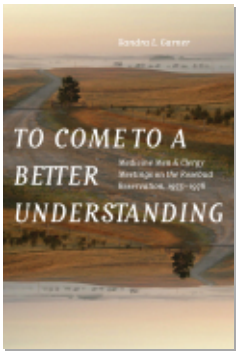
1. Which Kind of Indian Will Show the Way?



TO COME TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

1 Which Kind of Indian Will Show the Way?

On the evening of February 13, 1973, in the basement of a St. Francis Mission parish house on the Rosebud Indian Reservation in South Dakota, two groups—representatives from the newly formed Medicine Men's Association[1] (MMA) and Jesuit priests from the mission—began a conversation that continued across eighty-five sessions over the next five years. The dialogues, referred to as the Medicine Men and Clergy Meetings (MMCM), took place in a historical moment shaped by more than a century's worth of diligent efforts by colonial authorities, such as the Jesuits, to eradicate Lakota culture *and* a window of opportunity provided by changing sentiments about colonial projects on a national and global level. There was common ground for the two groups—medicine men and clergy—as each performed roles in the community as, respectively, Lakota and Christian ritual specialists. Transcripts from the first meeting state that the purpose of the conversations was to come to "a better understanding" and it is clear from the MMA participants that they believed their participation would result in real, beneficial, and concrete changes in the material world of their community. The participants agreed to record and transcribe what Marquette University (2015c) describes as a "historic Dakota-Christian theological dialogue."

Exactly two weeks later, on February 27, 1973, another meeting took place one hundred miles away on the neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation. During this meeting members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and a group of grassroots reservation activists (the Oglala Sioux Civil

Rights Organization) met at Calico Hall in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to discuss strategies for bringing change to the lived material reality of Lakotas on that reservation under the volatile political regime of tribal chairman Dick Wilson. This meeting may well have gone unnoticed had it not culminated in the decision to enter and occupy the hamlet at Wounded Knee, site of the infamous massacre that had taken place eighty-two years earlier.

The two meetings held that February took place on neighboring reservations in close proximity to one another. The respective Lakota citizens shared a common language, culture, and multiple familial relationships. They also shared a history of settler-colonial oppression, which continued to negatively impact their contemporary day-to-day lives. The venues of the two meetings served as spaces to consider approaches and strategies for bringing help and change to their communities. Another significant similarity between the two meetings was that the participants grounded their approaches in a conceptual frame that located Native, in particular Lakota, religious thought and practice at the center. Scholars Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche) and Robert Warrior (Osage) (1996, 39) argue that Native activism was unique among the other social movements of the 1970s because of the focus on Indian religion.

For both groups the stakes were high; indeed for all there was a sense that a distinctly Lakota future was at risk. They recognized the harmful effects of settler-colonial projects on their lived material reality *and* on Native identity and pride—what theorist Franz Fanon (1963, 11) famously identified as the colonized mind. Each group sought to imagine what a Lakota identity and future would look like, albeit in different ways. One young man, identified as Oren or Owen, attended the Rosebud meetings in 1978 and shared his story, which illustrates the complex issue:

> this is the way my parents brought me up and they are Indian so I was brought [up] the Indian way. The problem here, and again I might be wrong. But take for example my parents, I could say I was brought up by white parents but I could say I was brought up the Indian way. My parents have been conditioned to think the white way, what I call the white way . . . it is simply a reference to an attitude. . . . So, I could

> say I was brought up in the true Lakota way but I would be wrong because my parents don't really know how the old Lakotas were. . . . I'm thinking this is kind of a problem that were experiencing right now, that I'm experiencing right now. (Oren/Owen 1/2/1978, 13)[2]

Oren expressed the anxiety he felt as he tried to make sense of what it is that makes one Lakota. Was he Lakota because his parents were enrolled tribal members, because there was a biological connection? Or was being Lakota a cultural sensibility, a particular worldview not possessed by his parents as a result of colonization and forced assimilation? These were questions with which both the MMA and AIM were grappling during this watershed historical moment.

A comparison of the two February meetings not only illuminates strong commonalities and bonds between the two groups, but also draws attention to critical differences, which are intimated by Oren. First, while the MMA and AIM were motivated by concern for local communities and chose approaches that blurred distinctions between social, political, and religious activism, their strategies were very different. The group who met at Pine Ridge (AIM) employed activist strategies that were public, militant, and often violent, while the MMA at Rosebud strove to build relationships as they engaged in dialogue with one of the groups most complicit in their oppression. The MMA shared their knowledge and experience and it is clear they believed this approach would result in practical and concrete changes.

The second difference between the two groups was that the life experiences and demographics of the participants differed substantially, thus shaping different visions of what a Native, more specifically a Lakota, identity and future would look like. Members of the MMA were primarily Lakota middle-aged men and women who were born and had lived most of their lives on the reservation. Lakota was their primary language, though all were proficient in English as well. Between them they had decades of experience as Lakota ritual specialists and/or were regular participants in Lakota ceremony. Those engaged in the occupation at Wounded Knee represented a much more diverse background. Although there were participants from the local community, many in

leadership and in positions of visibility came from different American Indian nations; most were younger and grew up in urban areas removed and disconnected from their tribal homes. For the majority, English was their primary language and many were not conversant in their Native language.[3] Members of the MMA described people in the modern world as lost, with one stating during the MMCM, "We think of the AIM, they are also lost" (Unknown 1/29/1974, 13).[4]

Anthropologist Beatrice Medicine (Lakota) (1987, 162–63) provides a description of the distinction between the two groups in her account of participants' motivation to take part in the contemporary Sun Dance ritual. Medicine argues that the revitalization movement initiated by AIM must be situated within the colonial context of "cultural repression" and that it was part of a multiphase renaissance that included a period of reemergence in the 1950s; a revitalization movement for some Sioux in the 1960s; and, by the 1970s, due largely to the participation of AIM, a nativistic movement that served as marker of a panethnic Indian identity. Medicine further argues that not all contemporary participants engage in the practice for the purpose of identity performance associated with the nativistic AIM movement. Another group of participants (which she clearly privileges), she maintains, is looking for "a viable believable system—an orientation to something that will guide them through their lives" (164). According to Medicine this orientation (the achievement of "well-being") is accomplished by engaging and practicing the Lakota virtues—generosity, fortitude, wisdom, and bravery—within the context of one's place situated within the larger extended family unit, the *tiyospaye* (164). The orientation of this latter group, as described by Medicine, best represents the approach to life advocated by the MMA.

While the two groups described by Medicine (1987) did not account for every Lakota working to evoke change in their communities, they did represent two prominent groups with distinctly different approaches and visions of a Native future who actively asserted their vision. This raised questions for the communities, best articulated by a MMA participant who, early during the meetings, posed the question, "Which one of these kinds of Indians is going to be the one that's going to show

us the Indian way of life?" (4/8/1975, 54).[5] This project's focus is on the Indian way of life articulated and advanced by the MMA.

It is unclear when the MMA was founded and the members began organizing as an association. Evidence from discussions about the organization during the MMCM suggests the group was a relatively recent formation when the dialogues with the clergy from St. Francis Mission commenced in 1973. There was an impulse among the members to represent the MMA as a legitimate, official organization and in that regard they elected a chairman and other officials, as well as creating membership cards for the participants—the medicine men, their families, and other associates (singers and regular ceremonial practitioners). They met regularly at the reservation seat in Rosebud and were involved in multiple community outreach activities. In addition to their already full-time roles as ritual specialists, they attended tribal council meetings and advocated for official recognition as spiritual advisors at the local hospital and treatment center. They also served a critical role as they advised the local college, Sinte Gleska, in the development of the institution's Lakota language and culture course. In the early years they taught and appeared as guest speakers for the course. All of this was in addition to the five-year-long dialogue with the priests at St. Francis Mission, the MMCM, which is the primary focus of this project.

The number of Lakotas who were members of the MMA is unknown but a reasonable estimate is available for those who participated in the MMCM. Archives of the dialogues identify more than forty MMA members, twenty-five of whom participated with some regularity. The eighty-five sessions that occurred during the five years (1973–78) of dialogue often lasted two or more hours. During the first year, there were only four meetings, but other years they occurred as frequently as every other week for months at a time.

The dialogues were unique not only because of the participants, the history of their relationships, and the subject matter, but also because of the agentive, lead role played by the MMA participants in the process. MMA participants conducted all of the language translation and interpretation during the meetings and they wanted the meetings recorded

for future generations. The process of transcription was undertaken by MMA Lakota translators and Father William Stolzman, the primary representative from the mission. After the meetings were disbanded, Stolzman wrote *The Pipe and the Christ* (1986), a theological comparison of Lakota and Christian worldviews (through a decidedly Catholic lens) based on the MMCM. To date, Stolzman's Christian, western-centric text is the sole representation of the MMCM.

Indigenous-Centric Approach

This book takes as its point of entry what theorist Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) calls an "indigenous-centric approach" as it focuses on the perspectives communicated by the Lakota participants from the MMA at the MMCM. Byrd (2011, xxix–xxx) argues that "indigenous critical theory could be said to exist in its best form when it centers itself within indigenous epistemologies and the specificity of the communities and cultures from which it emerges and then looks outward to engage European philosophical, legal, and cultural tradition in order to build upon all the allied tools available," and thus has the potential to intervene and evoke "transformative accountability." A number of scholars in American Indian studies are concerned with putting indigenous critical theory in conversation with aspects of official knowledge(s) advanced by dominant western culture. They argue this intervention is not only critical, but potentially transformative as this approach hails accountability and offers alternative points of view. For example, while Byrd's own work focuses on western critical theory and conversations around colonialism, postcolonialism, and settler colonialism, David Martínez (Gila River Pima) (2009) focuses on philosophy, and Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Craig Womack (Creek-Cherokee), and Warrior (2006) enter conversations about literary criticism.

The recordings and transcripts of the MMCM offer a unique opportunity to consider an indigenous epistemology from the perspective of a local cultural community of Lakota medicine men and their associates on the Rosebud Reservation. Three primary observations weave throughout and shape this book. First, underpinning the MMCM was an unwavering commitment to a process of negotiation as the MMA

sought to articulate their real-life material experiences and advance their worldview. The five-year duration of the conversation and the frequency and length of the sessions over time demonstrate this commitment and the MMCM offers a sustained and in-depth representation of their point of view. Second, threading throughout the MMCM is the sense, on the part of the MMA participants, that their lives, beliefs, and practices had been rendered invisible on multiple fronts. They offer insight into the multiple intergenerational effects of settler-colonial projects. The decision of the MMA to engage priests at the local mission for the purpose of coming to a better understanding emerged out of a long history of inequitable power relationships and points in the direction of the real-world lived experiences shaped by the colonial and imperial ideologies characterizing modernity. At the same time, they felt that their worldview had been occluded by the attention paid to AIM and Native intellectuals by western scholars and Native peoples. Third, emerging from the MMCM is the particular worldview advanced by the MMA participants, the story they worked to tell about a particular worldview and ethos. The story describes a universe that is complex and dynamic. Everything is related. They argue that one only begins to understand this complexity through the experience of ritual practice.

Unwavering Commitment in Context

The commitment of the MMA to engage in conversation during the MMCM was not an anomaly. Rather, as I document throughout this text, there is a contingent of Native peoples, who across time and place, have sought various ways to translate and interpret Native culture for non-Native audiences. This impulse has taken a myriad of forms, shaped by the historical moment. As scholar David Delgado Shorter (2009, 14) observes, there is a long history of Native people willing to share and working to help non-Native peoples understand Native worldviews, traditions, and cultural practices—to provide an "insider's perspective." Power dynamics have shaped these processes in different ways at different historical moments. Numerous contemporary scholars have drawn attention to the inequitable power relationships between the Native informant and the scholarly participant-observer fieldworker in

an era referred to as salvage anthropology. Early ethnographic projects, particularly during the emergence of the academic disciplines of anthropology, history, and folklore at the turn of the twentieth century, have been subjected to critical examination. Writing about this era, during which she received her training, anthropologist Margaret Mead (1960, 3–4) refers to it as American anthropology's "Golden Age." She argues that the growth of a particular American engagement with anthropology was critically linked to the salvage of American Indian customs and practices. The implication of the term "salvage" is that the culture is under threat of being lost.

During the period preceding the MMCM there was tremendous escalation in the production of oral history collections and "as-told-to" autobiographies. For example, the Doris Duke American Indian Oral History Program ran from 1966 until 1972 and is one of the largest oral history projects ever conducted—certainly the largest American Indian oral history project. Seeking to rectify issues associated with earlier ethnographic collection practices, these projects recorded American Indian oral history from Native perspectives and made the materials accessible to the respective tribes of the Native informants. During the six years of the project, eight universities collected and archived thousands of interviews from a wide range of tribal members with affiliations as diverse as Papago, Tohono O'Odham, Seminole, Arapahoe, Cree, Cheyenne, Navajo, Hopi, Ute, and representatives from every tribe living in Oklahoma, to name just some.

MMA members Moses and Nellie Big Crow were among the many Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota interviewed by the University of South Dakota for the massive project. Other smaller oral history projects unrelated to the Duke projects were undertaken during this time as well. Some were community-driven, such as the work undertaken by Julie Cruikshank in the Yukon. In *The Social Life of Stories*, Cruikshank (1998) observes the move during the 1970s toward collaborative projects that reflected the complexity of Native experience and seemed to offer unlimited opportunities in response to the older generation of ethnographies that "seemed to erase any sense of human agency" (161).

During the same historical moment growth also occurred in the sales of "as-told-to" autobiographies. The most famous of these is *Black Elk Speaks* (Neihardt [1932] 2000). The appeal of the book is that it offers an Indian perspective on Native religion. First published in 1932, it received little attention. It was not until the 1960s that *Black Elk Speaks* garnered worldwide attention and a tremendous surge in sales occurred. Vine Deloria Jr. (Neihardt [1932] 2000, xiv, xiii) asserts that "today the book is familiar reading for millions of people" and calls it "a religious classic, perhaps the only religious classic of this century." As discussed in chapter 3, there are criticisms surrounding the issue of inequitable power arrangements of this genre and I do not discount these criticisms. However, I argue that the relationships that produced these works are complex and I am interested in drawing attention to the impulse on the part of many Native peoples to describe and offer Native viewpoints on a multitude of topics—such as lived experience, history, belief, and ritual—for non-Native audiences *and* the agentive role of Native participants in these processes.

There is compelling evidence across time and space that a cohort of Native peoples sought through various efforts to come to a better understanding with non-Native peoples, to take agentive roles and use whatever means available in the representation of their lived realities. It is within the context of a long history of these efforts that I locate the MMA's participation in the MMCM—as more the rule than the exception. These participants were not *passive* victims. In their dialogic exchange with the priests they were forthright about historical loss and offered scathing, often polemical, critiques of modernity. Their arguments and stories complicate the notion that they were not part of the modern era and their very presence—more than forty medicine men participated—challenges the narrative of lost culture.

Ghostly Matters: Modernity, Identity, and Loss

At the beginning of the twentieth century, one group who perceived the local, reservation Indian as outside modernity was the Society of American Indians (SAI). The SAI was one of the earliest pantribal American

Indian associations whose scope was national. Although the group was composed of individuals from diverse nations, there were many similarities. Most notable among their commonalities, the members were well educated and profoundly shaped by the boarding school system, a primary vehicle of assimilation designed to bring the Indian into the modern era. Many SAI members were the first to break through the barriers of the glass ceiling in a historical moment when many at the local level of Native communities had reached their nadir as a result of settler-colonial efforts. In spite of their varying degrees of assimilation, in their own complicated ways they too were activists working for American Indian rights.

At the October 2011 commemoration of the first meeting of the SAI, scholar Philip Deloria (2013), great-grandson of one of the original participants, made two key points about those who took part in the original meeting one hundred years earlier. He encouraged the audience of contemporary scholars to go beyond the "assimilation rant" directed at the original members of the SAI and to remember that they all worked actively to preserve some element of Native culture and envisioned a Native American future. Deloria urged the audience not to discount the efforts of the SAI, but rather to work to understand the "complexities embodied . . . [and] the strong-willed souls who lived through gut wrenching transitions and demanding social unevenness" (26). He also noted how his great-grandfather focused his efforts on life on the ground, in the community, and never returned to the SAI meetings after attending the first. While he proffered several reasons for this, Deloria also linked his explanation to what he referred to as the "dangerous assumption" made by many in the SAI "that reservation and rural people were not themselves also part of modernity" and his great-grandfather's work was at the local community level (30).

The subjectivity of the SAI participants described by Deloria is attentive to both the historical conditions of the SAI participants' lived reality and their complex and often messy responses to the processes of governmentality that shaped their lives. *To Come to a Better Understanding* is informed by the approach advanced by sociologist Avery Gordon, which is attentive to these same two issues. While Gordon is not the

first to attend to the context and complexity of the historical subjectivity produced in the modern era, I'm drawn to her use of the metaphors of ghosts and haunting(s), the appearance of which, she argues, signals the complex effects, impacts, and affects of modernity. Gordon (2008, 8, 11) posits the ghost as a social figure and haunting as a signal of a historical subjectivity that requires analytical attention to historical context and the "complex personhood" produced by processes of dominance and governmentality. The phenomenon is so prevalent that she declares it is "a constituent element of modern social life" (8).

Contemporary scholars at the centennial commemoration of the SAI clearly followed hauntings as they examined the complexities of the original SAI attendees. They provided nuanced attention to the impacts and effects of colonialism. In doing so, they offered a shifting epistemological model that intervenes in the ways the production of knowledge in modernity has served narratives that justify and legitimize continued oppression under various guises. Gordon writes that the task is "to reveal and to learn from subjugated knowledge." She draws on Michel Foucault in arguing that "subjugated knowledge names, on the one hand, what official knowledge represses within its own terms, institutions and archives. . . . [It is] 'disqualified,' marginalized, fugitive knowledge from below and outside the institutions of official knowledge" (xviii) and has therefore received little attention.

An example of the subjugation of indigenous knowledge as it rubs up against the notion of official knowledge is clear in current debates about the status of American Indian studies in the academy—is it a field? Is it a discipline? These very questions attest to the reality that scholarly work in American Indian studies remains fugitive knowledge. The majority of academic institutions employ only a handful of scholars whose research focuses on American Indians and/or indigenous people and only a few offer PhDs, MAs, majors, or minors in the field. On one hand, American Indian studies has come a long way in the last four decades. In a 1995 article, historian Dave Edmunds observed that the dearth of research in this field could be traced via an examination of the publishing history of the journal *American Historical Review*. During the first ten years of publication there was not a single article published in the journal about

American Indian history, and from 1920 to 1960 there were only four articles that referenced Native Americans (Edmunds 1995, 720–21).

Historian Donald Fixico (Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole) (1996, 30) observes that Native history was neglected for more than a century and a primary characteristic of the approaches at the time was that Native peoples were treated as peripheral objects while whites were the primary actors. Today this is no longer the case. Yet as Byrd (2011, xxxi) observes, "those outside [American Indian studies] perceive it as a project of recovery, culture, identity, and polemic," the implication being that those are not legitimate concerns of the academy. This obfuscation prompted Warrior (2013, 233) to call for contemporary scholars to focus on the "wounds and ruptures" experienced by "the least powerful, the most vulnerable, and most reviled people from our communities and to stand with them as intellectuals and, as scholars to promote the visibility of their lives and realities." This is the Native cohort that haunts Warrior and it is how the MMA described their lived reality.

Of the many MMA participants, only two are living today.[6] Their names and lives are, for the most part, unfamiliar to a contemporary, nonlocal, audience, and, for that matter, many within the contemporary local community. While they are literally ghostly figures now, following the ghost and haunting metaphors as articulated by Gordon leads to an analysis that is attentive to the focus of the MMA. They discussed at length the ideologies and practices that served to oppress and they expressed the messy complexities of their own lives and the lives of others in their community.

As Philip Deloria observed at the SAI commemoration, the original organizers of the first SAI meeting did not consider the reservation Indians part of modernity. In reality Native peoples were not outside of modernity, as evidenced by the MMA; rather they were shaped by, responded to, and engaged with modernity. Then and now Native peoples respond to the historical conditions of colonialism that "banished certain individuals, things, or ideas . . . rendered them marginal, excluded, or repressed" (Radway 2008, viii). Further, time-bound circumstances have "concrete impacts on the people most affected by them," which shapes

the very complex and messy ways that individuals respond (Gordon 2008, xv). Yet as Simon Ortiz (Acoma Pueblo) (2006, 253) persuasively argues in his seminal essay, "Towards a National Indian Literature," there is a "creative ability of Indian people [to] gather in many forms of the socio-political colonizing force which beset them and make these forms meaningful in their own terms." Focus on this creative ability is an important lens for considering the contributions of the MMA participants in the MMCM as we see a wide range of responses from rejection to critique to syntheses that create new meaning.

The MMA participants were complex persons, ones that, I argue, remind us of Deloria's caution regarding the original participants at the SAI, and like Deloria I argue that we should not judge or discount them too hastily. For example, all struggled with alcohol—either personally or within their immediate family. One participant attended the meetings intoxicated on more than one occasion (Big Crow 11/2/1976, 4). Another participant spent years in a federal penitentiary for manslaughter committed during an alcohol binge. They had varying, complex relationships with the Catholic Church. Some seemed assimilated to dominant society—in particular the Catholic Church—while others would not engage the Church at all. One could read these stories as the general story of victimization and tragedy. Yet each participant, a consummate storyteller in his or her own right, presents us with the irony of what theorist Homi Bhabha (2004, 123) calls the "ambivalence of mimicry," which he argues has both disruptive and transformative potential. Rather than a focus on a strict narrative of loss, there is an irony communicated by the MMA members. In spite of centuries of the governmentality of colonial regimes, the participants were actively weaving, as Gordon (2008, 4) notes, "between what is immediately available . . . and what their imaginations are reaching toward"—a distinct Native (Lakota) identity. They were activists committed to their particular vision of a Native American, specifically, Lakota future.

Activist Movements: AIM and the MMA

Historian Daniel Cobb (2008) observes that to date the majority of analyses of mid- to late twentieth-century American Indian activism

have centered on the activities of AIM. Cobb and Loretta Fowler (2007, x) write that Red Power is a particular sort of activism that has "so complete a grasp on our historical imagination that it has come to symbolize the quintessence of Indian activism." Cobb, Fowler, and Frederick Hoxie (2013) are among numerous scholars who have demonstrated that Indian activism has taken a myriad of forms and that there is a long tradition of American Indian political action.[7] As Cobb and Fowler (2007, 58, my emphasis) put it, the "activism of red power is just *an* episode in an ongoing American Indian political tradition." And while the focus of these scholars is on the political register, activist strategies on other registers require attention as well.

In many ways the different activist strategies chosen by the MMA and AIM were reflective of broader societal and social activist efforts taking place in 1960s America. Public discourse was centered on efforts to raise awareness about disenfranchisement, a sense of unrest was pervasive, and discussions and debates about how to mobilize reform abounded. The media focused most frequently on the more militant strategies and activist activities. In the case of the MMA and AIM, the media attention generated by the occupation of Wounded Knee catapulted the activism of the Pine Ridge group to national attention. Our contemporary *understanding* of Lakota activism and religion vis-à-vis AIM continues to hold dominance.

The AIM-centric focus had and continues to have a profound effect in two regards. First, the focus and emphasis on the activities of AIM obscures a long history of social, political, and religious activism, and, importantly, the alternative strategies employed by groups such as the MMA to evoke change. Today, Indian activism is most often associated with what AIM co-founder Dennis Banks calls "confrontational politics" in the recent documentary *A Good Day to Die* (Mueller and Salt 2010). Confrontational politics is often the key characteristic associated with "the Sixties." Yet across America this was not the sole activist strategy mobilized. Other characteristics of the era included community engagement in grassroots discussions, local interventions, rap sessions, consciousness raising groups, and the important, successful strategies of nonviolent activism, such as those of Martin

Luther King Jr. The MMA and their efforts in the MMCM were not dissimilar to this trajectory.

The second and more profound legacy of the focus on AIM is the way that its activism is posited as a revitalization of Indian thought and practice. This obfuscates and often contradicts the knowledge and experience of the MMA who had experienced more continuity with the cultural practices of "the old Lakota" (to return to Beatrice Medicine). It perpetuates the discourse of loss, and intimates a cultural system that had recently come under stress—thus casting AIM's activism as a social movement to regain equilibrium.[8] The stress on the cultural system of the Lakotas was not new at the time of either the MMCM or AIM. Rather, it is clear they would have concurred with Walter Benjamin's (1968, 257) assessment, that "the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule."

To Come to a Better Understanding argues for a more complex engagement with the ghosts of the MMA and to follow their haunting. Members of the MMA were subjected to a long history of marginalization from the oppressive regime of dominant society, but they were also marginalized by members of their own local Lakota community—many of whom had internalized colonialist assimilation forces to varying degrees—*and* were overshadowed by the emphasis on AIM and the revitalized nativism of AIM members. Today the cultural literacy and vernacular knowledge possessed by the MMA continues to be overlooked because their fundamental understanding of Lakota belief and practice challenges the nativistic perspectives embraced by the AIM and post-AIM generations. The prevailing sense that there is a single story of settler colonialism is, as Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie (2009) cautions, dangerous. It flattens a narrative that is much more rich and complex as it marginalizes the story about a lengthy history of efforts to transmit Lakota culture and ritual to future generations. It is also evidence of a profound subjugation of local knowledge. As the MMA participant intimated in the quote paraphrased for the title of this chapter, there is no one indigenous, Native, Lakota, or even, as we'll see locally situated within the cultural milieu of Rosebud Reservation, one particular MMA point of view.

Worldview and Ethos: "The Viable Believable System"

Lakota participants in the MMCM were primarily concerned with the transmission of Lakota values and explaining the "viable believable system" referred to by Beatrice Medicine, which they not only practiced but believed was critical to a Native American and, in particular, a distinct Lakota future. Medicine was not the first to recognize Lakota belief and practice as a fully formed and functioning cultural system. More than four decades earlier, the ethnographer Ella Deloria (Dakota) ([1944] 1998, 24–74) called Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota culture(s) "a scheme of life that worked." The key ethos and practices show remarkable continuity in their articulation by the MMA. As noted previously, relatively little has been written about the MMA or their conversations during the MMCM. Transcripts of the MMCM dialogues are a rich resource for examining Lakota religious philosophy and practice as more than forty different medicine men participated at some point during the five years of meetings. Many of the medicine men were elders with decades of experience as Lakota ritual specialists. This number of experienced medicine men on the Rosebud reservation challenges the dominant narrative of cultural loss. The majority of this book focuses on the worldview and ethos advanced by the MMA participants during the MMCM. This book's indigenous-centric focus also resonates with the interpretive approach posited by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), who stresses the importance of seeing religion through the eyes and ideas of the people who practice that religion (see also Pals 2006, 261).

Undergirding and weaving throughout the spiritual traditions of the MMA is a worldview best conveyed by the key Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin* (we are all related). David Delgado Shorter (2009, 19) observes that many Native peoples conceive "of their worlds as a single interrelated network of social relations that include other-than-human persons." I hesitate to use the "other-than-human" designation, but the "inter-related network of social relations" (19) offered by Shorter does describe the deceptively simple concept of *mitakuye oyasin* communicated by the MMA, which through its webs of significance is in reality quite complex.

This conceptual understanding of the world gives rise to an important ethos embraced by the MMA participants. They observed a structure to the interrelationship of all things that is shaped by kinship networks and requires a complex of reciprocal obligations. Further, they argued that to achieve a true understanding of *mitakuye oyasin* required experience, in particular experience gained through ritual practice. As Geertz (1973, 90) has observed, it is via ritual that the worldview and ethos are powerfully symbolically fused. The MMA participants believed Lakota orientation and practice were critical to Lakota identity and survival. It is clear that they believed their knowledge and experience as Lakota ritual specialists was valuable and offered an important contribution to their vision of a Lakota future. Thus, this book seeks to bring to the fore and to come to a better understanding of the local knowledge possessed by the Lakota MMCM participants—situated as part of a long history of Lakota intellectual traditions looking forward to a distinct Lakota future.

Working with the Records and Methodology

The audio recordings and meeting transcripts of the MMCM are currently held in the Special Collections and Archives section of Raynor Memorial Libraries at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The archive contains eight open-reel recordings and 233 audio cassettes, all of which have been transferred to WAV digital format. Of the eighty-five sessions, the first seventy-eight were transcribed at the time of the MMCM and photocopies are easily attainable for a small fee. The transcripts have been indexed by staff associated with the university and the index is available online. The focus of this project on the specific, local, case study of the MMCM on Rosebud Reservation is based on a close reading of the approximately one thousand pages of transcripts available from the first seventy-eight sessions. I have also listened to recordings from several of the meetings to get a sense of the rhythm, tone, and affect of the meetings and to assess the accuracy of the transcriptions.

When I spot-checked the audio files against the transcripts, I found the typewritten transcripts more accurate than I anticipated. Other than the omission of an occasional "hmm" or a word implied by the context missed, the written documents were quite faithful to the English portion

of the tapes. It is important to note that none of the Lakota dialogue was transcribed during the MMCM, although some Lakota terms were recorded. Thus the transcripts reflect only the English portions of the conversations. As the meetings predated the computer age, I can imagine that typing even the English portion of the transcriptions was a grueling, time-intensive process. My interest here regards the agency asserted by the MMA participants to translate, record, and transcribe the meetings and thus, following the decisions made by them, I focused only on the final artifact they produced. I encourage further engagement with the various forms of archives as they are a rich resource.

Both records of the MMCM (tapes and transcripts) had gaps. I will use the first meeting transcript and tape as an example because it was the most problematic. I was forewarned by the head archivist that due to deterioration of the original tape, the first minutes of the recording from the meeting were lost. Thus there are five pages of transcript before the WAV file of the recording for the meeting begins. The recording then abruptly ends with approximately two pages of transcript remaining. On the transcription side, three pages are missing—15, 17, and 19. During my original work with the transcripts I thought perhaps this was because the pages were numbered incorrectly. However, after listening to the recording I learned that conversation was missing and the pages were not included in the transcripts. I do not read anything into these discrepancies; rather I suggest these are the result of human error and the limitations associated with the available technology at the time.

These issues may raise questions for some about the capacity of the archives to adequately represent the conversations that took place. What is unique about the dialogues is that Lakota participants conducted all of the translation and were present during the transcription process; in other words, the English translation was provided by Lakota speakers. Further, those speaking Lakota were also English speakers. When reading the transcripts and listening to the tapes, it is apparent that the medicine men listened carefully to the translation. When a translator did not accurately represent the meaning conveyed during the translation, the speaker would correct them or provide nuance. As such, the transcripts do present a rich resource for considering Lakota thought.

The transcripts are also interesting in that they often reflect the affective responses of the participants. Indian humor undergirds the meetings and is often noted in the transcripts. Moses Big Crow, the primary translator, had a great sense of humor and frequently joked during the meetings, often to provide comic relief during particularly complicated discussions. For example, he liked to tease the priests when they used large words to discuss theological concepts. He would call the words "jawbreakers" and send the participants in the room into roaring laughter.

For this book, I was left with the decision of how to represent the words from the transcripts. There are numerous academic conversations about whether or not one should correct, so to speak, the archives. For the quotes used here, I stay true to the text of the transcripts, except when there is a glaring typographical error. There is a rhythm and cadence to the Lakota speech patterns that are lost when one tries to reword in order to have the text adhere to academic conventions.

Similarly, the MMA participants used terminology that is considered politically incorrect by today's standards, both in academia and among Native peoples. For example, the MMA almost always used the term "Indian" to self-identify. Today most avoid this term; instead terms such as "Native," "Native American," "American Indian," and "indigenous" are preferred. Even more preferable is the use of the specific tribal affiliation, which in this case would be Sicangu Lakota. The participants did not use these terms (although they did use "Sioux"). They talked about Indians, Indian language, and Indian religion.

"Religion" is another term that is currently unpopular in this context. Contemporary conversations in Native America frequently start with some sort of statement or interjection that Native worldviews and ritual practices are not religion; rather they are a way of life or spirituality. The MMA participants did not seek to make this distinction. They called what they did religion. I work throughout this book to reflect the points of view of, and the terminology used by, the people I am drawing from in their historical moment. When working with the MMCM archives and the participants I use the terms that they use, and when drawing from contemporary scholars I am attentive to the distinctions that they make.

While the central focus of this book is the MMA and their engagement with the MMCM, in order to historically situate and trace the continuity of their vision for a Lakota future, throughout the text I draw from other Lakota and Dakota individuals who represent multiple overlapping generations. Drawing from these individuals is not an arbitrary decision; rather the issues they faced and their claims about Lakota culture are evidence of a continuity of thought and practice. This book documents a consistency across four generations of Lakota/Dakota worldview. The first generation is represented by George Sword, an Oglala Lakota from the Pine Ridge Reservation, and one of the earliest Native informants during the early years of salvage anthropology. He was born around 1847 and died sometime after 1910 but before 1915. The next generation is represented by Ella Deloria, mentioned earlier. Deloria was Dakota and born in 1890. She met and talked with several of the MMA participants during the fieldwork she conducted on Rosebud Reservation. She had passed away before the meetings began, but the MMA participants were familiar with her, and her work was discussed during one of the meetings (10/20/1973, 6). The MMA participants represent the third generation. The final generation is represented by Albert White Hat Sr. (1939–2013), also Sicangu Lakota from Rosebud Reservation. For more than thirty-five years White Hat taught the Lakota Health and Culture Course developed by the MMA at Sinte Gleska University.

In this project I do not follow a standard linear chronological rendering of the MMCM. Instead, content is organized thematically in an effort to reflect the complexity of the foundational Lakota concept of *mitakuye oyasin* described by the MMA participants, which is similar to Shorter's concept of an interrelated network of social relations. This method begins in chapter 2, "*Isákhib* (Alongside)." Here I examine three nodes of analytical interest that tangentially relate to the MMCM. First, the MMCM do not fit into any one single genre of traditional western categories of narrative analysis. They exceed the boundaries of commonly used categories. For example, the conversations are not solely comprised of storytelling, or oral histories, or ethnographies, yet all of these narrative practices are present in the MMCM. Second, I address and reflect

upon my personal relationship to the MMA, and Lakota thought and practice. Last, I consider recent epistemological skepticism in regard to the notion of archives as neutral sites of impartial truth. Each of these nodes provides additional layers that enrich a reading of the MMCM.

The remaining body of *To Come to a Better Understanding* consists of four chapters related directly to the MMCM, which I imagine as a set of concentric circles that overlap and are co-constitutively formed. This provides a particular lens for thinking about the MMCM—the relationships among the participants and the sorts of exchanges taking place. The intricate web of relationships mirrored in the structure of these chapters are based on the conversational exchange of the meetings and quotes from the MMA participants serve as titles for each chapter.

Chapter 3, "I'm in This Bilingual," introduces the organization (MMA), provides a sense of the MMCM, and offers brief biographies of a few MMA participants who played prominent roles in the meetings. The commitment, on the part of the MMA participants, to the dialogic process is examined. It is revealed that they were acutely aware of the politics of representation and the challenges of knowledge production in previous historical moments. The principal focus of the chapter is on the way that the MMA participants saw themselves as cosmopolitan and the best suited for the role of cultural ambassadors. As cultural interpreters, they saw this as an extension of the roles they performed as ritual specialists, which required the translation, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning as they communicated messages from the "other-than-human" realm.

From the center circle, the medicine men imagined that their audience reached out beyond their cohort to the spheres of influence that they were motivated to reach. It is clear that they perceived their audience to include not only the Catholic priests in the room; they also hoped their influence would reach outward into their immediate community, other Native peoples, and the dominant culture. This is the focus of chapter 4, "How Can We Get to the People?" The MMA participants discussed the often negative impacts and effects in the wake of the experiences of governmentality in a colonized world. They described a wide range of responses to this oppression. It is clear that the

MMA participants advocated for a world conceived as an interrelated network of relationships and that for them a worldview founded on a notion of kinship and an ethos of reciprocal obligations offers a solution. Further, they imagined a window of opportunity that they sensed was available in their historical moment.

Chapter 5, "Given to Them by the Supernatural," explores the worldview of the MMA starting with their understanding of the cultural symbol and powerful ritual tool, the pipe. Via stories about the pipe, the smoke of which extends beyond the human-to-human realm into the human-to-other-than-human realm, the MMA participants discussed its power, purpose, and the final authority of the "supernatural world." This chapter also examines the stories the MMA related regarding how they were called to their role as interpreters and their understanding of their communications with the spiritual world—the final sphere and most authoritative influence in their worldview.

The last section in this chapter examines the MMA participants' continued emphasis on the primacy of experience—both in terms of life experience and ritual. For them conceptual knowledge could only go so far; it had limitations. In order to truly come to a better understanding necessitates continued ritual practice. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (2001, 8) discusses the role of experience in a way that resonates with the MMA participants: "Experience is a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolization." Geertz (1973) meanwhile opines that the most potent factor of religion at the intersection of worldview and ethos is ritual practice, and Shorter (2009, 19) argues "indigenous performances and rituals are epistemological because they make knowledge and set standards for what counts as truth." Chapter 6, "Practice His Religion," focuses on the importance that the MMA participants placed on personal experience, the role ritual had played in their lives, the role they had played in perpetuating the continuity of ceremonial practice, and their continued encouragement of others to participate in the experience of ceremony. This final circle encompasses and is necessary to all the rest.

Ultimately the MMCM came to a close after five years, and shortly thereafter the MMA disbanded. In many ways it is surprising that the conversations lasted as long as they did. The final chapter explores the dissolution and the factors that led to the breakup of the group, and summarizes the contributions made by the MMA and how an indigenous-centric approach contributes to a number of conversations.