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I Can Carry On From Here: The Relocation of American Indians to Los Angeles

by Ned Blackhawk

Elizabeth Murphy, a Luiseño Indian, and her new roommates at the Regina Hotel in downtown Los Angeles quickly became good friends. "We never went anywhere alone," she remembers. "We always held hands."¹ For these four young women living away from home for the first time, Los Angeles in 1967 contrasted dramatically with their rural homes in Montana, South Dakota, and Southern California where running water and electricity were considered luxuries. For Elizabeth, the seemingly endless, crowded streets of downtown Los Angeles vastly differed from the dirt roads of her small community of four extended families at Pechanga.² Although not geographically far from her home, Elizabeth's new environment required immediate, unfamiliar adjustments. Surviving in Los Angeles took on added dimensions at the Regina Hotel which was used not only by the Bureau of Indian affairs to house these American Indian women but also by the State of California for recently released prisoners. Despite the opportunities for city jobs, the exciting attractions of Los Angeles, and the many conveniences of urban life, Elizabeth and her roommates "all just talked about going home."³

These brief glimpses into Elizabeth Murphy's first weeks in Los Angeles poignantly reveal the challenges confronting her and her roommates in Los Angeles. Like thousands of other American Indians, they had moved to Los Angeles to take part in federally-sponsored job and job training programs. Arriving from disparate communities with unique historical conditions and societal organizations, American Indians brought to Los Angeles their own different cultural systems and community experiences. Each individual, ultimately, faced the challenge of personally negotiating his or her cultural identity in the new and hostile city. As Elizabeth relates, once in Los Angeles she and her roommates immediately established

close emotional ties. These bonds were continuously reinforced through their constant companionship and further supported through hand holding. For these previously unacquainted American Indians alone in downtown Los Angeles, hand-holding was not only reassuring but also physically signified to each other and publicly their collective sense of solidarity and friendship. Elizabeth's repeated emphasis on lasting notions of time, "never" and "always," indicates the importance of these bonds during this disorienting and often frightening process of urbanization.

Elizabeth Murphy's experiences are similar to those of other American Indians who left their traditional homes to come to Los Angeles and serve as a window into the broader processes of American Indian urbanization and migration to Los Angeles. What she reveals, however, are not only her own attempts at adapting to life in Los Angeles. As she illustrates, she and her roommates adapted both individually and collectively to their new environment. When she says that they "all just talked about going home," she reveals this reciprocal process of individual and collective adaptation. Exchanging stories about their homes, Elizabeth and her roommates shared past experiences of each other's communities and together forged a communal identity. For these four young American Indians surrounded by ex-convicts, sharing stories and talking "about going home" helped them to alleviate each other's pain and loneliness in their initial adaptations in Los Angeles.

This interpretation of Elizabeth Murphy's and her roommates' first weeks in Los Angeles raises many questions about the broader experiences of American Indians in urban environments. As Elizabeth suggests, cultural adaptation is often an inseparable process of individual and collective adjustments in which individuals under-

stand and interpret new experiences within familiar cultural frameworks. Absent from this discussion, however, are the decisions and conditions which led to these individuals' arrivals in Los Angeles. Although Elizabeth and her roommates "talked about going home," questions arise about what their different meanings of "home" were, what their motivations were for originally leaving their former communities, and why they decided to stay in Los Angeles. Other questions involve the influences and continuities of their individual cultures in their different urban experiences, as well as the role of the U.S. government in their lives. To what extent, then, does her example apply to other American Indians? As necessary components to any understanding of American Indian cultural adaptation in urban environments, these questions raise highly complex and unexplored issues in American Indian history.

American Indian history is predominantly studied as an examination of Indian-white relations which ends in the late nineteenth century with the conquest of the American West.⁴

Attempts to understand American Indian cultural change and continuities within the dominant American culture, therefore, remain extremely fragmented. Historically contextualized, culturally sensitive interpretations of American Indian struggles to maintain stable and viable societal organizations following military conquest and political subjugation are virtually nonexistent. For the purposes of this paper, only a small fraction of the many broader issues of twentieth-century American Indian history can be explored.

This paper principally seeks to examine a crucial component of American Indian urbanization in Los Angeles, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Relocation Program. Beginning in 1952, the BIA began a national job placement program for American Indians, and in twenty years Los Angeles witnessed the Relocation of nearly 30,000 individuals and/or their immediate families, nearly three times more than any other city.⁵ In order to study the processes of relocation in Los Angeles, I have interviewed ten individuals, six of whom were directly involved in Relocation and four of whom migrated to Los Angeles during the Relocation period. These individuals, six men and four women, came from eight different American Indian tribes, ranging from Oklahoma Pawnee to Virginia Mattaponi. Although representing a small fraction of the total number of American Indians who came to Los Angeles, this study reveals many different perspectives

within a very small sample and indicates the tremendous range of experiences within the urbanization of American Indians in Los Angeles. Newspapers and newsletters have provided information about the Los Angeles American Indian community, and I have additionally drawn from the Central Classified Files of the Los Angeles Field Relocation Office.⁶

Although drawing from a small sample of interviews and government documents, an examination of Los Angeles Relocation Policy as well as the experiences of American Indians involved reveals not only the bankruptcy of existing interpretations of urban American Indians but also, more importantly, the dynamic, vast mosaic of American Indian experiences in Los Angeles. Coming from well over one hundred tribes with different cultures and historical experiences,⁷ the individual experiences of American Indians in Los Angeles differ tremendously. Recognizing the extreme diversity of these experiences appears paradoxically to undermine any attempt to analyze collectively these fragmented, disparate experiences. Fundamental to each experience remains, however, each individual's own negotiation of his or her cultural identity within the new environment. This descriptive, seemingly normative assertion may appear to reveal little about the broader processes of cultural change and adaptation; such an interpretation, however, reconfigures existing approaches to the study of urban American Indians.

Interpreting how American Indians assigned meanings to their different experiences in Los Angeles sheds light upon not only the rich cultural diversity among them but also the historical conditions of the communities from which these individuals came. American Indian cultural change and adaptation within Los Angeles are extremely complicated, dynamic processes. This paper, therefore, focuses primarily on one aspect of these larger processes. A study of the Los Angeles Relocation Policy reveals the federal government's manipulative attempts to impose Anglo-American gender conventions on American Indians.⁸ Facing this hostile and arrogant imposition of gender values, American Indians creatively negotiated their different gender systems within their new environment.⁹ Despite the limitations of such generalized assertions, highlighting a few of these different individual struggles forcefully overturns existing portrayals of urban American Indians and offers alternative interpretations of the experiences of American Indians not only in Los Angeles but within modern American society.

Relocating the Dispossessed

Moving to Los Angeles, as Elizabeth Murphy illustrates, was often a lonely and painful process. Arriving in 1967, Elizabeth and her roommates came to Los Angeles as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Adult Vocational Training Program (AVT), an offshoot of the original BIA Relocation Program.¹⁰ The BIA had encouraged and funded over 100,000 American Indians to “relocate” to urban areas prior to Elizabeth’s arrival in Los Angeles and continued these programs until the mid-1970s.¹¹ Although specifically designed to expand employment opportunities for American Indians, the Relocation Program was explicitly linked to broader changes in U.S. federal Indian policy following the Second World War.

Under the leadership of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Dillon Myer, the BIA in the early 1950s attempted to eliminate most of the privileges and benefits American Indian tribes and reservations received from the government.¹² These attempts by the federal government to forfeit its responsibilities to different American Indian peoples reflected many of the dominant attitudes of the McCarthy Era which emphasized conformity to the values and attitudes of mainstream, Anglo-American society. These views were articulated in August 1953, when the U.S. Congress passed House Concurrent Resolution 108. The new policy objectives, commonly referred to as “Termination,” read as follows:

Whereas it is the policy of Congress, as rapidly as possible, to make the Indians within the territorial limits of the United States subject to the same law and entitled to the same privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States, to end their Status as wards of the United States...

That it is declared... at the earliest possible time, all of the Indian tribes... should be freed from Federal supervision and control from all disabilities and limitations specifically applicable to Indians.¹³

This policy of “terminating” American Indian treaty and legal tribal rights redefined the “Status” of American Indians in American Society. With a sense of urgency, paternalism, and mission, the U.S. government attempted to “make the Indians” adopt the “same responsibilities... (as) other citizens.” The inability to recognize the

cultural diversity of different American Indian societies, highlighted in the language of this law, illustrates the arrogance and racial assumptions of the U.S. government. Specifically targeting over one hundred culturally distinct American Indian tribes and bands, these new assimilative policy objectives became the backbone of post-war federal Indian policy.¹⁴

Attempting to implement these policy objectives, the federal government ignored not only its previous treaty obligations but also the painful historical experiences and unique cultures of individual American Indian communities. Combining a paternalistic, assimilative policy with its powerful bureaucratic apparatus, the government powerfully exerted its influence over American Indians. The interrelated Relocation and Termination programs tried to force individual American Indians to choose between competing and in the government’s view, incompatible lifestyles. Relocation attempted to establish an either-or scenario for American Indians whereby individuals would give up their tribal affiliations by moving to cities in return for middle-class “American” values and economic prosperity, embodied in employment. Often facing dire poverty in their traditional communities and hopeful of finding economic opportunities in the cities, many American Indians took up the government’s offers. According to a BIA Relocation officer in South Dakota, Relocation became “the instrument of termination.”¹⁵ For each individual involved, negotiating his or her cultural identity in this coercive, assimilative process became an extremely difficult struggle.

Portraits of Urban American Indians

The experiences of American Indians within modern American society remain poorly understood. Through monolithic representations of diverse cultures and general associations with the physical environment and historic past, portrayals of American Indians categorically misrepresent them. American folklore, movies, professional sports teams’ logos, and advertising are a few areas which reveal as well as reinforce this pervasive societal ignorance.¹⁶ A brief examination of existing representations and studies of American Indian urban experiences illustrates the necessity of culturally sensitive and historically contextualized understandings of urban American Indians. The rapidly expanding urban American Indian population, which rose from 27,000 in 1940 to 719,000 in 1980,¹⁷ spurred numerous attempts to describe and explain this phenomenon. Although they

highlighted some of the hardships encountered in cities, these presentations failed to recognize dynamic, individual experiences beneath their bleak monolithic portrayals. A *LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER* article from 1971, for example, described one individual in Los Angeles:

3 weeks ago, Joe pawned his tribal turquoise-buckled belt, jacket, and watch... Absolutely penniless, the young Navajo also suffers from delirium tremors,...sleeps on pieces of soggy cardboard,...(and) wanders from bar to bar, his only possession the clothes on his back. He talks of committing suicide.¹⁸

Homeless, psychologically scarred, alcoholic, and alone, Joe's situation appeared hopeless.

Accounts of such destitution pervade most portrayals of urban American Indians. These portrayals predominantly attribute these "problems" to inherent racial and cultural characteristics.

A 1966 article from the *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, for example, illustrated this view. "Sharing is basic to the Indian," it stated, "he is accustomed to trading, lending, and borrowing... Plans for the future are not often made."¹⁹ Homogenizing diverse cultures and peoples into one experience, that of the "Indian" male, such simplistic portrayals not only reveal the ignorance in American society but also attempt to understand American Indian ideological motivations in western, Euro-American terms. This imposition of western values and aspirations upon American Indians remains a recurring theme in the study of urban American Indians. When combined with bleak, one dimensional portrayals, these themes become unbreakable bars in the iron cage of American societal ignorance, further separating understandings of American Indians from the dominant culture.

Academic attempts to understand the urbanization of American Indians echo many of the problems of these other representations. Joan Ablon, who pioneered much of the scholarship on urban Indians, in a comparison of American Indian and Samoan urbanization, for example, attributed many of the difficulties facing urban American Indians again to the Indians themselves. Indians, she wrote, "often tend to withdraw in the face of conflict... Indian motivation for education... frequently is hampered by a poor self-image and severe cynicism about chances for success in a white world."²⁰ Attempting to evoke sympathy and to highlight the problems con-

fronting urban American Indians, these narrow portrayals victimize American Indians and continue to ignore the dynamic and complex processes of individual cultural change.

There are no major historical interpretations of the development of modern urban American Indian communities.²¹ With over 60% of the American Indian population currently residing in cities, the experiences of urban American Indians clearly remain marginalized in the study of American Indian history.²² The few existing urban perspectives, furthermore, perpetuate existing homogeneous portrayals of American Indians. Donald Fixico, in *TERMINATION AND RELOCATION*, focuses predominantly on federal policy changes and rarely mentions the effects of these programs. His attempt to include relocated American Indians in his discussion again presents bleak, seemingly hopeless portrayals:

After leaving their traditional social structures on reservations... (relocatees) had nothing... The city's alien environment was unlike anything they had experienced... As members of a small minority attempting to adjust to the urban scene, Indian Americans felt inferior. Loss of morale and pride threatened their personal identity, causing many relocatees to wander and drift in cities, searching for fundamental elements as they knew them traditionally... Some Indians contemplated self-destruction; the more depressed individuals committed suicide.²³

Presenting American Indians as victims of federal policy, Fixico suggests that they are incapable of culturally adapting within urban America.

Fixico's rigid, monolithic representation of American Indians demonstrates how many portrayals often become more injurious when they do attempt to interpret American Indian cultural motivations. Amplifying these problems, Kenneth R. Philp discusses Relocation. "The decision of Indians to leave their homelands," he argues, "was more than a response to prodding of federal bureaucrats. It was a stride toward freedom from Indian Bureau paternalism, economic insecurity... and second-class citizenship."²⁴ Explaining various American Indian motivations again in western, material terms, his analysis when considering other cultural influences degenerates beyond one-dimensionalism. Further explaining Indian rationale

for leaving their communities, he states:

Social life for Chippewas in Mille Lacs County, Minnesota, consisted of drinking beer, hunting wild game, and asking for government doles in the winter months. On the Red Lake and White Earth reservations, almost one-third of the children were illegitimate. Desperate mothers deliberately got pregnant to receive Aid to Dependent Children payments to supplement family income.²⁵

Rationalizing and justifying the painful histories and struggles of American Indians without any understanding of cultural traditions and practices, this prejudiced portrayal can only serve to further reveal the need for new conceptual and methodological tools for understanding contemporary American Indian experiences.

This discussion of existing representations of urban American Indians illustrates the bankruptcy of these rigid, homogeneous portrayals. Although American Indians faced difficult, lonely, and often very tragic struggles within urban environments, to suggest that the challenges confronting American Indians in cities were insurmountable ignores the dynamic and resilient processes of American Indian cultural change and adaptation. These portrayals are so pervasive that even the most acclaimed American Indian writers emphasize the tragic nature of urban American Indian experiences.

Both Leslie Marmon Silko in *CEREMONY* and N. Scott Momaday in *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* use the city to develop their broader themes of American Indian estrangement. In these novels, the city embodies the hostility and alienation of modern American society. In *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN* the protagonist, Abel, relocates to Los Angeles and is unable to adjust to the numerous pressures of urban life. "He was unlucky. You could see that right away," Momaday writes, "He was a longhair... You have to change. That's the only way you can live in a place like this. You have to forget about the way it was... Well, he didn't want to change, I guess, or he didn't know how."²⁶ Not knowing how to change, Abel's anomie becomes complete after a beating: "There was a roaring of the sea in his brain... The pain was very great, and his body throbbled with it... he could not place the center of the pain. And he could not see. He could not open his eyes to see. Something was wrong, terribly wrong... His mind was slipping away. He wanted to die."²⁷

Using similar imagery to reveal the disorienting nature of the city, Silko writes of the protagonist in *CEREMONY*:

Tayo felt weak, and the longer he walked the more his legs felt as though they might become invisible again... He leaned against the depot wall then; he was sweating, and sounds were becoming outlines again, vague and hollow in his ears, and he knew he was going to become invisible right there. It was too late to ask for help, and he waited to die the way smoke dies, drifting in currents of air, twisting in thin swirls, fading until it exists no more. His last thought was how generous they had become, sending him to the L.A. depot alone, finally allowing him to die.²⁸

Silko's and Momaday's use of outline imagery reinforces their representations of city life. As Abel is unable to see the center of his pain, Tayo can only hear the outlines of the world around him. In both novels, Los Angeles remains a foreign, unfamiliar world where Tayo and Abel remain alienated not only from their communities but also from themselves. Only after Tayo and Abel have left Los Angeles and returned to their traditional communities can they heal themselves. Resolution in both novels, thus, comes through isolation from urban American society and a return to traditional practices. Momaday's and Silko's use of Los Angeles as a symbolic space of American Indian alienation illustrates the pervasiveness of portraits of urban American Indians. In *CEREMONY*, the antagonist, Emo, who represents the evil and hatred of American society is banished from Tayo's community. Tayo's Auntie, then, says, "They told him to never come back around here... I heard he went to California." "California," Tayo repeated softly, 'that's a good place for him.'²⁹

American Indian Relocation, Los Angeles

The apartment Elizabeth Murphy and her roommates moved into "wasn't in a good location... it was near Queen of Angels Hospital."³⁰ The BIA Los Angeles Field Employment Assistance Office at 1031 South Broadway had finally found an apartment for Elizabeth and her roommates after over a month's stay at the Regina Hotel.³¹ After several weeks in the city, they had become accustomed to the business school where the BIA had also placed them and to living in Los Angeles. Learning the bus

schedules and quickest routes around town, they traveled to school, to buy groceries with their meager monthly stipends, and periodically downtown to the BIA office to meet with their individual counselors. When not in classes, or on weekends, they explored Los Angeles together. "We would sometimes get on the bus," Elizabeth remembers, "and say, 'I wonder where this bus goes.'"³²

Despite such exciting new experiences, living in Los Angeles was often intimidating and disillusioning. Since her home was only a few hours away, Elizabeth, when she had enough money, often returned to Pechanga on the weekends and holidays. Unlike her roommates and nearly all other relocated American Indians, Elizabeth regularly visited her family and community. Experiencing a connection with the familiarity and comfort of her home, Elizabeth gained much needed reassurance and support to help her in the city. Recognizing her good fortune, she relates, "Unlike them, I was close enough to home that I could ride the Greyhound bus... home." Returning to their apartment, she often "found out that they drank and partied all weekend." The BIA only later moved them to a better location, the Bethany House, a boarding school for girls. Unsure of the exact location of their first apartment, Elizabeth "still remember(s) Queen of Angels Hospital being nearby because my roommate tried to commit suicide and we had to rush her over to the hospital... She was Blackfeet... from Montana... her brother got killed in Vietnam and when she got the news she kind of freaked out. And she stayed drunk for about three days and locked herself in the bathroom..."³³

After nine months at the business school, Elizabeth and the other Indian women at the school decided against a business career. "I didn't want to go and work in an office. People always dress up and stuff. I didn't like to dress up... So there were about two or three of us who didn't want to do that. We went through all that school, and we didn't want to work in an office. We didn't want to dress up for some reason." Deciding instead to study at a medical assistance school, they all signed up at the BIA office. Elizabeth, however, "ended up going to that school all by myself. I don't know what happened to the other girls." Taking now another BIA job-training program, Elizabeth completed the eleven months of classes and a one-month internship and "then I got a job. It was at a private clinic (as) a general medical technician doing lab work, x-rays, and surgical procedures."³⁴

These brief, poignant glimpses into American Indian Relocation complicate one dimensional portrayals of

urban American Indians. Elizabeth Murphy and her roommates' experiences illustrate their tragic as well as resilient time together in Los Angeles. Highlighting the difficulties in her own struggles, Elizabeth reveals how she confronted foreign experiences by interpreting them in familiar ways.³⁵ Facing new and often conflicting expectations by the BIA and American society, Elizabeth Murphy constantly re-evaluated not only these foreign values but her own. A critical aspect of this continuous process of negotiation, as she relates, was resisting the imposition of Anglo-American gender conventions. When she states, "I didn't want to go and work in an office. People always dress up and stuff. I didn't like to dress up," Elizabeth reveals her opposition to these conventions. Trained to be a secretary, Elizabeth rejected a job where she would feel the constant pressures of maintaining certain standards of physical appearance. Her repeated use of the verb to "dress up" in the context of almost assuredly working as the only American Indian woman in an office undoubtedly controlled by Euro-Americans carries highly gendered and racial meanings. Stating that "People always dress up and stuff... we didn't want to work in an office. We didn't want to dress up," Elizabeth also differentiates herself and the other American Indian women from the dominant culture and emphasizes their solidarity in the face of imposed values and expectations.

Rejecting a job as a secretary, Elizabeth chose a career with a higher skill level and a greater sense of independence. As a medical technician working in a clinic where she wore the same uniform as the other employees, Elizabeth had her own specific job duties to perform without the constant pressure of being judged by appearance. Growing up at Pechanga, Elizabeth was from an isolated community which had endured centuries of first Spanish, then Mexican, and finally Armerican conquest. Facing the repeated intrusion of foreign cultures and values, Luiseño Indians have constantly negotiated their cultural systems in their attempts to maintain stable communities in Southern California. Away from her home, Elizabeth Murphy subtly resisted the imposition of Anglo-American cultural attitudes and managed the unfamiliar challenges of Los Angeles in familiar ways. Traveling home as often as possible, Elizabeth maintained strong ties to her community and drew upon existing cultural values to confront new situations. Having a certain degree of job autonomy became extremely important for her in Los Angeles. This interpretation of Elizabeth Murphy, thus, reveals not only

the challenges confronting relocated American Indians but also one individual's creative responses.

Before Elizabeth Murphy arrived in Los Angeles, the BIA had already designated a job training program for her. After applicants had taken a series of tests, the BIA offered them a few choices of jobs and job-training programs. These choices were based primarily on BIA policies or on BIA officials' perceptions of the ability of the applicant. Either way, the placement of individuals into specific jobs or training programs reflected the assimilative policy objectives of the federal government.

The Los Angeles Field Relocation Office during the Relocation years accepted nearly 30,000 individuals to Los Angeles. With the start of its vocational training programs in 1957, the Relocation Office designed separate job-training programs for men and women. As with the direct job placement programs, the programs of AVT placed individuals in specific job-training programs based on Anglo-American gender conventions. Providing glimpses into the programs of Relocation in other cities,³⁶ an examination of the programs of the Los Angeles Relocation Office reveals the heavily gendered policies and policy objectives of the entire BIA Relocation Program. In a memorandum on June 5, 1958, to all existing agency superintendents,³⁷ the Field Relocation Officer in Los Angeles, George Felshaw,³⁸ outlined the different job-training programs in Los Angeles:

At the present time there are 12 approved Adult Vocational Training Courses available in Los Angeles to Indian people... They are: Aircraft Machine Mechanic, Automobile Engine Mechanic, Barbering, Comptometry, Cosmetology, Landscape Horticulture, Nursery Horticulture, Radio Repair and Allied Electronics, Secretarial, Watchmaking, and X-ray Technician.³⁹

Later to include other programs such as Sheet Metal, Welding, Practical Nursing, Dental Assistance, and Sewing Machine Operator, these programs were all divided according to Anglo American gender conventions. Furthermore, these programs were all designed to train individuals in jobs suitable for urban areas and not for reservation communities. At the Allied Welding School in Compton, for example, all of the 42 American Indians enrolled in the training program in July, 1959, were men.⁴⁰ At the Marinello College of Beauty in Los Angeles from

the same period, all 12 of the American Indians enrolled in the 24-month program were women.⁴¹ Primarily concentrating on physically-intensive labor for men and service-oriented programs for women, through vocational training the BIA in Los Angeles instituted gender-specific programs which clearly imposed and prescribed Anglo-American gender conventions for American Indian women and men.

All of the individuals interviewed for this paper who were involved in Relocation were employed in low-paying, gender-specific jobs. Scotty Marklyn, a Sioux Indian from South Dakota, relocated first to Rapid City, South Dakota, to work in a mine before migrating to Los Angeles.⁴² Cecil Johnson, a Creek Indian, who relocated to Los Angeles with his wife, Fannie, a Creek Indian, and their two children in July, 1954, from Southeastern Oklahoma recalls that at Douglass Aircraft he "started out as a laborer, and... then later on I was working on production control... Then I went to machinist, when I got laid off."⁴³ Housed with predominantly other American Indians in a housing project in Harbor City, Fannie remembers that after the Indian men went off to work, "the ladies would come around and visit. As long as they spoke English, we understood each other."⁴⁴

With Cecil working at a factory and Fannie staying at home with their children, the Johnsons appeared to adopt the prescribed gender values of a nuclear family. Their successful integration into the labor market, however, helped them economically survive and adjust to life in Los Angeles. Economic employment for the Johnsons, moreover, was not gender-specific. After having eleven children, two stillborn, Fannie "started working after my last one was born... The kids took care of each other... and finally my cousin she called me and I told him (Cecil) to take me over there to plastics company," where she began working on the "third shift from 11:30 at night to 8:30 in the morning."⁴⁵

As the Johnsons demonstrate, married couples often more successfully adapted to the demands and pressures of urban life. As Fannie relates, the Johnsons confronted the challenges of the city in familiar ways. Revealing the importance of a large, tight-knit family, Fannie highlights how their children learned this value and "took care of each other" when she was away. For single individuals, Relocation was often much more difficult, especially for American Indian women whose opportunities were severely limited by the policies of Relocation.

Illustrating the limitations instituted by the

Relocation Policies is a letter received by George Felshaw from the Superintendent of the Blackfeet Indian Agency in Browning, Montana, on August 19, 1959. The superintendent wrote about an Indian woman who wanted to relocate: "Ramona is a very attractive woman and is interested in Nursery Horticulture. I have discussed the point with her that this is a job designed for men rather than women." The letter continued, "Ramona has no means of support with the exception of A.D.C. (Aid to Dependent Children)... This welfare office is very eager to see Ramona enter training and have (sic) agreed to cooperate in every way possible."⁴⁶ Despite her interest as well as the urging of another BIA official, the Los Angeles Relocation Office was unsuccessful in its attempts to find training for Ramona. Describing the responses of the schools of Nursery Horticulture, the Relocation Officer replied that the schools, "are not interested in enrolling one female in their all male class(es)."⁴⁷

This exchange of letters illustrates the critical aspects of race and gender discrimination within the Relocation program in Los Angeles. Despite the painful and difficult process of moving to a foreign city, especially with two small children, Ramona was willing to leave her community to find work. Her attempts were, however, denied because of the pervasive attitudes and gender role expectations of the BIA and of American society. Differentiating between the capabilities of men and women, the BIA programs imposed Anglo-American values on American Indians. The fact that Ramona was first introduced as "a very attractive woman" demonstrates how she is categorized according to patriarchal attitudes. For American Indian women, this discrimination meant much lower-paying jobs which often emphasized Anglo-American standards of physical appearance and beauty. Denied opportunities for equal economic placement not only with whites but also with Indian men, American Indian women in Relocation faced a double burden of struggling to overcome hostile racial and gender discrimination.

Unable to survive economically in urban cities many single American Indian women became live-in domestic workers. Although not specifically funded through the Relocation program, the Los Angeles Field Relocation Office was involved in the placement of Indian women in non-Indian households. The Relocation Office, for example, actively recruited recent graduates from many BIA-funded boarding schools to relocate to Los Angeles. The BIA Intermountain School in Brigham City, Utah, encouraged Indian students to apply for Relocation and

even devised its curriculum to facilitate the students' transitions to Los Angeles. In a letter to the Los Angeles Relocation Officer, the Employment Assistance Liaison Officer of the Intermountain School wrote:

Enclosed is a listing of all vocational courses offered this year at Intermountain... You will note the number of graduating students taking each course... Some of these students have had just one year of vocational training... In this case, they are being encouraged to take Adult Vocational Training... It will be approximately the second week in May 1964 before our students will be desirous of Employment Assistance service.⁴⁸

The "listing" of vocational courses listed 12 "Vocations" of which "Welding" had 26 students, "Commercial-Industrial" had 14 students, "Auto Mechanics" and "Auto Body & Fender Repair" each had 12 students, and "Home Service" had 34. The list briefly described the "Home Service" vocation and stated, "All of these girls have taken a course in power sewing machine operation... It is anticipated that many of these will prefer industrial type employment."⁴⁹ Although not specifically stated, these young Indian women might have preferred industrial employment over "home service" because they were apprehensive about the thought of living alone in a stranger's house solely to perform menial labor under someone else's incontestable authority.

Another letter from the Intermountain School to the Los Angeles Relocation Office stated, "Nine girls from the 1962 graduating class are asking to relocate to the Los Angeles area... Of the nine girls going directly from school, six will accept Home Service jobs. We will advise you of their employers as we receive confirmation from them."⁵⁰ This connection between Relocation and "home service" suggests that in Los Angeles many single American Indian women were highly encouraged if not funded by the BIA to work as live-in domestic workers in non-Indian households. This interpretation is further supported by a letter originally received by the Navajo Agency in Window Rock, Arizona, and then sent to the Los Angeles office. The letter stated:

Gentlemen: I have recently opened an employment agency to place Navajo girls interested in housekeeping positions in nice Santa Ana area

homes... (I) am quite familiar with Indian girls and am very fond of them. In fact, I have employed a Navajo girl in my home for a year and a half.

I will place the girls only in nice homes, with good families... The employer will pay my fee and advance fare to the girls if they do not have the money to buy a bus ticket. The girl will repay the amount of the fare... out of her first month's salary.

I require that the girls be sweet-natured, English-speaking... I would also prefer that they be at least 18 years of age... The girls will be paid \$25 per week and work a five day week. There are several Indian girls in the area and I will see to it that they meet so that they will not be lonely. I have several fine clients now awaiting girls, so I can place as many girls as wish to come.⁵¹

American Indian women were highly encouraged to become domestic workers in Los Angeles. Not officially affiliated with the instituted Relocation policies, the number of such workers as well as the nature of their experiences remain unknown.

Although the Relocation Program in Los Angeles attempted to expand the employment opportunities for American Indians, the subjugated position of American Indians in American society remained intact. Through race and gender discrimination, the job placement and job training programs were only intended for a certain level of economic advancement. A letter to the Los Angeles Relocation Office from the Blackfeet Indian Agency in 1959 again reveals the race, gender, and class discrimination of the Relocation Program.

"Helen," the letter began, "has been planning to enter training as an airline stewardess."⁵² Having already invested one hundred dollars in a training program, the letter continued, Helen wanted to relocate to Los Angeles to take vocational training as a stewardess.⁵³ Despite her commitment and major financial investment, George Felshaw of the Relocation Office remained discouraging. "The larger airline companies have their own stewardess schools," he responded. "The yardstick they use for choosing their candidates is personal appearance and personality. Very little consideration is given for previous training as stewardess."⁵⁴

As this example suggests, by becoming a stewardess, Helen would have directly challenged the defined status for American Indians in American society. As a stewardess with intimate contact with affluent, white clientele and exciting opportunities for travel as well as economic mobility, Helen would have defied the racial, gender, and class values prescribed for American Indians. Although Relocation espoused assimilative objectives, as George Felshaw—the director of the largest Field Relocation Office—illustrates, its programs maintained established racial hierarchies by limiting American Indian alternatives. When he responded, "the yardstick they use for choosing their candidates is personal appearance and personality," Felshaw explicitly suggested that as an American Indian Helen was incapable of meeting societal standards of "appearance and personality."

Despite the tremendous difficulties confronting American Indians in Los Angeles as well as the various discriminatory programs and policies of the U.S. government, American Indians adjusted to life in Los Angeles in many different ways. As many of the existing representations of urban American Indians suggest, the range of experiences included painful and often tragic ones. Two such examples are the American Indian homeless population in Los Angeles which was estimated at 5.1% of the total homeless population, nearly nine times the proportion of American Indians in the total population of Los Angeles.⁵⁵ Another example, as Elizabeth Murphy has recently related, involves the number of American Indian foster children. Many American Indian foster children and adopted American Indian children in the Los Angeles area who have recently been able to access their adoption files or birth certificates have learned that they are from American Indian tribes outside of California.⁵⁶ Only gaining this information after becoming adults, some of these individuals have struggled to understand the world of their Indian parents who were in Los Angeles over twenty years ago.

Despite such tragedies, American Indians have created the largest urban Indian community in Los Angeles with over a hundred different American Indian organizations ranging from beading and language classes to all-Indian bowling and sports leagues.⁵⁷ Fundamental in the creation and expansion of the Los Angeles American Indian community was Relocation. Despite the limitations and imposition of values by the BIA and American society, American Indians resisted the government's assimilative policies as much as possible and negotiated

their own cultural identities to meet the demands of their new environment. Although many came for only a short while before returning to their former homes, relocated American Indians created their own communities in this new and often hostile world.

Of the individuals I interviewed, half of them specifically related the importance of Indian churches in Los Angeles. Luella Thornton, a Cherokee Indian from Northeastern Oklahoma, remembers attending an all-Indian church in the Bell Gardens where "there (were) probably about 20 different tribes represented there. It was very common to hear the different tribes sing in their own languages. We felt welcomed and nurtured... and during the years we lived in that area, we insisted our children attend with us."⁵⁸ Lasha Tiger, who relocated when her father got a job, remembers attending a Creek Indian church with Cecil and Fannie Johnson. Cecil Johnson and Lasha's father were founding members of the church which served as an important community center.

These Indian social and religious institutions came to replace many traditional community practices for these individuals and highlight some of their distinctive cultural values and community experiences. Within Oklahoma Creek societies, for example, the Stompdance is a ritual which combines aspects of Christian and Creek Indian theologies. Illustrating the centuries old influences of Christian missionaries among Creek Indians who previously lived in the Southeastern United States as part of the Five Civilized Tribes prior to their Removal in the 1800s to Oklahoma, the Stompdance is led by a Indian preacher who shouts out religious teachings and is answered in song by members of the audience. Most likely some of the individuals whom Luella Thornton remembers singing out at the church in Bell Gardens were Creek Indians. When asked what he misses most about Oklahoma, Cecil Johnson tells of the Stompdances where as a young man he met Fannie Harjo and also heard about the BIA Relocation Program.

Highlighting the resiliency of many relocated American Indians is a letter written by Earl Stuart, a Sioux Indian from Sisseton, South Dakota, to the Los Angeles Relocation Field Office in December, 1963. Having relocated to San Francisco in 1957 with his wife and two children, Earl Stuart writes, "I am writing this letter to ask your help in locating and obtaining a job in Los Angeles... I have been unemployed since the 1st of August... I have talked to quite a few people from the Los Angeles area and according to them work is plentiful there... I am not looking for

anything from you people except help in locating a job I can step right into. I can carry on from there."⁵⁹ Articulating many of the primary reasons American Indians came to Los Angeles, Earl Stuart demonstrates how powerful the need for economic employment was. In the face of such economic necessities, he also reveals his own determination. While recognizing the BIA's importance, he clearly differentiates himself from the BIA officials, "you people," and maintains his individual dignity and pride. Unemployed in San Francisco and away from his traditional community, Earl Stuart had to adapt to his rapidly changing environment. Despite such unpredictable changes and need for financial stability, he negotiated and proclaimed his personal individual identity as an American Indian. Like tens of thousands of other American Indians who moved to cities hopeful for economic employment, he recognized his need for government assistance but also proclaimed his determination to be self-sufficient.

This examination of the Relocation of American Indians to Los Angeles illustrates a few of the challenges confronting American Indians in the unfamiliar world of Los Angeles. Despite the numerous impositions of values and expectations by the BIA and American society, American Indians creatively negotiated their different cultural systems to meet their new environments. By emphasizing the struggles of individual American Indians within the processes of urbanization, gross generalizations and homogenizations of diverse cultures can be avoided. Unfortunately, historically contextualized and culturally sensitive representations of twentieth-century American Indian societal organizations and processes of cultural change remain virtually nonexistent. In order to analyze collectively urban American Indian communities, heightened attention must be placed upon the nature of the Indian communities and societies from which the individuals came. Only with such emphasis can the processes of cultural adaptation and change be adequately assessed.

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Footnotes

- ¹ Interview and phone conversations conducted with Elizabeth Murphy from February, 1993 through June, 1993 at Claremont, CA and Riverside, CA.

- ² The Pechanga Luiseño Indian Reservation in Southern California is approximately 100 miles southeast of Los Angeles in northern San Diego County.
- ³ Interviews, Elizabeth Murphy.
- ⁴ As this paper will demonstrate regarding urban American Indian history, the experiences of American Indians in the twentieth-century remain severely neglected by the historical profession.
- ⁵ From 1952–1976, 29,693 individuals and/or their immediate families relocated to Los Angeles according to BIA sources as used in Joan Weibel-Orlando, *INDIAN COUNTRY; L.A.: MAINTAINING ETHNIC CONTINUITY IN A COMPLEX SOCIETY*; Chicago, 1991, pp.15–18.
- ⁶ Please see attached bibliography for detailed citations of the sources used.
- ⁷ The exact number of different Indian tribes represented in Los Angeles at any time is uncertain. Well over one hundred have been compiled by numerous different community surveys and ethnographic studies. See John Price, “The Migration and Adaptation of American Indians to Los Angeles.” *HUMAN ORGANIZATION*, 1969, pp. 168–175.
- ⁸ “Anglo-American gender conventions” refers broadly to the patriarchal attitudes and values of American society.
- ⁹ This discussion of American Indian “gender systems” in no way assumes knowledge of the many different cultures and historical experiences of different American Indian peoples. As stated, existing interpretations of American Indian cultural change within the dominant American culture remain almost nonexistent. It is therefore extremely difficult to even attempt to discuss the different “gender systems” of American Indians. For the purposes of this paper, American Indian “gender systems” refers generally to the social constructions of gender within different and unique American Indian societies.
- ¹⁰ The original BIA Relocation Program was expanded in 1956 by Congressional Public Law 959 which established various vocational training programs in urban areas as alternatives to direct employment. Public Law 959 also brought about a renaming of the Relocation Program to the Employment Assistance Program. This name change was ineffectual as most people outside the BIA still referred to the entire program as “Relocation.” For a detailed examination of the changes in BIA Relocation policy, see Donald Fixico, *TERMINATION AND RELOCATION: FEDERAL INDIAN POLICY, 1945–1960*, Albuquerque, NM, 1986, pp. 134–182. For the purposes of this paper, “Relocation” will be used to describe both BIA programs which brought American Indians to urban areas. Vocational training programs will be differentiated from employment assistance and abbreviated AVT.
- ¹¹ Exact figures on the number of individuals involved in Relocation have yet to be systematically compiled. The government estimates that Relocation “involved some 160,000 Indians.” See *REPORT ON URBAN AND RURAL NON-RESERVATION INDIANS: FINAL REPORT TO THE AMERICAN INDIAN POLICY REVIEW COMMISSION*, Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976, p. 23. What exactly constitutes involvement, however, is unclear. This number most likely refers to the specific number of individuals and their immediate families who were funded by the BIA to go to cities. Further compounding the certainty of these figures are the individuals who “re-relocated” to cities through BIA funding after having returned home.
- ¹² Specifically classified as wards of the U.S. government through numerous treaties and laws, American Indians have always maintained unique relationships with the federal government based on individual tribal histories and treaty agreements.
- ¹³ House Concurrent Resolution 108, August 1, 1953, as quoted in *DOCUMENTS OF UNITED STATES INDIAN POLICY*, second ed., Francis Paul Prucha, ed., Lincoln, NE, 1990, p. 233. These policies attempted to reverse much of the autonomous self-government granted to American Indian tribes under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. For an overview of U.S. federal Indian policy, see Prucha, *THE GREAT FATHER*, Lincoln, 1984.
- ¹⁴ This resolution “freed from Federal supervision and control” specifically all tribes within the States of California, Florida, New York, and Texas and applied to the “Flathead Tribe of Montana, the Klamath Tribe of Oregon, the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, the Potawatamie Tribe of Kansas and Nebraska, those members of the Chippewa Tribe who are on the Turtle Mountain Reservation, North Dakota.” The end of federal supervision and control brought economic and social tragedy for many of these “terminated” tribes and was fiercely resisted by many. See Fixico, pp. 44–133, 183–197. The effects of Termination on most of these peoples have yet to be thoroughly examined.
- ¹⁵ As quoted in Fixico, p. 183.
- ¹⁶ For the purposes of this paper, the creation and perpetuation of many of these derogatory images and academic presentations are examined primarily as reflections of the pervasive societal ignorance of American Indians. No existing studies have yet attempted to understand the effects of such pervasive racial stereotypes and images on individual American Indians or communities. The self-hatred conveyed by such images and symbols inarguably has a powerful effect on the socialization of American Indians.
- ¹⁷ These figures are based on U.S. Bureau of the Census figures which also reveal a profound rise of the total percentage of American Indians in urban areas from 8.1% to 52.7% as quoted in Stephen Cornell, *THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE*, New York, p. 132. Although U.S. Census figures inadequately measure the urban American Indian population because of, for example, return migration, they dramatically illustrate the changing demographics of American Indians.
- ¹⁸ Allan Parachini, “The Indians: Frustration Still the Same,” *LOS ANGELES HERALD-EXAMINER*, November 21, 1971.
- ¹⁹ Guerney Le Pelley, “Helping Hand for American Indians,” *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR*, April 27, 1966, p. 17.
- ²⁰ Joan Ablon, “Retention of Cultural Values and Differential Urban Adaptation,” *SOCIAL FORCES*, 1971, pp. 387, 391.
- ²¹ This interpretation rests on the inability of most historians of American Indians to differentiate between different American Indian cultures and historical experiences. Urban American Indian experiences and communities in many ways epitomize

- existing problems in the study of American Indian history. In different cities with the formation of unique multi-tribal American Indian communities, attention to such diversity and historical experiences is a prerequisite to attempting to understand why urban American Indian communities form and change over time.
- ²² U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990.
- ²³ Fixico, pp. 190–91.
- ²⁴ Kenneth R. Philp, “Stride Toward Freedom,” *WESTERN HISTORICAL QUARTERLY*, April 1985, pp. 176–77.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 182–83.
- ²⁶ N. Scott Momaday, *HOUSE MADE OF DAWN*, New York, 1969, p. 135.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- ²⁸ Leslie Marmon Silko, *CEREMONY*, New York, 1977, pp. 16–17.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- ³⁰ Interviews, Elizabeth Murphy.
- ³¹ Formerly known as the Los Angeles Field Relocation Office, the Employment Assistance Office was created in 1956 to handle both direct employment Relocation as well as Adult Vocational Training Programs under Public Law 959. The two names will be used interchangeably. *NATIONAL ARCHIVES — PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION; RECORDS OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS*; Records of the Los Angeles Field Employment Assistance Office: “Central Classified Files, June 1956 through September 1963,” Box: No. 1, File: 790.2 (1958–1961) AVT. Henceforth, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: ____, File: ____.
- ³² Interviews, Elizabeth Murphy.
- ³³ Interviews, Elizabeth Murphy.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*
- ³⁵ This discussion of “familiar ways” in no way assumes knowledge about the many different cultures and historical experiences of these individuals. Elizabeth Murphy was born and raised as a Luiseño Indian at the Pechanga Luiseño Indian Reservation. As stated, existing interpretations of American Indian cultural change and continuities within the dominant American culture are virtually nonexistent. Therefore, without any historically contextualized interpretations of the communities as well as understandings of the cultures of these individuals, it is extremely difficult to attempt to explain what these “familiar ways” actually were for the individuals involved. They are only partially discernible from the emphasis and meanings attached to their individual experiences.
- ³⁶ Eight Field Relocation Offices were established in 1952 with the original relocation program and expanded in 1956 under Public Law 959. Chicago, San Francisco/Oakland, and Denver were the other major destinations. See Fixico, pp. 137–142.
- ³⁷ The agency superintendents were the individuals who headed the specific BIA agencies on or near the Indian communities themselves. For a “Branch of Relocation Organization Chart—1957” which includes the numerous agencies, see Fixico, p. 211. The superintendents and agencies themselves played pivotal roles in the Relocation Program. Since each agency had preexisting contact with individuals and Indian communities, they encouraged and helped fund American Indians to leave for urban areas.
- ³⁸ The Los Angeles Field Relocation Officer headed the entire Field Relocation Office. The titles slightly varied throughout the Relocation period. There were five total Los Angeles Field Relocation Officers; George M. Felshaw was the second. The collection guide, “Arrangement and Narrative Description,” gives a general overview of the Los Angeles Field Relocation Office, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 1, File: 790.2 (1958–1961).
- ³⁹ Memorandum to Agency Superintendents, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 1, File: 790.2 (1958–1961).
- ⁴⁰ Tuition and expense reports for Allied Welding Schools, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 2, File: 797.3 (1958–1961), “Allied Welding Schools.”
- ⁴¹ Tuition and expense reports for Marinello College of Beauty, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 2, File: 797.3 (1958–1961), “Marinello College of Beauty.”
- ⁴² Interview with Scotty Marklyn conducted in April, 1993, at his home in Silverlake, CA.
- ⁴³ Interview with Cecil and Fannie Johnson conducted in April, 1993, at their home in Huntington Park, CA.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Interview, Cecil and Fannie Johnson.
- ⁴⁵ Letter to Los Angeles Field Relocation Office from Blackfeet Indian Agency, August 19, 1959, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 1, File: 790.2, “Inquiries Concerning Applicants.”
- ⁴⁷ Response to Mr. Howard F. Johnson, Superintendent, Blackfeet Agency, from Carroll D. Donlavy, Acting Field Relocation Officer, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 1, File: 790.2, “Inquiries Concerning Applicants.”
- ⁴⁸ Letter to Donald H. Spaugy, Los Angeles Field Employment Office, from Rohland Munns, Intermountain School, November 18, 1963, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 791.2, “Schools (Pupils and Graduates) B.” For a relatively small school to even have a “Employment Assistance Liaison Officer” illustrates the highly involved bureaucratic relationships between different parts of the BIA. The Indian boarding schools also maintained similar objectives as the other BIA policies from this time.
- ⁴⁹ List of a Vocation and corresponding “Number of Students” of the Intermountain School, Brigham City, Utah, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 791.2, “Schools (Pupils and Graduates) B.”

- 50 Letter to George Felshaw from Barbara Earl, Educational Specialist Intermountain School, Brigham City, Utah, February 19, 1962, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 791.2, "Schools (Pupils and Graduates) B."
- 51 Letter from Lee Horwitz, UNKEL AGENCY, Santa Ana, Calif, to Navajo Placement Bureau, Window Rock, Arizona, June 5, 1964, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 792.40, "Correspondence re Relocates and Trainees." Nothing has turned up about what the UNKEL AGENCY is. It is probable that the Navajo Agency sent along this letter to the Los Angeles office in order to attract attention to these existing policies.
- 52 Letter to George Felshaw from Reuben Fuhrer, Agency Relocation Officer, Blackfeet Indian Agency, Browning, Montana, March 4, 1959, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 790.2, "Inquiries re Program-Individual."
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Response to Superintendent, Blackfeet Agency from George Felshaw, March 16, 1959, *NATIONAL ARCHIVES*, Box: No. 4, File: 790.2 "Inquiries re Program-Individual."
- 55 "A Study of Homelessness and Mental Illness in the Skid Row Area of Los Angeles," Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, March, 1986. For U.S. Census figures of American Indians and problems involved in compiling such figures, see Weibel-Orlando, pp. 7-11.
- 56 Interviews, Elizabeth Murphy. Elizabeth now works for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Riverside, CA and has researched many cases involving American Indian child welfare.
- 57 The 1990 U.S. Census lists nearly 50,000 American Indians in Los Angeles. For problems in U.S. Census figures, see Weibel-Orlando who estimated the 1990 American Indian population in Los Angeles at 70,000.
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