unrealistic as trying to bring back the buffalo or encouraged by "sympathetic" whites as envisioning an actual return to the kind of Indian life depicted in museums. When Indian people begin to bring off what they evidently have in mind, improvement of their material welfare on their own terms, their success is interpreted as fulfilling the highly individualistic aspirations of middle-class white society and as a stepping stone to total absorption into it.

All of the authorities cited and many others besides advert to the stereotype, designated a negative stereotype, of the "drunken Indian." I find that their observational data support my conclusions better than their own. There are two points that are glossed over. First, there is a positive stereotype of the noble Red Man that is supposedly the identity which Indians seek in drunken delusions but which is actually exploited by cold-sober Indians who lecture and engage in theatrical performances. Rather than denying Indians this identity and thereby compelling them to seek it in alcohol, the larger society accepts and promotes it as evidenced by Boy Scouts and similar groups who even

⁴ Bernard J. James, "Social-Psychological Dimensions of Ojibwa Acculturation," *American Anthropologist*, LXII (1961), 728, 735, 741.

⁵ Marshall B. Clinard, ed., *Anomie and Deviant Behavior: A Discussion and Critique* (New York, 1964), 202.

play this kind of stereotypic Indian. Secondly, while we have the stereotype of the "drunken Indian," we do not have the "drunken Negro" or the "drunken poor white," the latter group otherwise considered analogous to Indians by Bernard J. James.⁶ These other minorities may not drink at all, or they may drink as much as Indians and get just as drunk, but neither their own spokesmen nor concerned outsiders see such drinking as a special problem of the minorities.

In trying to get ahead in terms of white success goals, black people particularly have suffered far more of the indignities, prejudice, rejection, and disappointments which are used to explain why Indian people drink. Black people are also stereotyped negatively but in ways distinct from the Indian stereotype—childlike, irresponsible about property, and dangerous if not "kept in their place." In the nascent and early stages of the black civil rights movement, as eventually given explicit expression by Martin Luther King, black people tried to justify their demands for fair and equal treatment by promoting an ideal image of themselves as ambitious, hard working, and in their forbearance outdoing the white man at his own game of Christian ethics. The dominant society would not accept this stereotype. Once black non-violence was organized, however, it communicated itself as violence and was met with violence. This was returned in kind by black people who then began getting results. It is now common knowledge that even middle-class black people believe the riots and civil disturbances did more good than harm, despite the fact that these people might deplore the need for violence and not engage in it personally. Black violence, like Indian drinking, communicates in mutually understood terms in the respective inter-group confrontations. The negative stereotype of the black, like the "drunken Indian," becomes a virtue or useful weapon to the in-group so stereotyped, at least up to the point of demanding attention and getting action. "Internalization" of the negative stereotype—that is, accepting it and even acting it out—does not, as James would have it, lead the Indian person "to conclude that he is, in fact, an 'inferior' person."⁷ Quite the contrary. Indian people appear to have long understood what blacks have recently discovered: the value of the negative stereotype as a form of communication and protest demonstration to register opposition and

⁶ James, "Social-Psychological Dimensions of Ojibwa Acculturation," 733.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 732.

hold the line against what they do not want until they can get what they do want.

My hypothesis, then, begins with the assumption that Indian people want to persist and succeed on their own terms as Indians, while at the same time borrowing freely from the material aspects of white culture. It does not matter to the hypothesis whether this is a good thing or whether in the opinion of the non-Indian they succeed. The fact is that they have maintained this sentiment and have endured for well over a century in the face of public expectation that they would vanish and despite official policies and programs that have been directed explicitly toward phasing them out. My hypothesis is that Indian drinking is an established means of asserting and validating Indianness and will be either a managed and culturally patterned recreational activity or else not engaged in at all in direct proportion to the availability of other effective means of validating Indianness.⁸ Three other means of validating contemporary Indianness will be dealt with in some detail later on as a preliminary test of the hypothesis.

In testing the hypothesis, my research design requires that we treat Indian drinking as a cultural artifact, applying Ralph Linton's four-part analysis of artifacts—form, function, meaning, and use.⁹ The "form" of Indian drinking (as opposed to other kinds of drinking Indians may also indulge in) is getting purposefully drunk to confirm the stereotype of the drunken Indian. Its function, that is, its relationship to other aspects of the culture or the culture as a whole, is maintenance of the Indian-white boundary by conveying a message: "like it or not,

⁸ I want to stress what I mean by validating since an earlier version of this paper was apparently misunderstood. Vine Deloria, Jr., in his *We Talk, You Listen*, (New York, 1970), 10, writes: "... last summer a noted female anthropologist presented a scholarly paper to the effect that Indians drink to gain an identity." Deloria goes on to demonstrate the absurdity of such an idea, and I fully agree that it is absurd because I never made such an assertion. In fact, I wrote my paper to combat the idea he attributes to me. Let me explain my position by an analogy. I have no doubt whatsoever about my identity. I am completely secure on this score. But I, like anyone else, often have to validate my identity to do what I want to do; for example, I must produce a driver's license to cash a check. Indian people when among other Indians, as Deloria notes, often cite tribal identity to validate their claims as Indians among strange Indians. There are other times when people may accept that I am who I say I am but may make assumptions that I consider unwarranted and undesirable in defining what kind of a person I am. As a woman and an academic among other things, I engage in all kinds of symbolic behavior in dress and manner that I usually do not even think about but rely on as devices my culture provides to communicate things about myself which will be clearly understood.

⁹ Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man* (New York, 1936), 402-404.

I am an Indian." Its meaning, the affective part, is to feel good or at least better. This is often verbalized, as many anthropologists and others can attest from personal observation, but I believe the wording is frequently misconstrued. When Indian people say they drink "to feel like an Indian" or words to that effect, I am not convinced of the conventional interpretation that they are seeking identity in drunken delusions of living in the golden past or expressing sheer bottle courage against white presumptions of superiority. Indian drinking plays upon the notion, widely shared by Indians and non-Indians, that Indians "can't hold their liquor like white men." Untenable physiologically, this belief, nevertheless, has a good deal of functional utility in communicating in mutually understood terms.¹⁰ Finally, the "use" of Indian drinking, the way an artifact is manipulated, employed or applied, is to get drunk according to prescribed form with greater or lesser frequency or intensity as it is called for situationally among one's own people, other tribes, or white society. Drinking to get drunk may make a person feel good in terms of a very old shared recreational activity of the Indian community. This may not be the non-Indians' idea of good, clean fun but on close analysis it can be seen to be carefully managed without real personal or social harm.¹¹ Drunkenness may also be an effort to relieve frustration when other means of asserting Indianness are not readily available. Not so well managed in these cases in regard to personal and social side effects, such drinking is still within its own cultural framework of patterned and calculated bad behavior and understood as such by other Indians and even whites in terms of the stereotype of the drunken Indian.

Before discussing alternatives to drunkenness as means of validating Indianness, I would like to comment on a number of features of Indian drinking which are pertinent to the hypothesis and gave rise to it. Despite acceptance of the stereotype even by Indian people that they cannot hold their liquor like whites, it does not take very extensive field work to observe that the irresponsible drunk on one occasion may on another occasion ingest just as much or more alcohol and maintain an

¹⁰ MacAndrew and Edgerton, *Drunken Comportment*, chaps. 6 and 7. In these chapters, both entitled "Indians Can't Hold Their Liquor," the authors analyze the factual untenableness but functional utility of this popular belief.

¹¹ Wesley Hurt, "Social Drinking Patterns Among The Yankton Sioux," *Human Organizations*, XXIV (1965), 222-230. This is one of the few ethnographic studies which views drinking among Indians as an established cultural complex rather than a "problem."

appearance of sobriety. Indian people, like anyone else, have differential capacities for alcohol. What is important in any case are the specific social conditions relevant to differences in behavior. My own observations suggest that Indian people are more likely to get drunk when they feel thwarted in achieving Indian rather than white goals or when their success as Indians or simply individuals apart from Indian-white comparisons is interpreted as success in achieving status as whites.

Indian suggestibility to drunkenness has been widely observed as has the Indian community's ambivalence toward drunkenness which seems to be related to the suggestibility. Drinking and drunkenness are deplored on the one hand, while the drunk is treated tolerantly on the other. People may withdraw from the obstreperous drunk to lessen his destructive impact on others but do not hold him seriously responsible for criminal and asocial acts as if he were sober. J. O. Whitaker's observations on the Standing Rock Sioux apply quite generally: "social sanctions against the heavy drinker or alcoholic are virtually nonexistent."¹² Possibly some community tolerance is due to the fact that many Indian people have similar problems and can empathize with the drunk's behavior vicariously while still being forced to recognize that the drunk is a community nuisance. The question remains, what is it the drunk is trying to accomplish that other Indian people understand and thus tolerate? I believe there is a "good" message in drunkenness no matter how "bad" the individual drunk may be. The community regrets the need for drunkenness just as the middle-class black deplores the need for violence to achieve given ends. There is also the realization that, in actualizing the stereotype or becoming habituated to its use and overlooking other alternatives to achieve given ends, undesirable side effects may offset the original idea intended by the demonstration. As Edward Dozier notes, many Indian communities have sought to reduce the problem by making liquor harder to get:

... the prohibition of liquor by tribal councils on most Indian reservations after repeal of the federal restrictive law is indicative of the Indians' own concern about abuses in drinking. . . .¹³

¹² J. O. Whittaker, "Alcohol and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, II: Psychodynamics and Cultural Factors in Drinking," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, XXIV (1963), 90.

¹³ Edward P. Dozier, "Problem Drinking Among American Indians: The Role of Sociocultural Deprivation," *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, XXVII (1966), 73.

Similarly, North American revitalization movements, such as the religion of Handsome Lake among the Iroquois and the pan-Indian Native American Church (peyote), interdict liquor while endeavoring to assert Indianness by means of such alternatives as the revival of customs and use of objects that are unmistakably derived from Indian tradition. Such religions assume that Indians are by nature different and cannot hold their liquor like whites.¹⁴ Where no such movement of this kind provides strong group assertions of Indians' rights to be Indians, it is difficult for the community to bring strong pressures to bear to discourage drinking, the more so because of widespread Indian reluctance to question anyone else's personal decisions. It is deemed better if temptation is simply removed as much as possible.

But even if the supply of liquor is reduced, it is not difficult for people to get drunk if they are determined to do so. The usefulness of feigned drunkenness, whether consciously or subconsciously engaged in, doubtlessly helps to explain the familiar Indian suggestibility to drunkenness. Whittaker's statements on the Standing Rock Sioux are again applicable to many Indian communities. Aggressive behavior is "virtually unknown in sober individuals" while "drunkenness, on the other hand, is frequently associated with violence."¹⁵ Statistics on Indian criminality demonstrate that Indians have a high arrest rate, that crime is almost always alcohol related, and that the crimes are largely unplanned and often terribly conspicuous offenses.¹⁶ While I have no argument with universalistic frustration-aggression theory, I suggest that if you are an Indian and need to work off frustrations, whatever their cause, you are doubly frustrated. Your stereotype of whites is that *they* are aggressive. As J. H. Hamer has observed, and I believe correctly, drinking gives the Indian person "an escape from

Dozier implies ideas made explicit here; deprivation of the opportunity to be an Indian is fundamental to so-called problem drinking rather than deprivation of white status, which is the approach of Bernard J. James cited above. It is perhaps significant that Dozier is himself an Indian.

¹⁴ This generalization is based on personal familiarity with members of the religions. As far as published work is concerned, the best discussion of Handsome Lake can be found in Anthony F. C. Wallace's *The Death and Rebirth of The Seneca* (New York, 1970), especially Part III. On the peyote religion, the best book is J. Sydney Slotkin's *The Peyote Religion* (Glencoe, 1956). Significantly, Handsome Lake and John Rave, the Winnebago who provided much of the inspiration for the institutionalization of peyote in the Native American Church, were both notorious drunkards before conversion.

¹⁵ Whittaker, "Alcohol and the Standing Rock Sioux," 85.

¹⁶ Omer Stewart, "Questions Regarding American Indian Criminality," *Human Organization*, XXIII (1964), 61-66.

anxiety about the expression of overt aggression.”¹⁷ Thus, before giving vent to aggressive inclinations, you get drunk or convince yourself and others you are drunk, in order that no one mistakes you for acting like a white man. James, with whom I took issue at the outset, provides what I consider a telling incident in this connection although I think he draws entirely erroneous conclusions from it.

. . . a band of carousing [Ojibwa] villagers broke into a church and its tabernacle in search of wine. The aisles of the building were left littered with beer cans. While such sacrilegious outbursts shock the community, there is no clear evidence that they are triggered by hostile feelings toward the mission. They seem to be the result simply of the lust for drink.¹⁸

The beer cans strike me as rather elaborate evidence to show that the carousers were already drunk when they broke into the church.

James and others who subscribe to the idea that Indians drink because they have a low sense of self-esteem and are seeking identity rely on phrases like those I have also collected in the course of field research: “I can’t get ahead because I’m an Indian” or “I’m as good as any white man.” I feel such expressions of sentiment are used selectively and misconstrued. To me, they seem of a piece with other phrases having nothing to do with anxieties over status deprivation in assimilating into white society. In the course of collecting more data on Indian drinking than I ever sought, it has struck me that the Winnebago tribesman is as likely to say, “I’m as good as any Potawatomi” as “I’m as good as any white man.” Friend Potawatomi answers in kind, sometimes with a punch in the nose to make his point that he is as good as any Winnebago. Despite the young Indian nationalists’ insistence that Indians should identify first as Indians and then by tribe, tribal affiliation remains the primary means of establishing identity. There is also the oft heard challenge, “I’m a bigger Indian than you are,” or, put sarcastically, “You big Indian, you!” The challenge is more philosophical than physical since such phrases are simply “Englished-out” of native languages and often not understood by the non-Indian observer who, if he thinks about it at all, puts his own interpretation on what he hears. What is really meant, in effect, is “I’m more genuinely Indian than you are.”

¹⁷ Hamer, “Acculturation Stress and the Functions of Alcohol Among the Forest County Potawatomi,” 285.

¹⁸ James, “Social-Psychological Dimensions of Ojibwa Acculturation,” 731.

This is not to deny the existence of classic self-hate and identity crises among Indian people as among other minority groups. However, in my own experience these are most frequently found among families or individuals who are estranged from the life of their Indian communities and would like to treat their obvious Indian ancestry as their white neighbors might advert to Norway or Ireland or some other "old country" beyond which they feel they have progressed. They acknowledge their origins, even with pride and some cultural tokens, but this has little to do with the everyday business of contemporary American life or even the contemporary cultures whence their ancestors came. If such Indian people can only manage to be genteely poor, then there is no question that they suffer low self-esteem and a sense of deprivation. They may even get drunk for these familiar reasons, thus supporting conventional wisdom and nullifying my hypothesis in such cases. However, I find they are often the very people least likely to get drunk or drink at all. Are they perhaps afraid of being mistaken for *Indians*?

Likewise, feelings of frustration and inadequacy in white society are commonly expressed by perfectly sober Indian students who are in a state of anxious ambivalence created largely by the school situation where white authority figures and peers badger them directly and indirectly to stop being Indians. They are made to feel by their own people that staying in school and succeeding as well as white students is a kind of betrayal. This is difficult to understand for well intentioned white people, including scholars, who have never been praised, overtly or subtly, for their apparent denial, lack, or denigration of their "whiteness." Finally, I would like to turn to historical considerations and show the evolution of Indian drinking from an institutionalized "time-out" period from ordinary canons of etiquette (a function it still serves on occasion) to its gradually expanding function of communication and protest in order to maintain the Indian-white boundary.

Liquor, of course, was a novelty to all North American Indian tribes except for a very few southwestern groups.¹⁹ It also proved to be an exceedingly attractive novelty. Too often frontier histories suggest

¹⁹ Among these few tribes were the Papago. MacAndrew and Edgerton, in *Drunken Comportment*, 37-42, document how native cactus wine was used in Papago religious ceremonies to promote a state of harmony with nature and one's fellow man which the Papago deemed generally desirable but impossible to achieve in the course of secular life. In other words, drunken behavior was characterized by changes-for-the-better. In-

that the introduction of liquor to the Indians led only to wild, drunken orgies. This view is contradicted by the numerous primary sources cited by MacAndrew and Edgerton on the first encounters of many Indians with alcohol.²⁰ They show that the inevitable sensorimotor dysfunctions were given widely varying interpretations, ranging from apparent delight in "instant vision" to repugnance. As liquor was "pushed" by traders and became generally available, some, perhaps many, Indians never developed a taste for it, but, for those who did, cultural patterns of drunkenness became apparent which included expansive conviviality, the letting down of customary decorum, and, in some cases, serious dignified drinking into a comatose state. In time the drunken behavior of traders and other adventurers was emulated

roduced to the trader's whiskey and the white man's disinhibited changes-for-the-worse, the Papago got drunk in emulation of their white mentors. Meanwhile, their religious use of cactus wine with its expected results continued. Different kinds of drunken behavior were manifested by the same people in different socio-cultural situations.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-135. There seems to have been a considerable time *after* the first encounter with alcohol before an Indian group gave evidence of really debauched drinking, and even then all the accounts of drinking bouts are not of this nature. We need more intensive historical study of recorded Indian drinking sessions in chronological sequence, following the moving frontier from tribe to tribe and from such contact to the present, including a search for data on inter-tribal diffusion of drinking customs. MacAndrews and Edgerton make clear that white historians tend to accept any mention of an Indian drinking bout as bearing out the stereotype of the aggressive, destructive, violent drunken Indian, whereas, in actual fact, the chroniclers of these occasions presented a range of descriptions which should be studied more carefully. As the Indians lost their lands and power, there may have been a discernible shift from using drunkenness as a simple, relaxed "time-out" period to using it as an occasion to commit serious asocial and criminal acts. As it became harder to express aggression effectively against whites and frustration mounted, aggression may well be shown to have turned increasingly inward. This possibility is certainly in keeping with fairly well established frustration-aggression theory. In this context, it should be noted that Clyde Kluckhohn explains native Indian belief in witchcraft in this fashion in his "Navaho Witchcraft," *Papers of the Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology*, XXII (1944). Fear, suspicion, accusations, and even hanging of alleged witches increased during the second half of the nineteenth century as the Navahos came increasingly under white domination. Witchcraft is a widespread, remarkably uniform cultural complex in much of North America, suggesting a very old cultural stratum. I have been struck by the apparent similarity between the growth of witchcraft among the Navajo, as described by Kluckhohn, and its increase among Great Lakes tribes, who use it to explain such problems as sickness and the inability to overcome poverty. There, too, it seems to be an outlet for aggression in the face of frustration. Drunkenness has an advantage over witchcraft in that drunken aggression to some extent can be directed against white society as well as inward. Since most whites believe that "Indians can't hold their liquor," there is a mutually understandable way to communicate protest and hostility. Whites do not understand Indian witchcraft and, if they learn about it at all, they tend to draw false analogies to what they consider "old fashioned" European superstition about old women riding with their black cats on broomsticks.

and improved upon by Indian people, but—and this is the point I wish to emphasize—they seem to have done so for cultural reasons of their own. These reasons relate to a number of entrenched, ubiquitous Indian values and ideals which transcend tribal considerations.

Recorded in the earliest documents, the Indian values are still noted in contemporary field studies as explicit ideals which are manifested in Indian behavior.²¹ Primary among these attributes are the beliefs that one is expected to take full responsibility for his own actions,²² to exhibit concern for personal dignity, to take pride in resourcefulness and to adapt what is at hand in order to survive, to demonstrate open-handed generosity and gracious acceptance of proffered gifts (essentially a strong sense of reciprocity),²³ and to show “respect” for other people. Some observers interpret the last as “permissiveness,” a view which I consider too simplistic; it is simply too difficult for most whites to keep their noses out of other people’s business, especially if they think they are saving people from their own shortcomings. These core values may have become demanding beyond their functional utility by the time of white contact, and thus drunkenness, in the form of disinhibited changes-for-the-worse, may have been seized upon in the way that Christianity was readily accepted and adopted by the taboo ridden Hawaiian aristocracy. The missionaries provided a socially acceptable way around cherished traits without giving them up entirely since they still served functional purposes. The Hawaiians actually had a native, fermented drink, kava, but its entrenched functions, meanings, and uses militated against using it for disinhibited reduction of ten-

21 Rosalie Wax and Robert Thomas, “American Indians and White People,” *Phylon*, XXII (1961), 305–317; A. I. Hallowell, *Culture and Experience, Selected Papers* (Philadelphia, 1955), 364–365; Ernestine Friedl, “Persistence in Chippewa Culture and Personality,” *American Anthropologist*, LVIII (1956), 814–825.

22 Taking responsibility for one’s own actions does not have moral connotations in terms of guilt-shame analyses of cultural compulsions to conform. Rather, it means simply a willingness to take the consequences of one’s decisions—figuring things out carefully before taking action. The point is made very clearly in Wax and Thomas, “American Indians and White People,” 305–317.

23 Reciprocal generosity implies that it is bad form to refuse gifts or to demonstrate a selfish desire to avoid having to give. Frances Northend Ferguson notes that this attribute has aided the program of prescribing drugs for Navaho problem drinkers in order to reduce their craving for alcohol. It is impolite to refuse the offer of a drink but the known fact that a person will get sick if he drinks while on the medicine allows him to refuse without fear of criticism from other Indians. “Navaho Drinking: Some Tentative Hypotheses,” *Human Organization*, XXVII (1968), 159–167. One wonders whether the “craving” in any situation is stronger than cultural considerations.

sions about taboos.²⁴ Furthermore, there is nothing innate to alcohol to suggest it could or should be used for such a purpose. As the Hawaiian case illustrates, cultures do not universally deal with the need for outlets from tension with what MacAndrew and Edgerton term socially acceptable "time-out" periods of disinhibition or license. Thus, Indian drunken time-out was not an inevitable development, but it was apparently a highly expedient innovation to meet a felt need to reduce tension or perhaps replace existing methods whose nature is lost to history.²⁵ Innovations are always reworked to some extent to make them fit the borrowing culture; moreover, they may be continuously adapted for functional utility as the culture undergoes change.

If all this strikes the historian as far-fetched speculation, I would merely note how little attention is paid to the fact that the Indians' tobacco was as attractive to Europeans as European alcohol was to the Indians. Europeans took over smoking with only slight modifications of form and use but the religious functions and sacred meanings of smoking and tobacco itself were irrelevant and were replaced with things familiar to European thinking—the sociability and relaxed comfort of spirits in moderation, perhaps. Smoking doubtless also appealed to those who attributed sophistication to familiarity with the new things brought to Europe in the great age of discovery. Furthermore, these desires were quickly exploited by colonials seeking lucrative export crops and by home governments interested in tax revenues. The present alarming reports relating tobacco to cancer and a host of other ills have prompted Pan-Indian humorists to refer to tobacco as "the Indians' revenge"—for bringing alcohol!

Now, if Indians institutionalized patterns of drunkenness for their own internal, cultural reasons, they were encouraged by Europeans for their own, largely economic reasons. We tend to forget that there was a long period when Indian societies dealt as powerful equals with representatives of competing European groups in negotiations for trade and alliance in warfare. The Europeans needed the Indians' skills and good will as much as the Indians wanted the Europeans' trade goods. The Indians accepted and adapted vast amounts of ma-

²⁴ There seems to be some disagreement whether kava can properly be defined as an alcoholic intoxicant. Cf. MacAndrew and Edgerton, *Drunken Comportment*, 42-46. On conversion in Hawaii, see Douglas Oliver, *The Pacific Islands* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 185.

²⁵ See footnote 20 above, especially regarding witchcraft.

terial items from Europeans, even to completely replacing analogous native items, but they kept their own cultural, social, and political counsel as did the Europeans who were growing rich on the Indians' furs as they puffed on their pipes and haggled over prices.

The initial and continuing encounters and interactions between whites and Indians were intimately associated with alcohol. Liquor was more than a borrowed item like steel traps which became part of Indian culture. Generous distribution of liquor was soon discovered to be a good way to begin business with Indians. It augured a satisfactory contract for both parties. There was no advantage in trying to befuddle Indians in order to cheat them, at least at the beginning of contact and for a long time thereafter. The Indians could simply take their business elsewhere.²⁶ The fact that Indians responded somewhat differently to liquor than did whites in their extremes of drunkenness was not attributed to cultural differences. Both sides simply assumed that they were by nature constitutionally different from each other. Furthermore, for several centuries the very differences between Indian and white society were worth maintaining as each side managed what it excelled at and exchanged with the other. But, as trade declined, as international boundaries in North America were firmed up to prevent Indians from playing different white nations against each other, and as severe competition for land set in, the nature of Indian-white relationships changed. Indians still kept their own cultural, social, and political counsel but whites deemed them a nuisance with nothing to offer in exchange to justify their separate existence.

In the meantime, trade had worked changes within tribal cultures. Leaders were often elevated to greater power as they took on the roles of negotiators with whites and distributors of goods. The old pattern of the generous hunter-leader had been extended insofar as he had more to give away. With the decline of Indian power, drinking took on increasingly desperate proportions, remaining one of the last features of the good old days. Thus, Harold Hickerson observes of the Ojibwa:

²⁶ Anthony Wallace, in his *Death and Rebirth of the Seneca*, 111-149, details the "play off" system employed by the Seneca (and other tribes as well) in holding a balance of power between the French and British. Although the Iroquois were particularly good at the play-off technique, it was not unique to them and was employed widely by other Indian groups in their relations with the various competing white powers: French, British, Spanish, Dutch, Mexican, American.

... brawls occurred chiefly during periods of orgiastic drunkenness in the vicinity of trading posts. Drunkenness itself was symptomatic of the decay of the old mechanisms enforcing hospitality; the distribution of liquor fell to the lot of successful trappers, perhaps at times to shamans, and thus enabled them to assume the guise of "chiefs." Under the fur trade, provisions were only sporadically available for distribution; such items as venison and wild rice were traded in large amounts to the traders, and trade goods were consumed within small extended family units. The function of the distribution of liquor to be consumed communally within the band, then, was the assertion and maintenance of leadership.²⁷

As the mutually advantageous features of Indian-white interaction deteriorated and Indian life became increasingly impoverished, ideals of Indian behavior became ever more difficult to sustain. Additionally, there were the pressures to give up entirely ideals of Indian behavior. Getting drunk remains a very Indian thing to do when all else fails to maintain the Indian-white boundary. It will remain so until Indian groups can achieve new, mutually satisfactory relationships with whites appropriate to contemporary opportunities.

At this point, I would like to discuss three alternatives to drinking as a means of validating Indianness. My examples are drawn from over twenty years of regular association with the Wisconsin Winnebago and four extended visits during the last ten years among the Dogrib of northern Canada. The generalized descriptions of the alternatives derive as well from briefer associations with other tribes in the Midwest, Plains, and Northwest Coast and from experiences with intertribal communities in Detroit, Chicago, and Milwaukee. The alternatives are not mutually exclusive. People who employ them may also drink, but drinking seems to be managed effectively in direct relationship to the effectiveness of the other alternatives.

An important validation of Indianness is the ability to maintain a reputation as an exemplary person in terms of basic ideals already discussed: dignity, responsibility, resourcefulness, respect for others, and reciprocal generosity. This complex is expressed in providing adequately but not conspicuously by local standards for oneself and dependents—usually a far larger group than the average white breadwinner is expected to provide for—and reasonably regular participation in activities that the community defines as Indian.

²⁷ Harold Hickerson, "Ojibwa," in Eleanor Burke Leacock and Nancy Oestreich Lurie, eds., *North American Indians in Historical Perspective* (New York, in press).

Mountain Wolf Woman, a Winnebago friend whose autobiography has been published, operated almost entirely in terms of this first general criterion of Indianness.²⁸ She worked hard to provide adequately for her family which included grandchildren and great grandchildren and on occasion children of distant relatives and Indian friends who had hit on hard times. She was secure in her position in the Indian community and commanded respect as an Indian among whites. She found in the peyote religion whatever comfort she needed in times of crisis, and worked off anxieties with tears or great bursts of physical activity, such as chopping wood or house cleaning. She never drank, and expressed disapproval of drinking for its social and personal destructiveness, but she was tolerant of the drunk, firmly believing Indians were physiologically different from whites in their capacity for alcohol.

A., a middle-aged, monolingual Dogrib, is a thorough-going "bush" Indian. He works hard at fishing, trapping, hunting, and occasional wage work to support his large family which lives well by bush Dogrib standards. He engages in community activities but only recently took on a formal leadership role. He is exceedingly dignified, almost severe, in manner. However, he will join in peaceful community brew parties. When he leaves his small village to trade he makes sure that all the groceries and other family needs are provided for before sometimes treating himself to a bottle or two of rum. He finds convivial companions to share his liquor and gets hilariously drunk with them. He does not flaunt his condition or get into trouble to be picked up by the Mounties. When A. gets drunk, he does so as an exemplary Dogrib enjoying himself. He is not trying to assert Indianness. He does not need to. His drinking seems to be a socially acceptable "time-out" period from the demands of being an exemplary Dogrib without any reference to problems with white society.

A.'s brother, B., speaks a little English and is more outgoing and jovial, but not without a certain dignity of manner. He is liked in the community and considered an essentially good, hard-working man, but quite literally crazy. His nickname among the Dogrib is "White Man," partly because he likes to show off his English. But what makes him really crazy, like a white man, is that he does not drink and is

²⁸ Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder* (Ann Arbor, 1961).

openly critical of those who do. B. is so thoroughly Indian otherwise in life style that the nickname is an endearment and he is considered harmlessly crazy. He is not distrusted like those educated English-speakers with steady jobs who are suspected of being sell-outs, at least potentially, to the white establishment.

Such a man is C. who, while sharing B.'s outspoken ethic about the evils of strong drink, drinks moderately if the situation warrants it. He will take a drink with Indian friends out of politeness and engages in sober social drinking with non-Indian friends. He tends to be house and possession proud, but his emulation of white standards is really part of a general orientation toward raising the community standard of living as well as his own. He sought special training and qualified as a community worker employed by the government. From a white point of view, C. would be the ideal tribal interpreter because of his objective intelligence and sophisticated grasp of English. But he is rejected by the monolingual chief and council men in favor of two far less competent and benevolently motivated men. If not entirely exemplary, their life style is clearly Indian and their relationship to whites, including in-laws in the case of one of them, is manipulative rather than cooperative or emulative. They indulge regularly in Indian drinking primarily in its recreational form but there are overtones of boundary maintenance in the case of one of the men. C. knows he is not trusted to react and interpret from a position of total Indianness, as defined by the Dogrib, in Indian-white confrontations. However, by dint of positive accomplishments in the community interest on the community's own terms, C. manages to keep up his credit as a Dogrib and finds personal security and satisfaction in being a successful innovator.

A second alternative to drinking to validate Indianness is Indian expertise. The acknowledged authority may command traditional lore and ceremonial prerogatives (or even quasi-traditional roles in revitalization movements) or the local church if it is considered the community's own institution. He may be an expert singer or dancer at pow-wows or an Indian guide to white sportsmen. The authority may be particularly well informed and consulted by Indians and whites about his tribe's history.

D. is a successful expert. A bilingual Dogrib in his sixties, he has a long reputation of capitalizing on his bush skills, general Indian resourcefulness, and bilingualism in relation to whites. In his younger

days he carried mail, guided, and performed other tasks in which whites were dependent for their very survival on his exemplary Indianness which among the Dogrib includes tremendous physical endurance. During the last ten years he has regularly filled the role of anthropological and linguistic informant. He is respected in the Indian community as a responsible emissary, spokesman, and representative of their best qualities to the outside world. He also manages to live as well as C., the community worker, supporting his family by hunting, fishing, trapping, wage work, and foster child care. His outlook is Indian and, although he is completely at ease among whites, he always deals calculatedly, albeit in a genuinely friendly manner, with an alien people. D. enjoys well managed but properly tipsy Indian recreational drinking. His attitude is well illustrated in a recent incident when a convivial party turned into a fight during which a participant knocked out one of D.'s teeth. D. was philosophical. The fellow was drunk and did not know what he was doing and, furthermore, he was sorry enough when he sobered up to give D. five dollars by way of apology.

Another expert was the late Charles R. (Charley) Lowe Cloud, a Wisconsin Winnebago. He wrote a weekly column, "The Indian News," for the *Black River Falls Banner-Journal*, by which it achieved a national circulation among Indian cognoscenti. Although a Carlisle graduate, Charley seems to have excelled mainly in football and other sports. Since his formal education was skimpy, his broken English accounts were no put-on as sometimes alleged. A classic of journalistic brevity under his by-line once summed up the complications of his life: "Not much news this week. Indian report in jail."

Charley was frequently in jail because he was frequently drunk. The authorities would pick him up when he seemed too drunk to care for himself rather than to punish him or to imagine that they could rehabilitate him. This Charley knew and appreciated, expressing neither shame nor remorse over his bouts with the bottle. Getting drunk was something Indians did. Nor did the local Winnebago people view his drinking with anything but tolerant amusement. They were ambivalent, however, about Charley's role as newsman. They admired and quoted his outspoken criticism of the white man and approved his obvious commitment to Indian values and traditional beliefs. But they were also sometimes embarrassed by his writing insofar as it often appeared to lampoon Indians and make them appear undignified to

white readers. Charley, I am sure, never realized that at times his grammar and spelling were not only funny but gave rise to unconscious *double entendres*. He was in dead earnest in his indignation and concern for the Indian community. It seemed to puzzle him that his efforts received a mixed reaction among the Winnebago but he was a man with a sense of calling and went on writing. I believe that his drinking was a desperate validation of Indianness among Indians and a classic example of exploitation, albeit probably unconscious, of Indian tolerance for the drinker. If what Charley wrote sincerely in the community interest turned out to be unintentionally offensive, Winnebago people would (and, in fact, did) forgive him since there was always the likelihood that he was not entirely sober when he took pencil in hand.

A third way of validating Indianness is what might be called leadership. I confine this definition to situations in which Indian people are in positions to promote community interests *vis à vis* white society, particularly in regard to government agencies. This is a difficult role because successful liaison efforts in communicating with whites are so easily interpreted as selling out the community or profiting at the community's expense. Yet, leaders are recognized as necessary if the Indian community is to prosper and survive at all. The successful leader usually manages both to get things done in the community behalf and to maintain personal exemplariness in Indian terms.

E. is a traditionalist Winnebago, intelligent and sensitive but with little formal education. As he approached middle-age he took on more attributes of exemplary Indianness and, as far as I know, had no reputation as a drinker when he became an active leader. He derived great satisfaction from the learning process involved in leadership and in seeing his efforts, in concert with other tribal leaders, result in material improvement for his people without in any way compromising Winnebago values. Unfortunately, as so often happens in Indian affairs, governmental agencies supplying funds for tribal work gained control of decision making and began undercutting the work accomplished by the tribe on its own initiative. E. labored to right the situation and get power back into the Winnebagos' hands but was unable to do so. He held out longer than many of his original co-workers in the new regime but finally he too resigned his office. Another Winnebago reported to me with evident approbation that E. had quit and gotten "good and drunk." Whether he did or not, it was important

that people thought he did. Suspected of being a sell-out, he had redeemed himself.

F. is a mixed blood Dogrib with a history of apparent identity problems. He was a heavy drinker and might have been written off as a classic example of drinking because of a sense of status deprivation and inability to assimilate as white. He seemed to be moving in a white direction since he had taken himself off the rolls as an Indian. Canadian law has now changed, but until the early 1950s treaty Indians could not vote or buy liquor. F. may have had other motivations but the right to buy liquor often accounted for people opting out of official Indian status. A brief community development project instituted by the Canadian cooperative movement permitted F. to use his white education, bilingualism, and basically sound intelligence as a leader. Although F. had long been identified by the traditional full-blood community as a member of the "no-good" faction of mixed bloods, the efforts of the Co-op began providing employment and serving the real interests of the total community. Scarcely launched, the project was terminated by political considerations in Ottawa. Whites took over the community service contracts which the Indian Co-op needed in order to prosper. Predictably, only the small handcraft end of the Co-op's operation was allowed to remain in Indian hands, thus reinforcing the idea that Indians can only manage things that whites can recognize as "typically" Indian in the museum artifact sense. When the bids of the Indian Co-op to handle brush clearance and other community services were rejected, although the bids were sometimes lower than those of white competitors, F., who had pretty well "dried out," went back to drinking. When last seen, he was blearily insisting he was an Indian, treaty or no treaty, and indulging in the familiar expressions that he could not get ahead because he was an Indian and that he was as good as any white man. Actually, F. is one of the few Indians whose skills could assure him a good job if he wished to compete with local whites. He would suffer no personal financial loss and have greater acceptance by the white community than he had in his role as Indian Co-op leader. It is not that he drinks because he cannot get ahead in terms of white success goals; the drinking actually interferes with his getting ahead and, to me at least, seems a desperate validation of Indianness when denied the opportunity to exercise other alternatives. F. can verbalize his anger and frustration to anyone who has the patience to hear him out. The Indian community, he believes,

could have handled its own affairs in its own way, namely with a co-operative, but the white government favored greedy whites whose management assured them most of the profits.

To return to my original hypothesis, I have admittedly stuck my neck out knowing I would not have space for qualifications and extensive documentation necessary to pull it back. I have only tried to make clear that I believe most studies of Indian drinking start with a mistaken assumption that it is simply *bad*. In my opinion, as an old, patterned form of recreational behavior, it is managed and probably no more hazardous to health than karate, mountain climbing, or mushroom hunting. If Indian people decide to give up recreational drinking (as it is, its intensity and frequency of occurrence vary from tribe to tribe), I am sure it will be for cultural reasons of their own, just as I believe they developed the drinking patterns initially for their own reasons. Middle-class whites concerned about Indian welfare—missionaries, social workers, psychiatrists, and others—confuse their concern for health and well-being with their embarrassment and disgust at any behavior which to them is *declass  *. Getting drunk for its own sake, like sexual promiscuity, may be fun but something “nice” people do not do, or at least do not flaunt. A persistent white, class oriented ethnocentrism prevents recognizing the otherwise exemplary, competent, “successful” Indian for what he is—an Indian doing contemporary Indian things, whether dressing decently, driving a car, or going to college. Somehow, his undignified behavior when drunk, or if he does not get drunk himself, his unwillingness to disavow or interfere strenuously with those who do, imply that he is not quite yet “just like us.” The fact that Indian drinking distresses and disturbs whites and forces them to take notice may well explain why it can so easily become a form of protest, assuming my hypothesis is correct, in Indian-white encounters and can even help restore credit where one’s Indian investment in the Indian community is called into question.

But protest demonstrations by definition involve extraordinary behavior and are hard to sustain indefinitely. The tragedy is that the Indian protest has been so prolonged that in some cases it becomes a way of life with disastrous consequences for the people concerned. I do not agree with Vine Deloria Jr.’s syllogism that young Indians were sold the notion by anthropologists that Indians live in two worlds; people who live in two worlds drink; therefore, to be real Indians they must drink. But, like Deloria, I, too, have “lost some good friends who

DRANK too much.”²⁹ Some took their lives before managing to drink themselves to death. And, like Deloria, my grief evokes anger and bitterness that they died as they did and that others are likely to go the same route so long as we pursue policies that continue to deprive Indians of lands, water rights, and other natural resources or so long as we offer them the opportunity to achieve decent living standards only if they measure up to our particular philosophical standards.³⁰

The one bright ray I see at present is that Indian people are finding increasingly effective, and sober, means to express aggression and protest which are unmistakably Indian. Many Indians have turned from defensive action to offensive tactics. The last few years, for example, have witnessed the occupation of Alcatraz, the development of influential and unifying Indian publications, such as *Akwesasne Notes*,³¹ the ejection of unwanted tourists from Indian land, and the successful campaign of the National Congress of American Indians to force withdrawal of a liquor ad which humorously exploited the stereotype of the drunken Indian.

²⁹ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died For Your Sins* (New York, 1970), 86. Indians were drinking long before anthropologists appeared on the scene. If they were as susceptible to the influence of the opinions of outside authorities as Deloria suggests, we would have succeeded long since in talking them out of wanting to be Indians.

³⁰ On November 23, 1970, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, by a ten to two vote, finally approved a treaty outlawing genocide and sent it to the floor of the Senate. Action on the treaty, signed by many other nations, has been held up in the United States for twenty-one years. The U.P.I. dispatch appearing in papers across the country (see, e.g., *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 24, 1970) suggested that the delay was due to “misgivings about its effect on the court system,” i.e. civil rights questions regarding blacks. If the treaty is finally ratified, it will be interesting to see whether American Indian groups will make use of it in arguing land and water rights and other issues.

³¹ The editor is Jerry Gambill, Cornwall Island Reserve, Box 435, Roosevelttown, New York 13683. Appearing ten times yearly, this paper reprints news items about Indians from newspapers and magazines published throughout the United States and Canada. The emphasis is on items which describe protests against abrogation of Indians' rights.