

Indigenous Leadership

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Abstract: A short contextual overview of the past and present opens up a discussion of the challenges surrounding American Indian leadership in the contemporary world and into the future. We survey some of the literature on Native American leadership and consider leadership issues in institutional settings such as academia, tribal governments, pan/inter-Indian organizations, public interest and NGO groups, and global Indigenous structures, suggesting ways in which non-Native organizations can better recognize, respect, and partner with American Indian leaders.

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In 1993, leadership consultant Emmett Murphy suggested that American businesses could learn valuable lessons by studying American Indian leaders. He dissected the Battle of the Little Big Horn, comparing the leadership style of George Armstrong Custer – self-centered, top-down, predatory, one-dimensional – with that of Sitting Bull, whom he framed as “heroic.” Murphy’s *Sitting Bull* offered a role model for leadership that was powerfully confident, but also collectivist, organic, strategic, and smart. Two decades later, football coach Mike Leach saw a biography of Geronimo as the most effective way to convey his own set of leadership lessons. Unsurprisingly, these focused on preparation, leverage, nimbleness, toughness, indefatigability, and other tropes drawn from the sport.¹ Indian leadership – at least as it was viewed from the outside – was a bit about what you wanted it to be.

Over the last several decades, the idea of leadership has become something of an American obsession. The Murphy and Leach books were part of a long wave of prescriptive writing on the subject, often focused on business and government. That writing has been supported by a consulting, coaching, and leadership training industry, itself backed by a range of academic studies, and given additional

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heft through an ill-defined but well-subscribed set of leadership classes and experiences for high school and college students. Though we struggle to define it and to teach it, most of us think we know leadership when we see it, and we understand that, somehow, it *matters*.

Leadership matters to American Indian people as well, not only in relation to deep historical traditions of strong leadership, but also to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Modern leadership challenges emerge from tribal obligations to both maintain and transform Indigenous social and cultural practice, intertribal organizing across Indian Country around a host of issues, and the constant imperative to develop and assert a sovereign futurity in a national and global world of proliferating institutional obligations, relationships, and responsibilities. Native American leadership carries its own particular sets of dangers, and these play out across a full range from the intimate, local, and tribal to the international and Indigenous. The tasks are many and they are hard.

Murphy and Leach situated American Indian leadership in terms of military conflict, a set of historical contexts that can make leadership seem obvious after the fact. Step outside those contexts, into the everyday nuts and bolts of contemporary leadership, and one may well find (particularly from non-Native observers) a different reading: a set of critiques. These often frame Indian leadership as being full of culture-bound deficiencies – nepotism, factionalism, corruption, and general ineffectiveness – that limit Indigenous potential in today’s world. Consider, for example, the discourse surrounding the 2016 protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline, which took place on the Standing Rock reservation in North and South Dakota. Pipeline advocates accused Indian people of what were essentially failures of tribal leadership: they had not been proac-

tive on administrative issues and had mobilized too late to be truly effective. The implication was that better leaders would have anticipated problems before they became crises and, once in crisis, would have managed affairs more forcefully.

At the same time, the Dakota Access Pipeline protest camps – with large numbers of shifting participants over a period of several months – self-consciously refused to churn out visible media-friendly leaders, as the American Indian Movement had done in the early 1970s during its takeover of the village of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. If one familiar aspect of leadership seems to be the generation of charismatic figures able to organize and speak for others, those people were not readily apparent – at least to the outside world. Where were the leaders? It was not until relatively late in the occupation that mainstream media actually began to identify the movement and its tribal leaders. *The New York Times*, for example, published its profile on Joseph White Eyes, Jasilyn Charger, Bobbi Jean Three Legs, and other youth leaders in January 2017, as the occupation was already winding down. And it framed tribal council and traditional leaders as being as late to the game as the *Times* itself.²

Other observers looked at Standing Rock and saw something different. To them, leadership was everywhere, active in alternative – and often highly laudable – forms. Leaders combined localism and Indigenous practice with global social media networking and developed a complex web of partnerships with environmental and anticapitalist organizers. Standing Rock suggested a more human set of leadership values: decentralization, spirituality, self-deflecting humility, collectivism, the navigation of subgroup interests, and a sometimes contentious but epistemologically distinct diffusion of authority. In this sense, Indian leadership was not so much an object of

critique, or a set of lessons drawn from the past, but a model for thinking about “new ways” of organizing and leading people that pointed to the future.

How might we make sense of this landscape? First, we should admit that our thinking is likely to be colored by a long tradition in which (mostly) White Americans offer stereotypical visions of Indian leadership, usually cast in terms of conflict. Emmett Murphy and Mike Leach echoed familiar (if often grudging) American appreciation for figures such as Powhatan, King Philip, Osceola, Black Hawk, Red Cloud, Chief Joseph, Quannah Parker, and others. These men knew how to unify, organize, strategize, and lead people. The evidence for their leadership was clear: it lay in their resistance to American colonial incursions. Their eventual defeat made them safe to celebrate. To tell their story was to receive Indian leadership lessons while confirming the supposed essential superiority of American society. It was, as in the cases of Murphy and Leach, yet another form of appropriation.

Second, when considering Indian leaders outside the military – or the *militant*, in the case of the American Indian Movement – Americans have been slow to recognize three essential aspects: a much wider range of individual leaders (where are the business books on Zitkála-Šá, Arthur C. Parker, or Wilma Mankiller?), intertribal organizations (such as the Society of American Indians, the National Congress of American Indians, or the Council of Energy Resource Tribes), or the existence of tribal governments themselves. Despite the existence of a deep roster of Indian political leaders, Americans fail to recognize Indian equivalents of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, John Lewis, or Jesse Jackson. Despite a proliferation of American Indian institutional leadership structures, for most non-Native observers, there is no visible analogue to the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Urban League, or the Southern Christian Leadership Council. The intricacies of tribal leadership remain a mystery. The cumulative weight of often-negative reporting on tribal activities has created, if anything, a shallow stereotype about deficiencies in Indian vision and management in the contemporary world. And it remains only barely possible to imagine Indian leadership in non-Indian institutional or political contexts. American Indian senators, business leaders, or university administrators are marked as exceptions that prove a rule of absence.

In short, general views of Indian leadership are often marked by positive misunderstandings, negative misunderstandings, and general ignorance. These views sit in tension with Indigenous understandings of American Indian leadership, and they do so whether the focus is on historical leaders like Sitting Bull or Geronimo, on tribal officials and intertribal organizers, or on the work of emergent leaders like the activists at Standing Rock. In these gaps lie a series of questions about leadership in general, and more particularly about past, present, and future leadership in Indian Country. How do contemporary Indian leaders function in relation to historical legacies and new institutional structures? What are the achievements, needs, and opportunities for leadership in Indian Country in the future? Are there commonalities among different tribal leadership experiences? Can one usefully identify specifically “Indian” styles of leadership in the historical and sociological record? If so, how have their elements changed in relation to conquest and colonization? How might Indian leadership practices transform the wider world of leadership? What *is* leadership, anyway?

To be human is to be part of many different kinds of social groupings, and to or-

der and organize those groups around such concepts as responsibility, kinship, rights, reciprocity, hierarchy, delegation, representation, opportunity, initiative, freedom, restraint, and decision-making. As part of such social organization, individuals find, take, and are assigned roles as *leaders*: people able to mobilize “social influence” in order to “enlist the support of others in the accomplishment of a common task.”³ Leadership can range from flexible and situational (“You lead the discussion this time”) to absolute and dictatorial (“I am in charge until I die and will kill you if you disagree”). It can be structured in terms of representational politics, institutional roles, personal achievement, social role modeling, and interpersonal charisma, among others. Over both historical time and geographic and social space, American Indian people, not surprisingly, have built a wide range of leadership practices.

How are those practices to be known? Scholarship on American Indian leadership has tended to fall into three broad categories. Many writers take a historical and biographical approach, tracing the rise of individual tribal leaders and their responses to situations – specific crises and structural changes – that demanded leadership. Others work with what are essentially ethnographic models, developing theories of leadership out of social and cultural understandings of Indian lives and worldviews. Still others make comparisons, often delineating Western leadership styles, and then outlining differences with a generalized picture of Indian leadership style. Considerations of contemporary leadership have often used all three approaches, applying them to various institutional frames, including tribal governance, education administration, law, policy, and lobbying.

Biography is usefully considered one of the earliest and most productive pathways into the question of Indigenous leadership, and perhaps no scholar has done as much

to consolidate the questions as historian R. David Edmunds, who edited *Native American Leaders: Studies in Diversity* (1980) and *The New Warriors: Native American Leaders Since 1900* (2001), while authoring books on the Shawnee Prophet and Tecumseh that explicitly considered the question of leadership. Edmunds has been committed to complicating the kinds of shallow understandings that underpinned writers like Murphy and Leach, who saw leadership in terms of the mobilization of followers around crisis events rather than everyday social life, and framed leadership actions in terms of strategy and tactics. Many of the contributors to the Edmunds volumes (and those edited by L. G. Moses and Raymond Wilson, Margot Liberty, and Frederick Hoxie, among others) are themselves biographers. Along with substantial numbers of “as told to” narratives and memoirs, they help make visible an enormous world of Indian leadership – if we are willing to see it – diverse across time, space, tribe, social identity, and function. Not all Indian leaders are war leaders; not all leaders are chiefs; not all leaders live in the past.⁴

Biography helps us understand these different kinds of leadership, carried through past to present and future. Tribal nations have had visionary leaders, able to see big pictures and chart courses through the challenges of military conquest and colonial domination. Edmunds’s work on Tecumseh, for example, details his concept of a massive pantribal military alliance and the traveling diplomacy he undertook to bring it to life. Tribes have had intellectual and ideational leaders, generating new ideas and figuring out strategies for working within the structures of the United States. Historian Frederick Hoxie’s treatments of Paiute author and activist Sarah Winnemucca, Omaha lawyer Thomas Sloan, Crow lawyer and administrator Robert Yellowtail, and Seneca journalist and lobbyist Alice Jemison, among others, offer excellent ex-

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amples. Tribes have had underappreciated managerial and administrative leaders, skilled at maintaining the everyday functioning of their people. During the Dakota Access Pipeline struggle, for example, Standing Rock Tribal Chair David Archambault II – a pragmatic and capable leader – emerged as an important public voice articulating arguments for tribal sovereignty, due process, and respectful consultation (and consent) between tribes and the federal government.

Despite the ways that biographers have given us a broad range of leaders, the form does not always lend itself to clear understandings of tribal leadership writ large. The questions surrounding leadership get caught up in tracing the life course of the individual and are too easily framed around the central problems – or even crises – that they engaged in during their lives. For all its virtues, the form tends to assume that leaders are made by the contexts in which they operate, or by the upbringings that shaped their characters, or both. Biography moves more readily toward specifics and thus away from generalizable concepts that might be transferred or compared in a larger study of leadership itself.

Another way to think about tribal leadership springs from the broader – but still contained – context of particular Indigenous cultures or, in many cases, of intertribal organizing. Anthropologist Ruth Benedict's 1934 study *Patterns of Culture*, for example, used three Indigenous case studies in which leadership was framed not in the Western terms of individual exceptionalism, but through culturally shared social roles: sacred priesthoods and medicine societies, lineage nobility titles, clan obligations, and shamanism. These forms did not require crisis-centered leadership; instead, good leaders concerned themselves with the daily maintenance of social structures, which encouraged a proliferation of leadership roles centered on “being a good

relative,” “doing things with care,” “acting like a human being,” or similar ideas that framed leadership largely as a shared enterprise. These are valuable lessons. But it is also the case that Benedict was writing out of an ahistorical ethnographic present, focused on exhibiting culture as much as history. The static nature of her interpretation failed to account for changes in leadership practice in relation to the challenges of colonial domination and conquest.⁵

Hoxie's detailed history of Crow politics at the turn of the twentieth century, by contrast, reveals exactly how these culturally centered everyday leadership styles and interests might proliferate in a colonial context, often functioning within and in relation to new institutional structures – tribal councils, church organizations, the Office of Indian Affairs – each of which encouraged new kinds of governance. The transition between earlier structures – charismatic leadership, collective governance, and the importance of social role and behavior – to hybrid political models that included forms of electoral representation marked a series of reorganizations in the very nature of tribal leadership. What did it mean to map voting, districting, and elections onto existing political structures? Inevitably, these things created dissent about the very idea of shifting structures and about the leaders who would navigate them. And yet, at the same time, everyday Crow cultural values cushioned and mediated those changes, creating new possibilities. Across North America, tribes working to maintain and create social and political structures in relation to ongoing colonial domination have also generated new leaders and new forms of leadership. Anthropologist Loretta Fowler has revealed the importance of long-standing Arapahoe age-graded leadership structures, which knit Arapahoe society together across both generations and kin groups and underpinned a symbolic politics centered on ideas of progress (rather than tradition)

that proved effective as they developed new forms of political leadership.

In the early twentieth century, Indian people developed a wide range of business councils, church-based groups, issue-centered lobbying organizations, and cultural networks, each of which created significant Indian leadership opportunities, often for women. These new-old social forms arose in relation to colonialism, of course, but also through increased mobility, Western education, and new forms of political engagement. The Society of American Indians (SAI), for example, offers a powerful example of new intertribal leadership structures. Modeled after the NAACP, engaged with academic sociology, and focused on a wide range of issues, the SAI allowed a diverse group of leaders to build what was essentially the first Indian think tank. It was notable, among other things, for the leadership of activists Zitkála-Šá (Gertrude Bonnin), Marie Baldwin, and Laura Cornelius Kellogg, who took on critical roles in organizing and articulating an intellectual agenda for the group. Indeed, reviewing the first organizing meeting, one finds that Kellogg's energy and boldness stands out among her colleagues, Zitkála-Šá proved an intellectual and organizational force of nature, and Baldwin's expertise in both law and the culture of the Office of Indian Affairs modeled new kinds of institutional political and policy leadership. The SAI and other intertribal organizations, in tandem with the representation-based tribal councils created following the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, laid a template for groups such as the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Youth Council, the American Indian Movement, the Native American Rights Fund, the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, and a range of other organizations that sought to exert national and international leadership in both tribal and intertribal contexts in the years following World War II.

These groups helped nurture and push to prominence a diverse collection of Indian leaders and strategists: Lucy Covington, Helen Peterson, Robert Bennett, Tillie Walker, Vine Deloria Jr., Ada Deer, Louis Bruce, Clyde Warrior, Hank Adams, Mel Thom, Helen Maynor Schierbeck, Russell Means, Dennis Banks, John Echo Hawk, Norbert Hill, Janine Pease, Elouise Cobell, and many others. They helped create a new world of Indian leadership that functioned in relation to American political and economic institutions, enabling the host of contemporary organizations and leaders that characterize Indian Country today and that are planning for its future.

The question of tribal leadership raises the question of cultural influence: is there, for example, an identifiably Iroquois (or Sioux or Seminole or x, y, or z) style of leadership that is the product of particular sets of values and particular histories? Tribal leadership does, in fact, rest upon both Indigenous historical memory and practice *and* the adjustments and necessities of navigating American politics and law. Historical contexts – long-standing family, clan, and kin alignments, for example, or embedded cultural logics – help explain some of the challenges of tribal leadership such as factionalism or deeply deliberative decision-making. In a similar manner, intertribal leadership raises the possibility of commonality across tribal lines, and thus something like a generalizable American Indian style of leadership. Intertribal leadership also rests upon the contexts of American colonialism, which seeks to present (at least in theory) unified policies to diverse Indian peoples, requiring Indigenous leadership and organization at a national scale. It is in this juxtaposition – American (or Western) and pan-Indian (or Indigenous) – that one finds analytical efforts to make sense of American Indian leadership by isolating character-

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istic pantribal elements, an interpretive move that is enabled by comparison.

The danger in such an analysis is readily visible in the efforts of a writer like Emmett Murphy, who frames Custer's leadership in crude terms, and thus finds himself essentializing Sitting Bull as well, creating timeless Indian characteristics and styles. Since almost all of these characteristics carry positive (usually antimodernist) values, they are appealing as objects of desire not simply to non-Indian readers, but to Indigenous ones as well. Amidst the messy complexity of actual leadership practice, though, the effort to consolidate cautiously a few categories of Indigenous practice remains valuable – not in terms of fixing essential and generalized ideals, but as heuristic devices used to think more deeply about Indigenous worlds past, present, and future.

Education researcher Miles Bryant has made a useful effort to identify such general categories, arguing that American Indian views of leadership might be seen in terms of six characteristics.⁶ Many of these remain useful descriptors and will, in fact, be familiar to Native leaders and to scholars of Indigenous leadership. Bryant emphasized the decentralized nature of Indian leadership. Across a range of social roles and needs, different people move through different positions as leaders in, for example, ceremony, war, governance, teaching, or subsistence. They might, in other contexts, be followers, according to their expertise and the circumstance. Few individuals are leaders in every context. This diffusion requires a more flexible posture on authority, which shifts situationally across a range of individuals. Such decentralized structures produce leadership that is less directive and even noninterventionist. Is the role of a leader to diagnose individual and collective problems and then organize others to fix them? Doing so may imply a lack of trust, a sense that one person – the leader – somehow knows better than oth-

ers. Indigenous leaders are often content to wait to be asked for help, and to place value on both leader-like patience and the social meaning of an eventual request to take the lead.

Is Western leadership instrumental in terms of decision-making? Bryant has suggested that such is indeed the case: it seeks to identify a future state, set a clear direction, break apart goals, delegate tasks, minimize resource investment, rationalize structures, and emphasize speed and efficiency. These elements may also be present in Indigenous decision-making, but Native American leaders tend to utilize processes that emphasize the nurturance of the collective. Questions are more readily talked to consensus (or exhaustion) rather than enunciated as a winning argument aimed at establishing the dominance of one position over another. It is less a question of convincing a powerful leader to take a particular action than convincing everyone of the rightness of a certain course. Indeed, it is in that process of persuasion that Indigenous leaders demonstrate confidence and project power. Charisma, personal magnetism, social-cultural status, spiritual favor, intelligence, and articulateness all help individuals rise in the eyes of the collective. This kind of process requires a leadership willing to think differently about time, in which efficiency is not inevitably the highest value. The path to action, in Indigenous leadership, lies not strictly through a projection of a future outcome or completed task, but through the maintenance of the social and spiritual condition of the present. From that beginning, Indigenous leaders have been challenged to fuse past histories, practices, and values together with a future that engages the possibilities of change. That condition is characterized by a broader view of the world in which all things have immanent value: that is, an understanding of not simply obvious human

relationships, but also less obvious ones, and with relationships characteristic of a complex nonhuman spiritual world that is itself part of the everyday.

All of these factors bear on the ways that leaders, ideally, present themselves. If Machiavelli gave us the Prince as a Western model of visibility, pragmatism, and individuality, many tribal leaders take pains to project a very different public image. While there are plenty of instances of performative boasting, Indigenous leadership often has a strong current of humility, self-deprecation, deflection of praise, and the absence of self-promotion, or has included the deliberate redistribution of accumulated property such as in the potlatch and gift-giving leadership structures of the Northwest Coast. Leaders may accumulate substantial material possessions, but they often do so in order to funnel resources to others, and thus either look poor or move through cycles of wealth and redistribution. The historical record is replete with examples in which Europeans in diplomatic negotiations mistook orators for leaders or sought to appoint leaders when they could not readily identify them.

Bryant's categories offer ideal-type characteristics. Clearly, they do not apply to all tribes, past or present; nor is it likely that any single leader would exemplify all these traits at all times. As descriptive categories, they tend to float above historical change. And they speak more easily to small social groups than they do to the abstractions of an imagined national Indigenous community, for example, or perhaps to intertribal organizations with diverse constituents and interests. Indeed, reading Bryant's description, one is struck by a twinned kind of affect. On the one hand, these factors seem to be present, in one form or another, among many contemporary American Indian leaders; on the other hand, the feel and tone of the categories – and their origins as the opposites of Western traits –

suggest something like a precontact social organization. In that sense, they are in danger of producing a picture of leadership located somewhere outside of new institutional structures such as tribal councils, tribal colleges, intertribal organizations, and tribal and intertribal businesses.

The characteristics referred to by Bryant – humility, self-deprecation, deflection of praise, and the absence of self-promotion – continue to serve as guides for non-Native leadership. They appear, for example, in one of the most read and praised books on leadership in the past several years: Jim Collins's *Good to Great*.⁷ They are part of what Collins refers to as Level Five leadership, the most effective kind of leadership in the companies that he studied. Level Five leaders are both modest and strong-willed. They are ambitious not for themselves but for their company. They are self-effacing and understated. They are determined to do whatever it takes to help the company be successful.

Nonetheless, the general nature of such categories threatens to leave contemporary American Indian leaders betwixt and between. There is every possibility that a leader exemplifying Bryant's value system might be accused by outsiders of dysfunctional leadership of tribal institutions that have to function successfully in American political and economic contexts. In those contexts, speed often matters – but consensus requires time. Shared decentralized authority can look like collective weakness. Too much humility seems like a lack of confidence and power. By non-Native standards, the culturally successful Indian leader can look like a failure. And the reverse is also dangerously true. Leaders who may be effective in broader American economic and political contexts may be accused of having moved too far from their cultural roots. The Indigenous complaint is easily launched and is powerful: *this* is how we Indians lead; why are you not doing it?

Outside critiques of Indian leadership tend to emerge from the first position. Bernard Bass, coauthor of a long-running and comprehensive manual on leadership, suggests that Indian people are “repressed and apathetic,” with the heroic leadership of past chiefs only a faded memory, while they are subject to “tribal councils that discourage participatory democracy and collaborate with state bureaucracies to maintain the status quo.” As university administrator Linda Warner and public leadership scholar Keith Grunt have suggested, Western leaders are often defined by their position more than their actual skills (though this reality is usually denied). Indian people who lead differently are read as ineffectual leaders, a mapping that racializes difference as deficit. Not only is Indian difference racialized, but it is also rendered ahistorical, as the very real deficits and impingements of colonial history and cultural destruction are erased. Changing leadership – and leadership demands – as scholar Lawrence J. Wise-Erickson has suggested, should be traced historically through challenges of demographic change, forced assimilation, and imposed institutional structures.⁸

All of these challenges confront American Indian leaders. And yet, leadership is alive and well in Native communities across the country. How do we know? A view that accounts for a full range – biographical, cultural, and comparative/cross-cultural – reveals both new and old institutions, movements, and networks, each requiring and generating Indigenous leaders. At Standing Rock, for example, young leaders emerged out of grassroots youth care and environmental and social justice moments. They joined a range of spiritual and cultural leaders, social media-savvy networkers, Native logistics leaders, national intertribal organization leaders, and, of course, local tribal council leaders, among others. Tribal chair David Archambault was arrested at a protest, wrote editorials for *The New York*

Times, spoke frequently to media, helped manage logistics and strategy, testified at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, kept the discourse focused on prayer and nonviolence, managed disappointment following the closing of the protest camps, and continued the effort through legal and administrative channels. Heroic leader? Here’s how Archambault described himself: “I earn my own living and don’t seek glory, fame, or wealth. . . I live a simple, prayerful life and strive to make our home, community, and nation a better place.”⁹ Leadership such as this – often explicitly framed in terms of Dakota or other Indigenous cultural values – made Standing Rock the most effective Indian political mobilization in decades.

Or consider a leader such as Governor Bill Anoatubby of the Chickasaw Nation in Oklahoma. Governor Anoatubby lost his father when he was less than three years old. His mother raised him and his siblings, and all were surrounded by family, friends, and community in Tishomingo, the old capitol of the Chickasaw Nation. Governor Anoatubby’s first experiences with leadership came in high school, where he served as president of his class and on the student council. When asked if he sought out these positions, he replied, “No, I didn’t ask for it. I wasn’t quite that assertive, but when asked to do something I did it.” When told that others must have seen leadership potential in him, he said “I often wondered what they saw . . . I was co-captain of the football team. I was selected All-Around Boy by the teachers. I was always surprised when these things happened. I thought it was very cool, but I guess I never realized any potential I may have had and just stepped in when I was needed or asked to.”¹⁰

Governor Anoatubby went to work for the Chickasaw Nation in 1975 as its first health director. He became accounting director in 1976, then special assistant to the governor, and then ran for lieutenant gov-

ernor in 1979. He became governor in 1987 and continues in this position today, having served for thirty years. When Governor Anoatubby began his first term, the Chickasaw Nation had approximately 250 employees. It now has fourteen thousand employees and operates more than one hundred businesses. As author Millie Craddick has noted, “While the quiet, humble, unassuming Chickasaw works hard to deflect attention from his accomplishments, the importance of the Chickasaw Nation under Governor Anoatubby to Oklahoma’s economy cannot be downplayed.”¹¹

And one might trace similar patterns of leadership, fusing everyday culture with new possibilities, in a number of spheres: tribal and intertribal business, academia, politics, energy, land, and environmental management, among others. From the most local social services effort to global Indigenous organizing, Indian leadership – often working hard to embody values of reciprocity, respect, service, and futurity – remains part of the legacy and the future of Indian Country.

How, then, should non-Native institutions engage Indian Country through its leaders? We conclude with a few possibilities. First, it is critical to understand the ways that tribal leaders, specifically, are representatives of sovereign nations. Models for communication and engagement with tribes might do well to draw more from the sensibilities of diplomacy and administration than from business; from the model of the treaty as much as from the contract. A university that wants tribal representation at an event, for example, might have done well to establish permanent relations on an entity-to-entity basis, and engage in periodic consultation on issues of mutual interest, of which there may be a surprising number.

Second, in that context, it should be understood that Native leaders will likely try

to embody complicated – and sometimes contradictory – social meanings in their leadership practices. Respect for differences around time, authority, and decision-making are exactly what is meant by the word “diplomatic.” Patience and persistence are respectful recognitions of the structural challenges – *not* some racialized dysfunction – that Indigenous leaders are working hard to navigate.

Third, it is important to understand the full range of temporality that Indian leaders necessarily engage. The first context for Indigenous leadership is the historical past, which is always deeply alive and visibly present, rich with local interpersonal histories that are inevitably weighed down by the very real traumas of colonial domination. A second context is the contemporary, which demands an engagement with the past, even as it presents a series of possibilities, hybridities, contradictions, dilemmas, and imperatives that are difficult to manage. But perhaps the most important context is that of the future. We say this only partly in the context of leader-like planning for the future. That matters, of course. But because Indian people and Indian leaders have so often been relegated to the past, it remains challenging for non-Native people to see them in the present and future. And yet, for American Indian leaders, futurity – not just survival but self-determination, prosperity, and happiness – is *everything*. When non-Native institutions engage Indigenous leaders on the ground of a productively shared future that recognizes and takes responsibility for the past, good things will follow in the present.

Fourth, non-Native leaders can support Indigenous leadership in nurturing the next generation of American Indian leaders. For the last several centuries, many of the best Indian leaders have figured out how to move in both Native and non-Native worlds. Today, despite the deeply lingering hurts of history, the possibilities for young

people to remain grounded in the everyday of a cultural home – no matter its physical location – while also mastering the world have never been better. Why not look for ways to support that cultural home, both for those future leaders in the making and for the leaders who hope to nurture them? A contemporary example worth emulating is the Ambassadors Program run by Americans for Indian Opportunity, which has been assisting early-career Native American professionals to develop their leadership capacities within Indigenous cultural contexts since 1993.¹²

Finally, it is worth following the impulse – if not always the lessons – of Emmett Murphy and Mike Leach. Indigenous leadership is not an instrumental resource

upon which to draw in search of success in business or football coaching. But, as observers of the Standing Rock effort noted, it may in fact be a resource for a powerfully humanistic rethinking of what leadership is, how it functions, and how it might be adapted and improved to better serve the interests and needs of communities in the contemporary world. Sitting Bull and Geronimo may well have something to say about that future. But perhaps it is just as likely that productive insights will come not from reading a book, but from active engagement with and support of American Indian leaders, the institutional forms in which they work, and the people who have granted them authority.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Emmett C. Murphy and Michael Snell, *The Genius of Sitting Bull: Thirteen Heroic Strategies for Today's Business Leaders* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1995); and Mike Leach and Buddy Levy, *Geronimo: Leadership Strategies of an American Warrior* (New York: Gallery Books, 2014).
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