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Native American Elementary Education in the Syracuse City School District: A Microcosm of the Native American Struggle for Self-Determination and Tribal Sovereignty

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Introduction

Public schools in Upstate New York witness the significant underperformance of Native American students every year. Eighty-five percent of all Native American students in the New York public school system receive federal grant assistance to pursue higher education, yet according to a study in 2002, only 49% Native American students graduate, compared to 50% of black students, and 75% of white students(Manhattan Institute).

The Civil Rights Project at Harvard/Urban Institute report finds: “The national (graduation rate) gap for Blacks is 25 percent; for Hispanics 22 percent; for Native Americans 24 percent. The report defines the “graduation rate gap” as the difference between its calculations for graduation rates of Whites and minorities. New York State is targeted as one of the 10 worst states for minority graduation rates (Amren).

Furthermore, only about 14% of Native American students in New York State are prepared for college, the lowest rate in the nation. In terms of graduation rates and reading levels, Native American students are falling further behind the students in the rest of the United States (Champagne 148).

There are many opinions and research that has suggested why the graduation gap is so great between White and minority students. One widely supported opinion is supported by a 1990 study by Professor of Education Stephen Brookfield at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis. He found that minority students belonging to a certain group exhibit a common pattern of behavior that is detrimental to their education, for a myriad of reasons. These

include poor self-image as learners, lack of clarity of teachers' instructions, student's personal dislike of teachers, fear of looking foolish in public, danger of committing cultural suicide by acting in ways that are inappropriate for the students' home cultures, and having students work at levels that are too abstract or sophisticated for them (Brookfield).

The study concluded that when they cannot appreciate their own culture and understand their role in society in their formative years, the student will begin to resent education, lose self-esteem and resist the system that initially rejected them.

This is essentially the argument of the Onondaga Nation, a Native American Nation located in proximity to Syracuse. The Onondaga are one nation in a Six Nation Confederacy throughout New York State called the Haudenosaunee. This community largely believes that Syracuse City public schools currently perpetuate marginalization, cultural ignorance, institutional discrimination, and negative stereotypes. Due to this, many Onondaga children students grow disillusioned or feel excluded in the classroom. This disillusionment turned apathy could be one of the root causes behind the exceedingly high drop-out rate.

The New York State and United States Departments of Education believe they are working to overcome these criticisms. Though these agencies have bolstered efforts in favor of education that encompasses all cultures, many changes they wish to implement are without coherent leadership and are mired in

bureaucracy. Though policies have been implemented, problems in the local classroom have remained.

The problem of exclusion of the Native American community in the classroom transcends education policy. For many, this issue is a microcosm of the tenuous relationship between Native American nations and State and Federal governments. Access to equal education is only one component in the struggle for survival of the Onondaga Nation. The opportunities that education affords could provide a means to empower a struggling, low-income minority community for future generations. The denial of this opportunity is perceived as a further vehicle for oppression and tyranny by State and Federal governments.

The Onondaga Nation believes that the Syracuse City School District has the obligation to adapt the current curriculum to include Native American students in order to help Native American residents of the City of Syracuse achieve as well as inform children of all races about the Onondaga Nation, a community in close proximity to the City of Syracuse.

Marginalization in school, loss of self-esteem, and disillusionment in the classroom may not be able to be quantifiably proven as the leading cause for the high drop-out rate of Native American students in New York State public schools, the intent of this paper is to investigate the claim that public schools do not provide sufficient education and in turn create unwelcome environments for Onondaga students in Syracuse City schools.

The first half of the paper will explain the complexity and delicacy of this issue. Furthermore it will examine the factors that have led to the existing

educational system, along with present state of education within the Syracuse City School District. These factors include the historical context for Native American education, the State and Federal government's legal responsibility to provide education, and an evaluation of the curriculum of the Syracuse City School District.

The second half of this paper will explain the significance of this issue and investigate initiatives taken to remedy this problem. This includes the impetus for multicultural education, the goals of the Onondaga Nation, local initiatives taken in other school districts and Native American communities, and suggestions for further remedial actions for all parties involved.

Chapter 1: The History of Native American Education

I. Colonization Era

Of all the malignancies embodied in the twentieth century U.S./Canadian Indian policy, the schools were arguably the worst. The profundity of their destructive effects upon native people, both individually and collectively not only in the immediacy of their operational existence but in the aftermath as well, was and remains by any reasonable estimation incalculable...Churchill 2004 p xlv

Education of the Onondaga Nation dates back to “the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest” (Noriega 368). The subsequent treatment of early Native American communities directly contributes to the current tensions between the two parties. This section investigates the immense history of treaties and policies from the inception of colonization to the current day. It will establish the players involved in Native American educational policy, the cultural component of this issue, and the complexity of the current system (368).

When French settlers arrived in the region of St. Lawrence River, they were faced with resistance from Native American forces. As early as 1611, French King Louis XIV issued an edict stating that education and Christian religion should infiltrate Native American communities in order to neutralize their opposition.

French Jesuit missionaries, supported by the French military, opened schools along the St. Lawrence River. These missionaries were charged with the

task of “Christianizing” and “civilizing” the Haudenosaunee, a Confederacy of Six Native American Nations, including the Onondaga. The missionaries began removing children from their families through coercion and stripped them of their traditional languages, cultures, and religions.

As British settlers seized control over the area, these schools were taken over by British colonists Sir William Johnson and the Reverends Samuel Kirkland, John Brainerd and David Brainer. During the American Revolution, Reverend Samuel Kirkland led the effort for Haudenosaunee education in the New York region. By the end of the Revolution, early schools were well-established in the region and approved by the New York State Board of Regents (Noriega 371).

Professor Martin Carnoy of the University of Michigan framed the sentiment of education in that time period in his book, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*. “Since schooling was brought to non-Europeans as a part of an empire...it was all along integrated into an effort to bring indigenous peoples into imperialist/capitalist structures” (Carnoy 16).

II. Early America and the Assimilation Era

After the American Revolution, the United States government and the State of New York engaged in a power struggle battle over jurisdiction in Native American affairs. On October 23, 1779, the New York State legislature designated the governor and four commissioners to preside over all peace negotiations (Hauptman 4).

However, the U.S. government subsumed the right for Native American education under the treaty and commerce clauses of the U.S. Constitution. Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution invests Congress with the authority to regulate commerce with Indian tribes. Native American tribes were recognized as separate and sovereign nations.

Furthermore, Title 25 of the U.S. Code, Article II, Section 2, gave president the power to make treaties with the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate. Using the tenets of international law and the right to make treaties, over 400 treaties were negotiated between 1778 and 1871, 120 with provisions for education. These two clauses gave the federal government plenary power, or total authority to negotiate with Native Americans and supersede initiatives taken by New York State. The plenary power was described as a “guardian-ward” relationship with the Native American tribes acting as a dependent nation (Wright 8).

Through the use of plenary power, Congress established the “Civilization Fund” an additional annual appropriation of \$10,000 for schools with Native American students. In 1820, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun mandated that all treaties with indigenous nations included additional cash annuities for education so that Indians might “be initiated in the habits of industry, and a portion taught the mechanical arts” (Noriega 379). Missionaries from Congregational, Presbyterian, and Dutch Reform churches established schools throughout New York State. Despite the actions taken by the Federal government, the efforts to

divest Native Americans of their political and religious beliefs were largely unsuccessful (379).

In 1846, the New York State legislature enacted a law that provided buildings and appropriations for state-sponsored schools on the Onondaga reservation. They attempted to “[do] away with the system of reservations, dividing up the lands among them, and making them citizens subject to our laws” (Hauptman 76).

The premise behind the early schooling efforts was to assimilate Native Americans into mainstream American society.

Indian students targeted for training in the early stages of U.S. colonial education were used essentially as a virus, a medium through which to hurry along a calculated process of socio-cultural decay ‘from within’ thus speeding the day in which Native America might be predicated to become fully integrated into the Euro-American state structure. (Noriega 379)

Native American children were coerced into attending these schools or kidnapped from their homes to attend these institutions where they were forced to endure torturous living conditions, exposed to deadly infectious diseases, and forced follow a brutal regimen of labor-intensive activities (Klug 32).

However, these schools were largely unsuccessful in changing the traditions and community structure of the Onondaga Nation. W.W. Newman, the superintendent of the Onondaga School blamed the failures of the school system on the paganism and practical communism of the Onondaga Nation (Hauptman 76).

In 1855, the New York State legislature passed a bill to establish the Thomas Indian Asylum for Orphan and Destitute Indian Children on the Cattaraugus Seneca Reservation, a member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The School was founded by Reverend Asher Wright and his wife Laura, two Presbyterian missionaries who needed help caring for children suffering from a typhoid epidemic. They requested funding from Philip Thomas and the Philadelphia Meeting of the Society of Friends. After substantial fund-raising and a promise of support by New York State, Thomas Asylum was created. The school took the official obligation of “de-Indianizing” and “civilizing” the population of Native American children in New York State. The school would grow to more than one hundred children by the late 1890s. However, the New York State Board of Charities assumed control in 1875 (Burich 92).

Because the school began as an orphanage, Thomas soon came to serve as a refuge for children of families suffering from death, divorce, and destitution. The school was able to operate unregulated by State or federal regulations. Little attention was given to the special needs of students. In many cases they were subject to serious physical and emotional abuse.

Parents were given the impression that they abdicated their parental rights once their children enrolled at the school. In order for the children to be accepted parents had to sign an application stating that they “renounced all rights to the care, custody, and control of said child... .” (Burich 95)

Children of different ages and genders were housed in separate quarters and not allowed to socialize. Often, members of the same family were segregated, causing severe trauma for some young students.

... Native American children were white-streamed...changing the children's dress and hairstyles from their individualized traditional tribal attire to institutionalized military-style uniforms; destroying all of the cultural materials they brought with them from their home communities; banning all cultural practices and severely punishing 'students' for engaging in their Indigenous cultures such as speaking their native tongues. (Malott 119)

Soon after, many other boarding schools began appearing throughout the Northeast. The leader of this effort was General Richard Pratt, who founded a boarding school at Carlisle Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He created these institutions in order to "kill the Indian, save the man" (Churchill xlv).

The Native Americans faced physical, biological, and cultural genocide of their people.... These include direct extermination, subjection to conditions of life which are likely to result in the debilitation and death, mutilations and biological experiments, compulsory abortions, sterilization, segregation of the sexes, denationalization, forced transfer of children, prohibition of the national language, destruction of religious works, and destruction of land or objects of value. (Malott 29)

This coerced assimilation forced more than half of Native American children to believe that their culture was inferior and shameful. Most schools stripped students of all vestiges of their heritage, including language, history, traditions, religion, and practices. This was accomplished through manual labor, vocational teaching, and at times torture, disease and starvation.

In many cases, these practices were physically beaten out of children. Furthermore, when the children produced from these institutions were released, they could not return home because of the loss of their culture and often resorted to alcoholism or suicide (Malott 125).

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Education Director Willard Beatty commented that the boarding school program emphasized the development of desirable work habits. Three-fourths of the schooling was spent in vocational instruction in a trade, and the remaining instruction focused on civilizing the student to acclimate into mainstream society (Senese 91).

This led to the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871 which nullified Native American nation's rights as an independent nation, tribe or power. By extinguishing nation sovereignty, the federal government was able to focus more intently on assimilation (O'Brien 71).

For more than one hundred years, thousands of Native American children from across New York State were sent to the Thomas Indian School. However, due to the limited capacity of boarding schools and the expenses incurred by the students, not all Haudenosaunee students entered these schools. In 1888, the New York State Legislature created a special committee to "Investigate the Indian

Problem of New York.” This committee was headed by such notable members as the chancellor of Syracuse University Dr. C.N. Sims. The committee produced the *Whipple Report*, a document that summarized and critically evaluated the Onondaga Nation.

There are about 450 Indians residing on the Onondaga reservation. There are two schools upon the reservation, one a State school and one conducted by the Episcopal missionary. The State school building is a new one, furnished with all the modern appliances for a successful school. It was built and furnished by the State, and is now maintained by it. With 100 children of school age on the reservation, the average daily attendance was twenty-three, and before the new school-house was built the average attendance was much smaller. The progress of the Indian children, in matters educational and moral, is greatly retarded owing to their home influence. The majority of the Indians on this reservation are unfriendly to the schools, and as a result they do much to discourage the children in attending. (Whipple Report 41)

The report further suggested that Native Americans should be released from their ward-guardian relationship with the U.S. government.

These Indian people should now be educated to be men, not Indians, and it is the earnest belief of the committee that when the suggestions made, or at least the more important of them are accomplished facts and the Indians of the State are absorbed into the great mass of American people, and not before, will the “Indian problem,” be solved. (Hauptman 3).

The Whipple Report recommended that Onondaga reservation lands be allotted into severalty and urged New York State to exercise full jurisdiction over the Onondaga Nation. (Hauptman 12).

These suggestions were not adopted and during the State Constitutional Convention of 1915, the State of New York voted to transfer Native American jurisdiction to state courts and extended all state laws to the Native Americans. By 1930, the New York Agency of the BIA distributed annuities and provided educational loans and scholarship programs to Native American students (12).

In 1906, Indian Commissioner Frances E. Leupp approved a plan to integrate Native American students into public schools. This action eliminated most federal costs associated with independent boarding and day schools focused specifically on Native American children. In Leupp's opinion, the plan "held the prospect of proving so successful as to make the role of the government's Indian education business superfluous after only a few generations" (Noriega 384). In New York State, the Chief of the Special Schools Bureau of the State Education Department administered district schools on the reservations and worked with public schools to integrate Haudenosaunee students (Hauptman 12).

The federal government's assimilation policy continued unchecked until the 1920s, when the Bureau of Indian Affairs and federal Indian policy became "a notorious example of inefficiency and ineffectiveness" (Szasz12). Students graduating from these schools were left with little to no training to return to life on the reservation and became subjects of ridicule. To the Native American, schools "represented the most dangerous of all attacks on basic Indian values, the

one mostly likely to succeed in the end because it aimed at the children, who had known little if any of the old life” (13).

III. Reorganization Era

The twentieth century brought a number of reforms to education. In 1924, the House of Representatives appointed a Committee of prominent non-Indians to study and make recommendations concerning what they had termed the “U.S. Indian Problem.” They concluded that Leupp had been correct in his assessment and that boarding schools had largely failed. They stated that, instead, greater emphasis needed to be placed upon training the grassroots Native Americans to “think white” (O’Brien 80).

Additionally, Congress passed the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, to provide that “Noncitizen Indians born within the territorial limits of the United States be ... declared to be citizens of the United States: Provided, That the granting of such citizenship shall not in any manner impair or otherwise affect the right of any Indian to tribal or other property” (80).

Despite the deterioration in treatment and educational services, an outspoken advocate for Native American affairs, John Collier, was appointed the Executive Secretary of the American Indian Defense. He was notorious for battling discriminative legislation in Congress and publicly exposing the horrors of the treatment of Native Americans in federally funded boarding and day schools.

Collier’s efforts towards a national reform movement came to fruition in 1926 when Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work asked experts at the non-

governmental research institution, the Brookings Institution, to prepare a comprehensive analysis of the federal Native American education programs and make recommendations for improvement. Under the direction of Dr. Lewis Meriam and educator W. Carson Ryan, Jr., this document, known as the Meriam Report, came to be the most substantial educational reform document of the 20th century and led to the Progressive Education Movement of the 1920s.

The recommendations in the Meriam Report “pinpointed the glaring weaknesses within the Bureau [of Indian Affairs] and offered concrete cures for its numerous shortcomings” (Szasz 16). The recommendations proposed a total revamping of the education system. The off-reservation boarding schools were specifically targeted as the “symbol of all the evils of the Bureau education system” and that “provisions for the care of the Indian children in boarding schools are grossly inadequate ... with deplorable health conditions” (Meriam Report). Boarding schools were exposed as mills of slow starvation, disease, dangerous overcrowding, and excessive physical labor (Szasz 19).

The Meriam Report asserted that Native American students’ difficulties and lower achievements in the educational system were not due to their ignorance or lack of intelligence, but rather to the lack of understanding, resources, and poor methods of teaching (Klug 34).

This report was also the first widely recognized and accepted research document that concluded that the Federal government cannot and should not mandate the assimilation of Native American children through education (34). Unfortunately, the initial optimism of these reform efforts disappeared under the

heavy economic pressures of the Great Depression and failed to produce concrete change. Due to limited resources, the boarding-school system was not terminated but instead encouraged to undergo comprehensive restructuring. Boarding schools became separate community day schools for Native American children that would allow the “adaptation to two worlds – the white and the Indian” (Meriam Report).

Moreover, though the proposed recommendations were federally encouraged and maintained, they were rarely carried out in these community schools. In this era, most teachers were non-Natives and believed that Native American culture and language were largely irrelevant. Though the Federal government began allocating funding for Native American education programs, the money rarely went to the Native American student population (Klug 109).

Though the success of the Meriam Report was dubious, activist John Collier rejuvenated his advocacy campaign, which led to the passing of crucial appropriation bills by the U.S. Congress. These bills provided \$250,000 annually to Native American children who sought vocational or trade-school education. Collier also restructured the curriculum of Native American community day schools to a “curriculum more suited to the needs of the child,” which required, “a better qualified faculty and staff” (Szasz 48).

John Collier employed the idea of utilizing the Bureau of American Ethnology and nongovernmental organizations to research Native American tribes, “so that the other branches of government could administer both intelligently and sympathetically” (55). This marked the first time in federal education policy that Native American tribes were consulted for institutional

reforms. Due to his innovation, John Collier was elected Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1945 under Franklin D. Roosevelt and was then able to supply money for Native American schools using New Deal policies and resources. This led to the creation of 100 new day schools constructed on reservations and the termination of federally funded boarding schools. In the course of a decade, the enrollment of Native American children in reservation community day schools tripled (61).

Also in 1934, the Johnson-O'Malley Act was enacted to provide federal funding to states in exchange for the assumption of responsibility for Indian educational services through the public schools. This act authorized the Secretary of the Interior to enter into contracts with state or territories to pay for their services to Native Americans. The JOM Act allowed the federal government to pay states for supplemental education programs for Native Americans in public schools. Unfortunately, this money often went into the general operating fund of the school districts and did not support the education of non-Indian students (Reyhner 50).

This Act was followed by the Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act. This provided annual funding for special Indian education and required a greater BIA emphasis upon the mass education of indigenous children. The main intention of the IRA was to provide funds and government assistance to expand Indian trust lands and reestablish tribal governments. It created tribal business cooperatives, passed law-and-order codes, began public-works programs in health, education, and welfare, and raised funds for land, equipment, and

livestock. The Wheeler-Howard Indian Reorganization Act made Native American education a, “unique, integrative community program” (French 30).

However, in the wake of the Second World War and the Great Depression, many of these programs became low priority and suffered from inadequate funds. Furthermore, the main intention of this act was to bolster the Native American communities to eventually become self-sustained. In order to achieve this, BIA urged the creation of tribal constitutions, similar to the United States Constitution. Over the next twenty years, many Native American communities were still incapable of total self-sustainment which led to a retaliatory period where most Native American governmental programming was extensively cut (French 32).

IV. Termination Era

Due to the insistence by Congress and others to close the boarding school institutions, Native American student enrollment shifted from three-fourths of children in boarding schools in 1933 to two-thirds in on-reservation community day schools by 1943 (Noriega 386).

These day schools educated Native American students in local community environments for the first years of education. Native American parents began to prefer day schools to public schools and wished for their children to be educated with other Native American children. As more students attended and graduated from day schools, Congressional funding approved teacher apprenticeships to Indian college graduates who had chosen to teach in the Indian Service (Szasz 89).

Through these day schools, Native Americans were encouraged to find their “place” in society. The day schools were an effort to quickly terminate some of the larger boarding schools and avoid any embarrassment of the atrocities that took place.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs essentially created a three-tiered system of education, equipped to teach Native American children at all levels of their development. Day schools served a homogeneous local community. The boarding schools were targeted at acculturating reservation Indians whose English language skills were still poor. The public schools were entrusted to teaching the more highly assimilated pupil (Noriega 385).

However, these day schools were often completely dilapidated and dysfunctional. The same senators and representatives who had created the boarding school movement, witnessed how it had failed to assimilate Native Americans, and shifted support to placement of Native American students in the public school system (385).

V. Civil Rights Era and Reform

Between 1930 and 1970, Native American student populations in public schools grew exponentially. The Education Division, the federal agency responsible for allocating funds to public schools, provided supplemental funding to school districts that were financed primarily by property taxes and suffered a loss of funding from nontaxable Native American land (Szasz 90).

This agency was under the leadership of Education Director W. Carson Ryan. Ryan also delegated the negotiation of government subsidies to the state

level. This action allowed the federal government to defer much of its authority in education to the states. Still convinced of its plenary authority, the federal government assumed the role of oversight and let the state decide the standards for education. Therefore, as children began to attend public schools, they no longer had power to negotiate with the federal government and were subject to the state's control. This action laid the groundwork for the modern school system (Noriega 386).

Also during this time period, the federal government attempted to ease state and local tensions by enacting public laws addressing these issues.

As far as Indian parents were concerned, there was little community direction of the school; any 'community' direction came from the white community. Nor did the Indian students speak out about their needs; they felt that their teachers and their non-Indian classmates had little sympathy for them. They were taught the culture and history of mainstream, non-Indian, American, and from this perspective they learned that they were nonentities, or worse, 'savages' as outdated textbooks continued to describe them. (Szasz 104)

The Education Division, which had provided substantial gains in Native American education in community day schools, was unsuccessful in its efforts to influence state public school education. "When the states began to administer federal funds, they were no longer directly responsible to the Bureau [of Indian Affairs]. The failure of the Bureau to maintain control...meant that it had lost its opportunity to affect the public schools" (105).

Though enrollment increased, public schools generally had less qualified teachers and administrators, and less resources. States gained greater control over what was to be taught in school which created huge discrepancies in education standards among different states.

Public education has remained a subject of debate between states and the federal government, especially in districts with non-taxable entities, such as Native American Reservations. In 1953 Congress passed Public Law 874, which appropriated federal funding for a school district based on tax-exempt land and the percentage of Native American children within a district. Furthermore, in 1965 Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which met the “special education needs of low-income families” (O’Brien 80).

In 1966, Lyndon Johnson appointed a White House task force headed by Walsh McDermott, a professor at Cornell University, which suggested that incipient unrest among Native Americans might be alleviated if an impression of greater Indian “input” into educational and other sorts of federal programming was fostered. In March 1968, Johnson followed up by sending a “Message on Indian Affairs” to Congress, in which he reiterated the main points advanced by the task force (Noriega 386).

Senator Edward Kennedy called American Indian education a “national tragedy” in a summary report for the Special Subcommittee on Indian Education in 1969 (Ward 6).

For the first time, the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged the needs of Native American families within schools districts. Native American

students qualified for grant aid under Title I of this Elementary and Secondary Education Act because “most of them were from low-income families and most of them displayed the characteristics of the educationally deprived. Not only were they well below the average in achievement and well above average in the dropout rate, but also a significant number of them were convinced that they simply could not achieve” (Szasz 184). Additionally, in 1969, funding was allocated for training, teacher aides, personnel services, curriculum development, field trips, language arts, health and food, kindergarten, and mathematics and science (184).

However, as federal aid became absorbed into school budgets, large portions of this money were used for school operating expenses. “These special funds, which totaled about \$530 million in 1969 and which Congress intended for Indian students, usually were spent for all of the students in the school districts, and in some cases non-Indian students benefited more from them than Indian students themselves” (185). State public schools became more interested in money than in the Native American students.

VI. Case Study: Reforming the New York State Social Studies Curriculum 1968-1986

In an attempt to regulate and control the population of Native American students in public schools, the New York State Department of Education granted contracts to 13 school districts throughout the State located in close proximity to reservations. As a reward for hosting Native American children in the public schools located in the district, the school received state and federal grant monies.

New York State required children from the Onondaga Nation to attend schools within the Lafayette School District (White).

This act, though an attempt to improve educational standards, only served to inflame the anger of the Haudenosaunee toward New York State. Many believed that Native Americans must be given the option of maintaining their separateness, rather than being forcibly integrated into the dominant society (Senese 105). Due to the mistreatment of Native American students and the surge of new ideas, on April 22, 1968, community leaders of the Akwesasne Mohawks, Chief John Cook and Minerva White organized a boycott of the Salmon River School District. To combat what they felt was exclusive education, many Mohawk parents took their children out of local public schools.

The Mohawk community demanded greater local participation and inclusion of cultural practices in the school. They also wanted all schools allotted for Johnson-O'Malley Act federal funding to actually reach the children and not be used for general school operating purposes.

Similarly, the Onondaga Nation held a boycott of the Lafayette School District in 1971 led by Lloyd Elm, an Onondaga teacher at the Lafayette Central Elementary School. These boycotts were reactions to the extremely high drop out rates of Native American students, the lack of cultural enrichment programs, and general apathy on the part of the state to respond to Native American concerns.

These two events finally caught the attention of the State Department of Education. In response, Executive Deputy Commissioner of Education Gordon Ambach promised to redesign the education of Native American children. He met

with community leaders from the Haudenosaunee at the Longhouse on the St. Regis reservation. In this meeting, he stressed the need for sensitivity to differences, development of programs on culture, and participation of Native Americans as teachers. Ambach understood the deep-seated fears and community resistance. He stated, "...we can't continue asking them to cast off their ties to the past. The past is their prologue just as your past is yours – so help them to build upon it, not apart from it" (Hauptman 76).

After the initial meeting, reforms in the public schools with Mohawk students developed quickly. There was a new teacher certification program and the creation of the Akwesasne Cultural Center. Though changes were slow to take hold, the Onondaga community saw a greater awareness in Native American cultural concerns in public schools, and this led to the expansion Onondaga Nation School to the 8th grade (Elm interview).

More substantially, the boycotts forced the Board of Regents to turn their attention to correctly teaching the history and culture of Native people in New York State. Although hesitant, Executive Commissioner Gordon Ambach stressed the essential need to address these education issues. He stated that if the State would not act, the situation could escalate to a greater community uprising. Fearing reprisal, the State Education Department made substantial reform efforts. Furthermore, this led to a greater awareness of the problems in Native American education by both local educators and officials at the State Department of Education.

For example, local educators Anna Lewis and Dale Samuelson wrote a comprehensive five-year plan for improving Native American education. They specifically called for education boards made of nation leaders, parents, and youth to become official school boards responsible for Native students within the school. Other initiatives they recommended were the establishment of a pilot Demonstration School, the creation of teacher internship program, development of new curriculum materials, improved medical and health attention, and the creation of day care centers.

At the State level, the State Legislature's Assembly Subcommittee on Indian Affairs gathered testimony from Minerva White and Chief Irving Powless, Jr. of the Onondaga Nation about educational needs. They focused their recommendations on school drop-out prevention and the development of curriculum materials giving a greater history and cultural understanding of Native American communities in New York State, although none of these recommendations were adopted (Hauptman interview).

Their testimony largely led to the State's mandate for the creation of an advisory committee on Native American education. The requirements were for the Native American Education Unit to include each chief school officer and one Indian leader from each of the department's districts and each of the reservations.

Based on the State's criteria, the State Department of Education established the Native American Indian Education Unit under direction of Lincoln White, a Mohawk educator, in 1973. The Education Unit took on two major initiatives in its first year. The first was to focus on securing the federal money to

subsidize Native American students in New York State through the Johnson O'Malley Act of 1934, which had yet to be received by Native American students. The money was finally secured in 1975, though thousands of dollars of federal funds were lost, largely because of neglect by State Department of Education officials. Schools receiving the federal grant money for incorporating Native American on-reservation students would often spend the money on acquiring school texts, teacher salaries, and upgrading school technology (Hauptman 77).

The second initiative of the Native American Education Unit was to urge the Board of Regents to take a stance on the status of Native American education. The Board of Regents responded in 1975 with Position Paper #22, entitled "Native American Education." Among the recommendations made were: (1) to develop a statewide advisory committee (which took place in the mid-1980s) (2) to involve Native American parents and educators in the local school board, (3) to develop teacher training programs across the state, (4) to expand post-secondary grant-in-aid programs, and (5) to provide Native American guidance counseling services (77).

Despite the recommendations, the Native American Unit faced several bureaucratic difficulties within the Department of Education. In 1977, Anna Lewis outlined these problems in a policy memorandum titled "Status of the Native American Education Unit," In this document, she noted the internal struggles that severely limited the credibility and legitimacy of the Unit. Among these, were the Unit's very low priority within the Department, limited

responsibility for decision-making, and lack of clearly defined policies and jurisdiction of authority (Hauptman 83).

Professor Laurence Hauptman, a fellow at Rochester Public Policy Institute was sent to do background research on Haudenosaunee. He wrote a letter in 1985 encouraging Ambach to consider development of new curriculum at the urging of the Head of Education, Hazel Dean John (Hauptman interview). After a 10-year delay, the State Department enacted one of the Board of Regent's recommendations and created the Native American Education Advisory Committee. The Committee was led by local school teacher Lloyd Elm and was first convened on January 6, 1986. By 1987 the Committee had two full-time employees, and its responsibilities included acting as a liaison between the Department of Education, the Native American Unit, and local schools, on educational matters in reservation communities and five major urban areas.

However, the committee quickly became overwhelmed with work. The efforts of the two employees could not manage the needs of the entire state's Native American population. It was very soon apparent that the Native American Unit and the Native American Education Advisory Committee were established to satisfy the requirements of the Regents position paper and quiet the community uprising, but were rendered essentially ineffective (Hauptman interview).

Despite this failure, The State Department of Education tasked the Native American Advisory Committee with the creation of a supplemental social studies curriculum that focused specifically on the Haudenosaunee. The goal was to incorporate pieces of this document into State public schools. Denise Waterman, a

graduate student of education at Syracuse University at the time and contributor to the curriculum, states that this proposal “was an effort for the United States to understand about the world and themselves” (interview).

The project was to be directed, managed, and led by leaders of the Haudenosaunee, throughout New York State. Members of the Onondaga Nation were hired and paid as consultants and writers. The Onondaga Nation also hired consultants and education experts to design an appropriate, inclusive, and thorough curriculum for elementary school students from kindergarten through the eighth grade.¹

According to the foreword in the curriculum, “The Resource Guide is designed to reinforce the goals of the New York State Social Studies Syllabi and provides additional insight into Indian realities... The educational aim of this guide is to help correct misunderstandings and cultural stereotypes about Indians that have become a part of popular culture” (iv).

The six-hundred page document contained three main sections and teacher’s notes on how to apply and integrate the information into the classroom. The first section of the curriculum is for younger students. The curriculum focuses on aspects of Haudenosaunee culture such as their language, traditions,

¹ Contributors and consultants to the curriculum included faculty at State University of New York at Buffalo, State University College at Oneonta, State University College at Fredonia, University of California Riverside, Cornell University, Chief Irving Powless from the Onondaga Nation, former representatives from the New York State Education Department in the Native American Indian Education Unit, teachers from Upstate New York school districts. Furthermore, the adjunct curriculum coordinator from the New York State Education Department Mary Kinnaird served as project coordinator. New York State Education Department Director for Program Development, Edward Lalor directed the effort (Fadden i).

creation story, origins, clan lifestyle, dress, and ceremonies. This is supplemented with pictures, crafts, and activities for students.

The second piece of the curriculum focuses on Haudenosaunee history and includes numerous pictures, maps, cartoons, historical news articles and source documents of the history of the Native American people. These topics include European warfare, the intentional spread of disease to exterminate the Native American population, the Sullivan-Clinton American military genocide campaign of the Revolutionary period, and the impact of the Haudenosaunee on the formation of the U.S. Government.

The third section of the curriculum focuses on the contemporary relevancy of the Haudenosaunee culture. This section directly confronts issues of taxation, land claims, citizenship, reservations, racism, stereotypes, and education. The curriculum states on page 477, “Reasons cited for the inordinately high dropout rate [The 1986 figure for the graduation rate of Native American students averages 46%] included: (a) personal, cultural, linguistic dehumanization, (b) discriminatory high school admission policies/practices, and (c) lack of appropriate language programs.”

The curriculum concludes with appendices of source letters and documents authenticating the Haudenosaunee account of history and an extensive bibliography of sixty-six sources from academics, universities, and experts compiled by the New York State Museum (Appendix).

When the curriculum was submitted, the New York State Department of Education employed an official advisory board and council comprised of

archeologists, historians, and anthropologists to analyze and review it before publication. On January 8, 1987, the Board of Regents, Native representatives, and Department of Education officials met and decided to conclusively develop their own supplemental educational materials. However, the Haudenosaunee curriculum never reached final stages of development and talks between Department officials and leaders in the Native American community never resumed (Hauptman 85).

Professor Lawrence Hauptman believed that the project began with the best of intentions. Commissioner Gordon Ambach was a fair and appropriate commissioner of education. In his estimation, Commissioner Ambach fully understood the interaction, history, and current interplay between the State Department of Education and the Haudenosaunee. He also understood the complexity of working with the Haudenosaunee and realized that they were not one unified community. He recognized the inherent differences among the Six Nations and wanted to work collectively with all to produce a cohesive effort with the Department of Education. He also recognized the State bureaucracy's limitations, lack of responsiveness, and apprehensiveness about making major changes or developments (Hauptman interview).

However, Commissioner Ambach resigned in 1986 and was succeeded by Executive Commissioner Thomas Sobol. In Hauptman's estimation, Commissioner Sobol was not equipped to handle the situation. Sobol did not understand the complexity of the politics of the situation, especially the history and delicacy of relations between the State Department of Education and Native

peoples. He did not continue to work and evaluate the Haudenosaunee curriculum to see it succeed.

Commissioner Sobol believed that the act of reaching out to the Native American community was the real triumph, and that the end product was not as significant. This de-legitimized the process for the academics and reviewers. The project was subsequently disproved by a number of academics throughout New York State (Hauptman interview).

Jo Ann Larson, the current Assistant Director of the Curriculum, was in the State Department during the curriculum development and remembers colleagues who dealt directly in negotiations. These colleagues, such as William Fenton and George Gregory, have since retired from the State Education Department.

She stated that from the beginning the curriculum was rife with conflict. People became so frustrated that they would not negotiate. Eventually, tensions escalated and the project was put on the back-burner. The project was so distressing that all parties walked away from the negotiating table with the intention of resuming the initiative, but eventually it became obscured.

Commissioner Sobol blamed the academics involved in the project because it was easier to blame the bureaucracy than affront the Native American community. Hauptman states that “[Commissioner] Ambach encouraged the project but the reason it failed [was] because of Sobol’s incompetence in handling the project. He shifted blame on the reviewers even though some had legitimate concerns” (Hauptman email).

Eventually, a rejection letter was sent to Chief Irving Powless, which was viewed as a formal rejection letter from the State. Hauptman suggests that perhaps the intention was for the Native community to reassemble and produce a better, more accurate curriculum. However, communication between the State and the Native Americans involved was lacking and the curriculum was seen as a defeat. The Director of the Akwesasne Cultural Center said that this effort and rejection “left a bad taste in everyone’s mouth.” New York State contracted with the nations but the effort was never focused and appeared to not have direction. After this contentious struggle, many people gave up (Herne).

No records currently exist validating the original contact or agreement with the Haudenosaunee or the refusal, but Neal Powless, son of Chief Irving Powless, an Onondaga who received the rejection letter, states that the proposed curriculum was deemed to be “too controversial” and that it contradicted too many current textbooks and popular perceptions of history, though the advisory panel never repudiated its factuality.

Denise Waterman adds that the panel of experts all had a specific agenda and was very conservative in their thinking. She believes they were hired to discredit the document. Though the curriculum was never published, the New York State Department of Education rejected the proposal and abandoned the idea without ever proposing recommendations, negotiations, or compromises.

Professor of Religion at Syracuse University, Phil Arnold, explains that the refusal of this document was a demonstration of the power struggle between historians and Native people. Native Americans, who rely mostly on oral

tradition and family history, refute pieces of the academic's perception of history. Professor Arnold adds, even though recently discovered source documents and findings have confirmed much of the Haudenosaunee history, academics generally want to be in charge of what is considered "history" rather than collaborate with Native leaders.

The same year the Bureau of Curriculum Development distributed a field-test edition of new social studies curriculum which contained historical inaccuracies about Iroquois Confederacy, deemphasized the role of the Indian in State history, made no mention of the contemporary existence of Native Americans within New York State (Hauptman interview).

VII. Reactions and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Era

Despite the local controversy surrounding education, from 1972-1975 major gains were made under President Nixon, which greatly impacted Native American education. Public Law 92-318 granted federal aid for programs that included bilingual and bicultural projects, health and nutritional services, remedial instruction, and academic and vocational instruction (Stahl 1).

In 1975, education and economic development were codified by the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act Public Law 93-638 which provided the legal base to regulate contractual agreements of the federal government to pay the local community to provide a variety of services, clinics, tribal enterprises, and public works (Senese 119).

Part B of the Indian Education Act "authorized a series of grant programs to stress culturally relevant and bilingual curriculum materials" (198). Title VII of

this Act included the creation of after-school and supplemental education programs in school districts with large Native American populations. Part D established the Office of Indian Education within the U.S. Department of Education to administer the provisions granted. This office was to be directed by a Deputy Commissioner for Indian Education and an advisory council body comprised entirely of Native Americans. These actions allowed Native American leaders more involvement, oversight and input in the education process for children (Klug 43).

Also during this time, the Office of Economic Opportunity created Indian controlled contract-schools. These were schools designed to educate the community rather than primarily the students. Contract schools extended access to compensatory education and codification of contracting through the Self-determination and Education Assistance Act (Noriega 386). In 1988, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled School Act which allowed tribal boards to directly receive federal grant money by applying as part of local school districts. This money was intended to institutionalize tribal control of schools (Malott 124).

Despite the progress of the 1970s, legislation the 1980s and 1990s marked a constant struggle between federal, state and tribal authority in terms of education. “In the last two decades, but especially the 1980s all levels of Indian schooling faced decreasing funds.” The Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations attempted to dismantle much of the Native American funding. Due to their policies of fiscal conservatism, many Native American programs were stripped of appropriate funding, despite promises to the contrary. However,

in 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the Native American Language Act which recognized the right for Native American languages to be given the same academic credit as foreign languages (170).

The tide of Native American civil liberties turned again in 1992 under the Presidency of Bill Clinton, an outspoken supporter and advocate of Native American Education. Although he held good-will visits, White House Conferences, and summits in Washington D.C., no substantial institutional advancements were made in the early 1990s.

It was not until 1998 that President Clinton signed the Executive Order on Native American Education 13096, aimed at “improving the academic performance and reducing dropout rates for the American Indian ...” (Klug 46). This included the recognition of tribal sovereignty and establishment of an interagency task force led by officials in the Education and Interior Departments to consult with tribal governments on their education-related needs and priorities. This order also made provisions to increase opportunities for the training and employment of Native Americans as teachers in public schools (46). President Clinton’s Executive Order was the last federal initiative aimed directly at aiding and providing funds specifically to Native American Education.

Though the federal government lagged in progressive education in the 1990s, New York State created a review and development committee under the direction of Gordon Van Hoof, Janet Gilbert, Lauren Schofield, to critically look at social studies curricula materials. They developed a report called “One Nation Many Peoples” on the status of, and impetus for, multicultural education within

New York State. This committee eventually formed into a “Diversity Committee” of teachers, professors, superintendents, and New York state officials, called the New York State Council for Social Studies. This Council eventually formed into the Standards Review Committee within the Office of Curriculum Development. They met from 1990-1996 to create a new social studies curriculum standards. The new social studies curriculum was finally issued in 1998 (Larson interview).

Control over the curriculum and standards for New York State is now under exclusive State control and will be summarized more clearly in the following sections.

The 20th century has seen great reforms in the realm of Native American education. However, many believe that the history of assimilation still persists in the classroom today. “Walking the well intentioned road to hell, Western scholars dedicated to the best interests of indigenous peoples often unwittingly participate in the Western hegemonic process” (Semali and Kincheloe 20).

Assistant Professor of Literary and Teacher Education at Idaho State University, Beverly Klug, summarizes this problem in her book, *Widening the Circle*. She explains, “From their school experiences, Indian peoples suffered a loss of languages, cultures and their sense of self. This experience ... has done much to undermine the interest in obtaining Western education” (Klug 271).

It is evident that the sordid, painful, and complex history of Native American and U.S. relations over centuries has created generations of aversion and suspicion towards the government. Native American communities still feel

the lingering fear of the U.S. government. This has obviously contributed to the mistrust of New York State and federally funded public schools today.

However, as the Onondaga and other Native American communities continue their efforts to reform the educational system, the question then becomes, do federal and state governments have a specific obligation and responsibility to extensively evaluate the portrayal of Native Americans in the curriculum? Do Native American communities have the civil right to equal access to education, even though they consider themselves a separate and fully sovereign nation? The next section proves that through the contentious history of Native American and U.S. Relations, the State and the Federal government have the obligation under law to provide these educational services.

Chapter 2: The Right to Education

The Onondaga Nation maintains its status as a fully sovereign nation existing within the boundaries of the United States Government. Since Onondaga children attend United States public schools, this section will determine whether the state and federal governments have the legal obligation to attend to the needs of the children of the Onondaga Nation, and whether they have the specific civil right to request public education that includes their Nation.

I. The Extent of Tribal Sovereignty

Prior to 1871, the U.S. entered into nearly 400 legitimate treaties with Native American nations. Due to this, the Onondaga Nation contends that they have never relinquished their national or collective sovereignty as a member of the Haudenosaunee. “There has never been any provision for transferring that sovereignty to any other entity, nor have the traditional chiefs of the Haudenosaunee ever consented to such a transfer” (Onondaga).

The United States is legally bound by the provisions of more than 370 treaties. Treaty rights are, by law, property rights and are recognized as the law of the land by the United States government.

The founding documents and laws of the United States remove any doubt that the nascent state recognized the national sovereignty of indigenous nations; the intention to recognize indigenous sovereignty is clear. (Morris 65)

Sovereignty is clearly recognized by William Wirt, an early Attorney General of the United States.

So long as a tribe exists and remains in possession of its lands, its title and possession are sovereign and exclusive...[W]hile an Indian nation continues to exist within its acknowledged limits, we have no more right to enter upon their territory than we have to enter upon the territory of a foreign prince. (Morris 65)

According to the Onondaga Nation, they continue to possess sovereign authority, both as a nation and as part of the Haudenosaunee. They have the sovereign to power to pass laws, make treaties, and act on behalf of the Onondaga people in relations with other sovereign nations (Onondaga). However, the federal government's argument is that Indian nations today are quasi-sovereigns, or domestic dependent nations (O'Brien 292).

It is also clear through decades of treaties that the United States government originally recognized tribal autonomy and sovereignty. It was not until the late 1800s that tribal authority became dubious.

II. The Extent of Federal Authority

However, more recently, it has been asserted by the state and federal governments that the treaties between the United States and indigenous nations do not fall within the international definition of a treaty under international law. The United States argues that relations between states and indigenous peoples are purely matters of internal, domestic jurisdiction through plenary power.

The sovereign status of Native American tribes has been asserted in many Supreme Court cases. The most definitive case for these provisions was Chief Justice John Marshall's decision in *Worcester vs. Georgia* in 1831. The Supreme

Court overturned an act of Georgia legislature which was created to "...prevent the exercise of assumed and arbitrary power by all persons, under pretext of authority from the Cherokee Indians" (Worcester v. Georgia). Chief Justice Marshall stated that this act violated the Constitution, treaties, and laws of the United States.

Treaties and laws of the United States contemplate the Indian territory as completely separated from that of the states; and provide that all intercourse with them shall be carried on exclusively by the government of the union...The Cherokee nation, then, is a distinct community occupying its own territory in which the laws of Georgia can have no force. The whole intercourse between the United States and this nation is, by our constitution and laws, vested in the government of the United States. (Worcester v. Georgia)

This case set the precedent for further Supreme Court cases, such as *Kagama vs. United States*. In this case, two Native Americans killed another Native American on the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation in California. The government argued, through the commerce clause, that Congress had the authority to claim jurisdiction over crimes between Indians, arrested and tried the two men.

Although the Supreme Court rejected this argument, it did uphold the government's claim to jurisdiction by virtue of its authority as guardian of the tribes. Writing for the Court, Justice Samuel Miller acknowledged that the United States had always recognized the tribes as semi-independent entities, "not as States, not as nations, but as separate people, with the power of regulating their

own social relations and thus not brought into the laws of the Union...” Due to this definition, Congress was entitled to govern policies affecting tribes by legislation. This change, as perceived by Congress, was permissible because of the tribes’ dependent condition.

This case came to define the relationship of federally-recognized tribes to the United States. In the federal government’s opinion, the tribes are protectorates under international law. The Federal Government assumed the responsibilities of acceptance by a weaker sovereign of the protection of a stronger sovereign. However, the relationship, as Chief Justice Marshall emphasized, “does not involve the destruction of the weaker sovereign” (O’Brien 267).

The decision in *United States v. Wheeler* in 1978 also came to define this intricate relationship.

The sovereignty that the Indian tribes retain is of a unique and limited character. It exists only at the sufferance of Congress and is subject to complete defeasance. But until Congress acts, the tribes retain their existing sovereign powers. In sum, Indian tribes still possess those aspects of sovereignty not withdrawn by treaty or statutes, or by implication as a necessary result of their dependent status. (Meyer 9)

Furthermore, a 1903 Supreme Court case, *Lone Wolf v. Hitchcock*, established that Congress had absolute authority over Indian relations, including the right to pass laws that violated treaties (O’Brien 80).

According to the federal government, nations are still wards of the United States. They are communities dependent on the United States.

From their very weakness and helplessness ... there arises the duty of protection, and with it the power. This has always been recognized by the Executive and by Congress and by this court, whenever the question has arisen. (O'Brien 73)

This understanding of protection meant that the government had absolute authority to define how it would protect Indian tribes. In the 1880s, "protection" took the form of assimilation, rather than the protection of tribal autonomy (O'Brien 73).

Even leading authorities have difficulties defining this unusual relationship. Native American people are American citizens with full rights guaranteed, along with responsibilities. The Constitution gives Congress plenary power over commerce with Indian people. It allows Congress to decide Native American policy unilaterally. However, there is no doubt of the quasi-sovereign nature of the tribes, but their reliance on the federal government has weakened their autonomy greatly (Senese 165).

Further difficulties center on the extent of the government's trust responsibility. Some argue that the trust only extends to the protection of Indian material resources. Others argue that the trust extends to the development of Indian human capital, even to the extent of saying that sovereignty itself is to be protected. (165)

Unfortunately, the trust relationship clouds the lines of sovereignty even further. This relationship was designed to give more control to Native Americans. However, even when Native Americans have been shown to be capable of

maintaining control or complying with federal authorities and demands, the federal government reneges on agreements, removes funding sources, or intervenes and assumes complete authority over affairs (Senese 165).

III. The Native American Civil Right to Education

Despite controversies over the true extent of tribal authority, after the Citizenship Act of 1924, all federally-recognized tribe members became citizens of the United States. However, tribal members did not lose their tribal citizenship or rights when they became American citizens. Native Americans are actually citizens of three sovereigns, “the United States, the state of which they are residents, and their tribe – and they have the rights and privileges of each” (O’Brien 80).

As federal citizens, Indians are protected by the Bill of Rights. As state citizens, they are eligible to vote and to receive state services. And as tribal citizens, they may receive certain federal benefits as required by the federal government’s trust relationship (O’Brien 80).

Once American Indians were citizens rather than domestic subjects, they had the constitutional right under state laws to attend public schools...They were entitled by the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution to participate in all federal and state programs, including education, which the states had the primary responsibility for providing. (Wright 8)

As the federal government delegated greater delegated the authority to negotiate government subsidies to the state level, Native American education, too, came under the umbrella of state authority.

The Onondaga Nation is a federally recognized tribe. The federal government maintains a trust relationship. It is implied through this that the federal government is obligated to protect the tribal lands and resources and to provide them with health care, education, the preservation of tribal autonomy, and economic-development assistance (O'Brien 261).

However, the Onondaga Nation does not recognize this trust relationship, because they do not believe they are the wards of the United States government. The Nation retains the rights of a sovereign nation with a government to government relationship. Despite this discrepancy, the 1975 Indian self-determination and Education Assistance Act enacted provisions which specifically delineated the government's obligation to provide these services.

The non-Indian population generally does not understand that, while Indians are eligible for many special services, services are not charity or welfare. Tribes bargained long, hard, and often unwillingly for these benefits and they ceded vast tracts of land in exchange for such services. (O'Brien 265)

The federal government assumed education for Native Americans as early as the 1800s. Therefore, the issue of education and the State's role in the welfare and education of Onondaga children greatly affects and clouds the concept of tribal sovereignty. However, the history of legislation and court precedent allows

the Onondaga Nation to assert its authority as a sovereign territory within the United States while concurrently being entitled to American rights to education and welfare. Therefore, the federal and state governments have the specific obligation to provide Native American children with a means to education.

The question then becomes whether or not state public schools have the implicit obligation to teach culturally sensitive and inclusive material to Native American students. The answer to this lies in the New York State government's stated goals. In 1991, the New York State Social Studies Review and Development Committee created a document called, "One Nation, Many Peoples," which was a "declaration of cultural interdependence." This document made suggestions that aimed to revise the social studies curriculum to include multicultural materials and instruction (Sobol).

However, a disparity exists in the execution of these ideals. Despite intentions, many local communities continue to use textbooks and teach the same outdated material year after year. The demands of the Onondaga Nation, that culturally relevant materials be better incorporated into the public school curriculum, are not only warranted, but are in keeping with the state's own affirmed goals and mission. The fact that the efforts of Native American educators, parents, and students within the school district are going unnoticed and unfulfilled serves to inflame distrust and disappointment in the public school system.

Despite the execution, this section has proven that the state and federal government have the obligation to provide for Onondaga students. Retaining their

rights as members of a sovereign nation does not contradict their rights of students in the local public school districts. Furthermore, the pursuance of multicultural education by the state and federal departments of education demonstrates this belief.

The next chapter will provide an overview and critical evaluation of the practices of the Syracuse City School District and its relation to the state and federal departments of education.

Chapter 3: The Syracuse City School District

The previous sections have provided historical and legal context for the Onondaga Nation's claim to inclusive public education. This section will evaluate the actions and testimonies of teachers, administration officials, and state representatives to examine how Syracuse City School District public schools incorporate and teach Native American subject material.

I. Basic Overview

The Syracuse School District is one of the five major school districts in New York State, known as the "Big Five." Due to this, Syracuse has representatives on the Board of Regents that develop the curriculum standards. Despite this status, the Syracuse City School District is a low-income district because much of the District is occupied by tax-free entities, such as Syracuse University. The District relies heavily on state funding and must strictly adhere to the requirements and benchmarks of New York State Board of Regents. Some of the state-allocated money targeted specifically for programs is contingent upon certain results. Local schools often have their hands bound by requirements of the state in order to receive funding (Maynard).

The Syracuse City School District also hosts the fifth largest percentage of Native American students in all of New York State, averaging a little over 3% of students in 2004 (Comprehensive Info Report). The present-day territory of the Onondaga Nation is approximately 7,300 acres, just south of Syracuse near Nedrow, New York (Onondaga). Many Native American children attend the

Onondaga Nation School, a tribal-controlled, on-reservation, elementary school, or the locally contracted district schools in the Lafayette School District.

However, many Onondaga residents of Syracuse attend schools within the Syracuse City School District. It is here where the greatest discrepancy between Native American education and public school education lies. Within these neighboring school districts, elementary schools teach dramatically different material in the fields of American history, culture, contemporary government, and American society. The Onondaga believe that all public schools should revise their textbooks and teachings to incorporate cultural materials, especially when located in such close proximity to the Onondaga Nation. This effort should be mandated by New York State for all school districts, so that all students, regardless of race, encounter environments of understanding.

II. The Curriculum

The social studies curriculum of public schools in the State of New York makes efforts to incorporate Native American culture and history, in order to achieve a more multicultural education. Native American culture and heritage is introduced and taught in fourth and eighth grade social studies classes in New York State. I have focused research the fourth grade social studies curriculum to provide a more in-depth assessment of what is taught.

According to the New York State Department of Education website, “The grade 4 social studies program builds on the students’ understanding of families, schools, and communities and highlights the political institutions and historic development of their local communities with connections to New York State and

the United States...The historic study of local communities focuses on the social/cultural, political, and economic factors that helped to shape these communities. Students study about the significant people, places, events, and issues that influenced life in their local communities. The grade 4 program should consider the following themes and events at the local level: Native American Indians of New York State, the European encounter, the colonial and Revolutionary War period, the new nation, and the period of industrial growth and development in New York State” (Standards and Benchmarks).

Native American Indians of New York State are specifically highlighted as the first standard to be studied in the curriculum. Within this standard the curriculum covers five key ideas: “ (1) Native American Indians were the first inhabitants of our local region and State, (2) The Iroquois (Haudenosaunee – People of the Longhouse) and the Algonquian were the early inhabitants of our State, (3) Meeting basic needs – food, clothing, and shelter, (4) Uses of the environment and how Native American Indian settlements were influenced by environmental and geographic factors, and (5) Important accomplishments and contributions of Native American Indians who lived in our community and State.”

Though Native American culture represents one-fifth of the social studies standards in the fourth grade, Native Americans are only discussed in the past tense, as the “Native American Indians who lived in our State and community.” The next chapter includes a history lesson of Native Americans during the Revolutionary War entitled, “Native American Indians in New York State influenced the War” (Standards and Benchmarks).

David Maynard, Field Coordinator for Social Studies in the Office of the Superintendent of Syracuse City Schools, has aligned the social studies curriculum with the New York State benchmarks and standards. Mr. Maynard states that Native American history and culture is often taught as a “stand-alone.” Subjects like the Iroquois Confederacy are not taught in conjunction with U.S. history and it becomes difficult, then, for the student to connect Native American history and U.S. history.

In the fourth grade social studies text, there is a chapter on regional Native American tribes. However, the Onondaga and the Haudenosaunee are not mentioned. As Mr. Maynard includes, “Kids are in Syracuse, learning about Rhode Island, which is great, but this is where they live. Teachers are very good at gathering materials from other places [to supplement the curriculum] but it’s a lot of work for them.” Furthermore, the social studies curriculum of the fourth grade in Syracuse University City schools does not adequately establish that the Haudenosaunee are still in existence. Furthermore, many historical events are omitted, such as, the extermination and expulsion of Native Americans during the colonial period and beyond. There is no mention of tribal governments or neighboring communities under the theme of “Local and State Governments.”

The New York State Education of Department clearly states that one intended benchmark and performance indicator in evaluating the curriculum in grade 4 is that the student “[U]nderstand the daily life and values of Native American cultures now and in the past.” Therefore, there is a gap between the

stated benchmarks and performance indicators and the state-mandated curriculum taught in Syracuse City District Schools.

The Learning Standards for Social Studies were compiled by the Regents of the University of the State of New York, a board of educators from sixteen different districts throughout New York, including Syracuse. These educators and lawyers are “responsible for the general supervision of all educational activities within the State, presiding over The University and the New York State Education Department.” The University of the State of New York is the nation's most comprehensive and unified educational system. It consists of all elementary, secondary, and postsecondary educational institutions, libraries, museums, public broadcasting, records and archives, and professions. This organization created, and administers the annual test given to all elementary school students within New York State (NYSED).

Testing in social studies, including subjects such as geography and U.S. history, only occurs in the fifth and eighth grades (NYSED Regents). The fifth grade level Regent’s exam includes three questions focusing on Native American culture within the first three pages. One question states, “A similarity between an Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) longhouse and an apartment building in a city is that both are mainly used as housing for many families.” The other two questions highlight the contributions in agriculture of Native Americans and the traditional roles of “Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) women” (Grade 5 Test 6).

As recently as 2002, the New York State social studies test was given to 250,000 fifth grade students, although according to the school liaison of the

Onondaga Nation School, Frieda Jacques, the test was controversial because it included elements that were inappropriate and insensitive to Haudenosaunee beliefs. “First, the test referred to ceremonial objects and displayed the images of two cornhusk masks, all of which are sacred to the Iroquois. Secondly, a war club was listed amongst other objects, and students were asked to write how each was used in daily life. This seemed to imply that warfare was an everyday practice. Thirdly, a deerskin cap and rattle were misidentified as one another. And lastly, the test only focused on the historical viewpoint of the Haudenosaunee. Writers purposely based questions on pre-European Haudenosaunee practices and in that context it was not inappropriate” (Otsingo).

Though students are conclusively tested during the fifth grade year, due to the fact there is no annual substantive testing for social studies in New York State, social studies classes taught in other grades are often sidelined. Teachers often de-emphasize social studies in elementary schools because students will not be tested on that information. The schools budget and evaluation is based upon how students test in English Language Arts and Mathematics, so there is no institutional incentive to focus on social studies issues. This discrepancy has been widely noted and registered by teachers throughout New York State (Time out).

III. The State’s Response

The New York State Board of Education largely feels that it is substantially teaching Native American history and affairs in all public school elementary lessons and texts. The State reviewed its policy of inclusive and multicultural education in the social studies curriculum in 1994. During this time,

the National Council for the Social Studies restructured the national requirements to include ten broad themes including culture; peoples, places and environments; and individuals, groups and institutions.

Syracuse University Education Professor Jeff Mangram states that the education curriculum had to be reformed, “It had a deleterious effect on all groups and peoples and became myopic in thinking. Students weren’t seeing aspects of themselves in school.”

Jo Ann Larson is the Assistant Director of the Curriculum for the New York State Department of Education. She stated that the 1994 review committee aimed to drastically alter the way subject matter was taught. The new curriculum was devised by professors from all over New York and New England. The new curriculum standards and benchmarks were released four years later, in 1998. Now the State assumes total control over the evaluation and review for the curriculum. The social studies curriculum is due for its first review in 2009 by the New York State Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

This organization of professors and teachers from New York, aims to “ensure that NY’s diverse community of learners is reflected in our programs, resources, membership and governance.” The organization also works to “influence educational policies, practices and resources in order to increase success for all learners,” by providing “research-based quality programs and resources that meet the needs of members” (NYASCD).

Despite this evaluation structure, Larson attributes some of the disparities in education to the unique relationship the Department of Education has with local

schools. The Department does not have direct control over what is taught day-to-day in the classroom. The Department has laid out broad standards for what must be taught over the course of the year and monitors the effectiveness of the standards through Regent's examinations administered in elementary grades level 5 and 8, program evaluation tests, and competency tests. The Education Department then takes each district's data into a resource document known as the Comprehensive Assessment Report, to provide a public record of accountability and review for the State (White 1).

There are professionally developed classroom curricula available for teachers on the State Department of Education's website, but these are not mandates. The local schools and teachers have full responsibility over what is taught in the classroom. Larson states that components of Native American culture and history could potentially be presented at every grade, but it is ultimately up to the discretion of the teacher. The State Department of Education is trying to improve teaching standards and cultural information, but these efforts are not reaching the local classroom.

She also states that the problems with multicultural education are difficult to overcome because many area teachers are struggling to reach the students at all. Her goal is to raise achievement in testing and education while at the same time narrowing the gap and lowering the drop-out rate (Larson interview).

IV. Federal Restrictions

Though the Federal Government largely leaves educational requirements and standards to the state, policy and funding have become a complicated political contest between the federal and state Governments “Education policy [historically] was molded by many pressures ... Outside pressures included federal Indian policy and national education policy. The education director himself was forced to administer according to the will of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Secretary of the Interior, and the President” (Szasz 191).

President George Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has indirectly impacted Native American education by focusing on narrowing the education gap through frequent standardized testing. Title VII of the No Child Left Behind Act specifically targets Indian Education. The document states, “It is the purpose of this part to support the efforts of local educational agencies, Indian tribes and organizations, postsecondary institutions, and other entities to meet the unique educational and culturally related academic needs of American Indian and Alaska Native students, so that such students can meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards as all other students are expected to meet” (NCLB Title VII Part A). Direct assistance is authorized for programs meeting the unique and culturally related academic needs of American Indians, the education of American Indians and adults, the training of Indian people as educators, and research, evaluation, data collection and technical assistance (NCLB).

The University of the State of New York is accountable to the mandates of the United States Department of Education. With the No Child Left Behind Act

(NCLB) of 2001, the U.S. Department of Education granted \$81.8 million to New York State under the Reading Excellence Act, intending to support local efforts to improve reading and close performance gaps. The No Child Left Behind Act requires that every school strives to “meet the need of low achieving children in our Nation’s highest poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance” (USCCR, 2004 3). Each state sets academic standards and yearly goals for achievement. No Child Left Behind’s goal is that, by 2014, all children should be achieving at their state’s proficiency level in reading, language arts, math, and science and with a dramatic reduction of education gaps.

The No Child Left Behind Act has put substantial pressure on the New York State Department of Education to increase performance each year in order to receive federal funding. The Board of Regents must establish a single accountability system for all schools and assess Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the minimum level of improvement school districts and schools must achieve every year.

In turn, the New York State Board of Regents began using the Regents’ exam, first administered in 1865, as the definitive mechanism to measure how schools and students are performing in accordance with No Child Left Behind. Since 2005, this exam has been given to students from 3rd-8th grade annually and is based on English Language Arts and Mathematics in order to comply with federal standards. As of 2007-2008, students are tested in science in grades 4 and

8, even though the State of New York has already exceeded the standards for science aptitude in testing (Facts NYSED).

It is widely noted by many educators in New York State that there is a dramatic de-emphasis on social studies that leaves students unaware of certain topics and wholly unprepared for high school education. The limitations of the No Child Left Behind Act weaken the importance of social studies topics in the classroom.

In fact, in 2004, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission report found that the No Child Left Behind Act had very little effect on the achievements of students. The Commission noted that due to the nature of the law, its “high stakes for minority students and schools, and the total lack of attention to closing the gap in financial resources between the richest and poorest schools are widening the gap between children of color and their more affluent White peers” (USCCR 2004). There is also a pervasive concern that the No Child Left Behind Act omits culturally based education and community choice, and leads to hyper-attention to standardized testing at the expense of sound instruction (Lomawaima 156).

The pressure for local schools to excel is also heightened. Sandy Trento, Assistant Dean at the Syracuse University School of Education, explains that if testing grades at a school are below the state standards for three years in a row, the school goes under review. This means that they remove the current administration, withdraw federal funding, subject the school to outside remediation, and get a new team of administrators and teachers. Due to this,

elementary school are panicking and teaching to make sure that students pass the test.

V. Local Initiatives

Locally, there are efforts as well to reform the system. The Syracuse City School District has applied for a local grant to teach local American history. As Mr. Maynard states, “Sometimes the federal government gets aggressive and puts pressure on the state to get something done, but not often. They are more facilitators, not people who mandate. If we’re sitting in the middle of the Iroquois Confederacy ... who is Washington to tell us what to teach?”

David Maynard also states that many local administrators are working at the State level to encourage curriculum alignment between English Language Arts and Social Studies and are pushing for one Humanities Assessment test instead, to prove proficiency in social studies and English at the same time and to also satisfy No Child Left Behind Standards.

Despite the obstacles, Field Coordinator David Maynard, believes that teachers enjoy teaching about Native American culture and heritage. “Teachers enjoy teaching it, if given the opportunity. A field trip went to a school this year down in the valley built on a Native American trail. They learned strong lessons on Iroquois culture, making connections to the modern day ... My challenge is to let people know that and understand that [teachers] can teach important parts of the curriculum and engage in these activities at the same time.” He continued, “There is a pendulum swing in education. On one side, you have the need to test

every child every year to identify problems ... on the other side you need to educate the whole child ... to create a citizen” (Maynard interview).

To combat the structural limitations of the New York State standards and benchmarks, some local teachers have individually incorporated elements of Native American culture and heritage in their classrooms. According to Mr. Maynard, “Teachers have a lot of latitude in what they teach. However, teachers who have studied Native American Studies may include elements of this into their teaching. Other teachers rely solely on the text book and source material.”

One local teacher at Clary Middle School, Sue Savion, is an example of a teacher who is dedicated to all of her students and passionate about including them in her classroom. Her school, located three miles from the Onondaga Nation, contains a high percentage of Native Americans students that, she states, have a visible pride in their culture and heritage. Ms. Savion personally creates supplemental teaching materials that educate students about the Onondaga Nation and the Haudenosaunee.

She creates lesson plans incorporating the Haudenosaunee Creation Story, passages from contemporary texts, and has children read novels by Native American authors. She also engages students through group discussions and craft-making activities in her class. She explains that it is important to teach these elements, especially because there are many Native students in her classes. She feels that it is important to teach the other students that the Onondaga are not a part of some past civilization. “They’re still here, and they don’t wear feathers. And they don’t act like it’s 300 years ago, either” (Savion interview).

Sue Savion agrees that the most frustrating part of her job is the emphasis on reading and mathematics. She states that time is taken out of the day for test preparation, and grading that saps creativity out of every subject. She finds methods of incorporating the culture in her classroom through initiatives such as laminating relevant news articles in the “Syracuse Post Standard” or putting up bulletin boards with topical history lessons.

Ms. Savion states that it does not take a lot of money to incorporate small elements into the education materials, especially with the \$120 in discretionary funding that the school allocates for each teacher. Furthermore, she states, “Teachers learn how to do things pretty cheaply.” She has also created daily questionnaire worksheets for students, which she hands out during attendance. These often focus on environmental and Native American issues. She offers her supplemental materials to other teachers for use in their classrooms as well.

She is also is writing a grant to get Native American speakers to come to the school and interact with the students. Three years ago she was able to get a Native American stone carver to visit the school.

When speaking of her colleagues, Sue states, “It’s the minority of teachers that take on these initiatives.” Most of the teachers are not well informed on this subject in general. However, she notes that the restrictions behind the No Child Left Behind act are driving the good teachers out of schools because they cannot teach creatively anymore. There are a lot of “canned” programs and field trips in social studies and art classes. However, with English classes, teachers have more discretion because they can choose novels approved by the Board of Education

and can add supplemental readings. She believes it is possible to integrate Native American lessons into English Language Arts and Social Studies.

Sue Savion is not the only local educator who actively incorporates Native American topics in her classroom. Bradley Powless, an Onondaga teacher hosted the "Onondaga Nation School Educational Share" last fall, which allowed Syracuse teachers to visit the Onondaga Nation, learn from Onondaga educators, devise lesson plans, and engage in new crafts and activities they could take back to their students.

However, the majority of teachers do not reach out to their Native American students. The value of education relies on the dedication of the individual teacher. This obviously can lead to consequences and disparities in education. While the No Child Left Behind Act left provisions has raised the requirements for qualifications of teachers, this issue still appears problematic.

American Indians are substantially underrepresented in higher-level academic groups, such as gifted classes, which have positive effects on students ... Furthermore, American Indian students are also far more likely to be disciplined through the use of school suspensions than are white students...research from a multitude of educational scholars supports the propositions that assignments to lower-level academic groups and the unfair use of suspensions has detrimental effects on the students so assigned or disciplined. (Wright 130)

Though the exact causes for this disparity are unknown, many argue that the gap in education and the exclusion of Native American students could be a result of the culture and environment of the classroom. A study from the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities reported that many Native children have been inaccurately diagnosed as in need of special education classes, speech/language therapy, or other types of compensatory programs as a result of teacher's defaults, rather than the student's inability to learn (NICCYD).

VI. Intersection of Policies

While the local, state, and federal policies toward education are not without setbacks, the Native American population in the Syracuse City School District has benefitted from the intersection of federal policy and the efforts of local educators. The federally funded Title VII program mandated by the Indian Education Act provides a resource for Native American students in public schools. Tonya Shenandoah, a professor at Lemoyne College, explains that the Title VII Program “operates in most school districts with a significant Native population to provide additional culturally relevant learning, experiences, and role-models and outreach initiatives, though they are often overloaded with high needs and limited resources.”

Shirley Villafane is the Program Facilitator for the Title VII program in the Syracuse City Schools. She is active in engaging Native American students to create a sense of community and tradition. The goals of the program are to hold classes on a weekly basis, meet individually with Native American students, and provide cultural and historical information to school teachers. Students have taken

field trips to longhouses and participated in sacred ceremonials. With older students, she teaches more contemporary issues, such as Native American mascots in professional sports. The program also has a Parent Student Committee component that meets and works with program staff to monitor students' needs.

The Title VII program has recently been restructured and reorganized, so that students must fulfill requirements to engage in the program. First, they must be students in good academic standing so that the extracurricular activities in the program will not negatively impact their grades. Second, the students must legally prove that they are a member of a federally-recognized tribe, using the 507 form. Upon filling out this form, students are given an enrollment number. However, several families in Syracuse have struggled to obtain their enrollment numbers due to the cumbersome bureaucratic process of enrollment. Families are given a period of one year to locate their number, and if they cannot, their child is removed from the program. Due to this, the Title VII program lost 100 students last year, resulting in a dramatic budget cut.

With the budget cuts, Villafane's program lost a teacher, tightening the reigns on the program and necessitating the need for external fundraisers. She was able to raise \$649 in a silent auction through their Parent Committee this year for a field trip to a local longhouse. This year, she hopes to increase the student population in the program

Students are only allowed to enroll, participate in the Title VII program, and receive grant funding if they are members of a federally recognized tribe.

Problems for New York State students in tribes not federally recognized happen less frequently, but are still a concern.

Title VII employs a “pull-out method” where teachers identify Native American students and coordinate their schedules so that students can participate once a week in after-school and during-school activities that supplement their schoolwork and requirements. Though Title VII works to create a refuge for Native American students within public schools, the program itself only rarely interacts with non-Native students. However, Ms. Villafane has seen a receptive response from teachers, asking to bring speakers to the school or put on craft displays. She finds that the more she engages with other teachers, the greater the demand has been.

Through all of this, however, Villafane adds that she feels that the New York State curriculum truly tries to incorporate the culture, heritage, and many issues facing the Haudenosaunee and local Native Americans. In the schools that she has worked at in Syracuse, she believes that teachers and community members are culturally open-minded, respectful, and eager to learn about the local Native American community. In fact, she adds that the curriculum and teachers in New York do a far better job at this than schools that she has taught at in other states.

The American Indian Education Program is the most important factor explaining the favorable treatment of American Indian students ... The program produces many positive benefits for American Indian students. Such benefits include individual tutoring in math and reading

courses...increases in levels of self-esteem, and higher awareness of American Indian culture and heritage. (Wright 127)

Through programming such as Title VII, the state and federal governments make efforts to enhance the education of Native American students. However, a structure and bureaucracy remains that is inflexible and slow to react to the demands of the local community. It seems that the State Department of Education lacks clear authority in the local districts. While it provides overarching guidelines and structures, the majority of the decisions that affect students and teachers in the classroom are made at the local level. However, due to the restrictions of the No Child Left Behind Act, local districts are not able to tailor their teaching methods to their constituencies.

However, when there are problems or discrepancies in this system, such as the Onondaga's disapproval of the social studies curriculum, history has shown that the State does not intervene or attempt solutions until extreme conflict arises. This has led to the sentiment that the state will not reach out unless forced, and that the voices of the Onondaga Nation will not be heard unless bolstered by boycotts and protests. This may also be a major cause behind a major sentiment that the situation is hopeless. Many Onondaga feel that the State plainly does not care and will not take efforts to bridge these cultural miscommunications.

In order to remedy this, many local activists and national education scholars have supported the implementation of multicultural education practices across the board. The next section will define multicultural education and examine its potential impact for students.

Chapter 4: An Alternative View of Education

This section will make an argument in support of multicultural education for all students, not as a compensation or special service to minority communities. Inclusive and multicultural education is a burgeoning movement in education espoused by many communities and even by official U.S. and New York State education policy.

Approximately 90 percent of all American Indian students attend public schools in the United States. Unfortunately, common teaching practices such as ability grouping and disciplinary measures often leave minority children with unequal treatment. Schools often propagate misinformation about the culture, contemporary contributions, and historical treatment of Native American communities. Tragically, Native American education is still rife with attitudes of paternalism, condescension, and the need for assimilation towards their communities (Ward 6).

These attitudes have been termed resegregative or “second generation discrimination” practices, because even though schools have been integrated since the Civil Rights era, racial discrimination still persists in an even more invidious form. Minority students are often given unequal education and opportunities and can also be subject to greater punishment. “[These educational practices] can have an adverse effect on minority students’ life changes – ‘the ability of minority children as adults to participate fully in the social, economic, and political life of society’” (Wright 1).

There is an imperative for multicultural and integrative education because in theory, schools should provide the foundation for the socialization of students and how they learn about cultures, classes, and gender groups. Furthermore, trust and legitimacy are important factors in the relationship between the teacher and the student. Early on, the school teaches children their role in society.

Native American students often cannot see how their life, family, heritage, and history fit into mainstream society. School failure can lead to greater failures in life and society. When children cannot identify with school teachings, other students, the teacher, and the demands of school life, the child can feel isolated, like an outcast in school. In attempts to assimilate Native Americans children and prepare them for mainstream society, schools have actually had an adverse affect, contributing to their poor performance (Ward 225).

Ethnographic studies indicated that Native American students who experience prejudice typically are negatively affected, and had lower expectations of themselves and have lower levels self-confidence (225). Most students attend schools where the teachers know little of their culture. Even with greater attention and sensitivity to this issue, research has shown that vestiges of assimilation policy from the 20th and 19th centuries still exist in the classroom today.

The effects of these circumstances have been documented in research on Indian classrooms: Greenbaum (1985) reports that Indian students in regular (non-Indian) classroom setting interacted very differently with non-Indian teachers than did non-Indian students, the effects of which were detrimental to their learning...Indian children, on the other hand,

performed more effectively when the classroom contexts were organizationally similar to local Indian contexts...Such findings suggest the possible importance of differences in school contexts” (Ward 44).

I. Multicultural Education

In essence, multicultural education requires teachers to remove the feeling of being an “outsider” from the school and classroom, based on unchanging social and cultural differences. The goal is to make students invested in their education so provide greater job opportunities, greater self-esteem, and produce more active citizens later in life. “The effect of education is greatest for the poor. In this sense, education may be even more critical for the American Indians than any other minority group, since they represent the most economically disadvantaged group in the United States” (Wright 19).

II. Within the Syracuse City School District

The struggle and debate for enhanced Native American education is ever-present within the Syracuse City School District and the State Department of Education. As a low-income public school district just outside the borders of the Onondaga Nation, Syracuse City Schools host many Onondaga children who live off the reservation. Many Onondaga parents not only strive to protect their children from discriminating education and give them opportunities, but to, in a sense, “set the record straight” (Waterman), about their history, culture, and contemporary relevance, with the hope of achieving mutual respect, admiration and understanding.

However, Onondaga residents of Syracuse still face public schools which, perhaps even unintentionally, refuse to challenge the traditional curriculum.

Wendy Gonyea, Onondaga Faith Keeper and Member of the Beaver Clan, states that it is a common belief that students are missing out on other things by learning Native culture. One of the reasons for the mistreatment and misunderstandings between cultures is the lack of education. Their culture, one of caring, respect, and conservationism, is being lost through the generations.

Brittany Baggett, a student of the Syracuse University School of Education and student teacher at Nottingham High school, states that teachers do not intentionally aim to elicit this reaction in students. She believes that the problem is not that teachers are lazy or do not care, but that teachers easily find themselves teaching the same material year after year. In attempts to get students to pass Regents' examinations and appease the school board, teachers often use materials and books that were effective in previous years and do not challenge the status quo.

However, Neal Powless, an educator at Syracuse University and an Onondaga, feels it is imperative to change this structure. "You look at us, and you see that we're different – our facial structure, and body. It's not something you can hide." He feels that the "Onondaga are minimized as a people in the educational system" and that the system "breeds ignorance." He notes that, when talking about the Onondaga or any Native culture, the context is always "history, history, history." As a life-long Syracuse native, he states that there was an arduous battle in his local public school to fly the Onondaga flag next to the

American flag, to get Native American students to identify and take pride in their school.

He states that there is a general distrust of the educational system among certain groups and pockets of Native Americans, due to the brutal history of boarding schools. His cousins and community members were “picked up off the street” and forcibly coerced into attending schools. Many older Native Americans have grown resentful and abandoned hope for change, considering what is taught about the Onondaga in local schools and the time that it has taken to reach this point.

More recently, Syracuse University Professor of Religion Phillip Arnold told the story of his son, a Native American, in his elementary school class. The elementary teacher informed the class that lacrosse, a Haudenosaunee sport, was a game of war. Professor Arnold’s son approached the teacher after class and mentioned that the game of lacrosse is actually a healing and medicinal game. The teacher replied that he might be correct, but to get it right on the test, he would have to answer that it was a game of war.

Professor Arnold and his wife, Sandy Bigtree, finally moved their sons from their elementary school, due to her dissatisfaction with the way the teacher presented Native American studies and history. Her children now attend a school in neighboring Fayetteville where the teacher “takes it upon herself to teach issues not approved or quizzed by the school board” (Arnold).

Minerva White, an Akwesasne Mohawk, was an education activist in the 1970s, who fought tirelessly for change in education in public schools.

It is probably hard for whites to understand what it is like knowing who to talk to and not having anyone who will listen when problems arise where your children go to school. We could go to talk to the principal and he would listen to us and agree with us while we were there. But nothing was ever done. (Hauptman 76)

While, ideologically, solutions may be simple in the classroom, the realities of the long-standing debate for inclusive, multicultural education are much more complex. Sentiments of prejudice, insensitivity and an unwillingness to alter the status quo pervade our nation's schools. These schools are reinforced by intricate state and federal bureaucracies that have a heavy hand in mandating educational practices, and they ultimately control the school's budget allocations.

III. Operation of the New York State Department of Education

The devastating impact of the failed Haudenosaunee curriculum was felt as more than just a rejection by the State. The effort to reform the curriculum had no any real intention of making coherent and lasting policy change.

Though the State underwent a major reworking of educational standards in the 1990s to include more multicultural education, many Native American communities still harbor disillusionment and feel excluded from Western education.

According to the State Department of Education, they have committees of experts from a variety of ethnic groups across America contributing to their curriculum (Larson). However, those involved with these committees and projects have a much different story. Dr. Lloyd Elm of the Onondaga Nation works for the

New York State Department of Education on the Central Consortium Diversity Committee. This committee was formed to act as a liaison between the State and Native American reservations. He states that the consortium is largely ineffective, and for his duties he rarely is involved in making decisions and giving lectures at events.

However, the State Department of Education has created an office for Native American educational affairs called the Native American Education Unit. The Unit provides scholarships for Native American students in public schools and colleges. For higher education, the maximum total awards per student are \$4,000 for two-year college students and \$8,000 for four year college students. This applies to residents who are officially enrolled members of the St. Regis Mohawks, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca Nation of Indians, Tonawanda Band of Senecas, Tuscaroras; Shinnecock and Poospatuck (NYSIA). This is currently headed by acting coordinator Adrian Cooke, who has been actively involved in education efforts since the 1970s (Hauptman interview).

The State Department of Education states on its website that it engages scholars from around the country and pursues a multicultural education to close educational gaps. However, multicultural education does not have a simple definition. The state may avow this policy, but many feel that these statements only reflect a superficial change.

If the State Department of Education truly wishes to reform curricula and policies they must employ effective leadership, a clearly stated vision and goals, and strategic development of the policies. Without concrete action, the intentions

of the State Department of Education are largely meaningless and only serve to worsen Native American relations with the state.

IV. The National Movement

The previous sections have established that the history of Native American and United States relations has afforded Native American communities the civil right to state education as wards of the federal government. Furthermore, through efforts of self-determination, many Native American communities are attempting to maintain a system of complete tribal autonomy and sovereignty, a project with which many are still in the formative stages. Therefore, many Native American children are attending public schools, such as the Syracuse City School District. Many parents are dissatisfied with the education given to their children. Native American communities believe that they are a substantial minority population that has contributed much to the formation of the United States. Thus, they believe their contributions should be presented in public schools.

However, the State Department of Education would argue if they incorporate more information about the Haudenosaunee community then soon they will have to add information about every minority group in America. The State's primary responsibility is to get children to pass the standards for proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics.

The Onondaga Nation argues from the standpoint of the First Peoples to occupy North America. As a society rebuilding from the brink of extinction, the Onondaga Nation, especially, is not asking for monetary reparations. They only ask that the federal government protect their best interests and help the prosperity

of their children. If the United States Department of Education is intent on narrowing education gaps in public schools throughout the country, it is in their vested interest to reduce barriers to education. It is then important to examine the goals of the public schools.

In *Rethinking Our Classrooms*, authors Bill Bigelow, Brenda Harvey, Stan Karp and Larry Miller (2001) state that schools should be “laboratories for our society.” They argue that educators must help children survive within the world and to transform it. If either of the two are neglected, then the teacher has not fulfilled his or her responsibilities” (207).

Professor of Education Noriega Garcia argues that schools engage in a social contract with their students.

[Public schools] should meet the educational needs of culturally diverse students by recognizing that their cultural knowledge is worthwhile and by reinforcing and expanding on that knowledge in the classroom, so as not to force assimilation processes on those students who are not members of the American mainstream. This goal is a direct response to the demands by American minority groups for educational opportunities historically denied them. (Garcia 20)

Furthermore, regarding Native American students especially, education should empower them to become participants in their community and country. These goals do not necessarily require assimilation into mainstream society. Education can include the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for

“politically active, culturally viable, and economically prosperous citizens,” without removing their sense of history and culture (Garcia 12).

However, public schools, even in the Syracuse City School District, do not have a majority of Native Americans in the classrooms. Professor of Multicultural Education at Northern Arizona University Jon Reyhner states,

The majority of our students are not and will not be Native Americans, but we are all on Native land, the vast majority of which is currently, being illegally occupied, and historically, it has been the non-Native community, people of European descent especially, that has had the greatest, and most negative, impact on Indigenous communities. (5)

It is through this argument that most argue public schools should have the impetus to teach more culturally relevant materials. Professor Reyhner states, “...[An] intercultural, antiracist, orientation allows students to develop the ability, confidence, and motivation that lead to academic success...Four dimensions – cultural and linguistic incorporation, community participation, instruction, and testing are integral....” (Reyhner 5)

Research also shows that incorporation of these materials not only improves the schooling of the Native American communities, but allows for greater education for all children. If schools are the main medium for the socialization of the child, the teachings in the classroom help develop their attitudes later in life.

A more multicultural, inclusive education may be the solution to closing the education gaps and cultural misunderstandings between cultures as it not only

positively impacts Native American communities, but also contributes to the education of all racial groups. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights stated in a 2006 report that “[P]erpetuation theory suggests that only when students are exposed to desegregated experiences will they lead more integrated lives as adults. Specifically, a more recent set of studies on attitudes of students toward their peers of other racial groups found that students—of all racial/ethnic groups—who attend more diverse schools have higher comfort levels with members of racial groups different than their own, an increased sense of civic engagement and a greater desire to live and work in multiracial settings relative to their more segregated peers. This finding corroborates earlier findings that white students in integrated settings exhibit more racial tolerance ...” (USCCR 2006).

Similarly, Professor of Bicultural and Bilingual Education at the University of Texas San Antonio Wayne Wright agrees that positive impacts in the classroom impact society as a whole. “They include...a more talented and productive workforce, more coproduction or volunteerism in the delivery of services, greater political socialization, and better citizenship” (Wright 19).

...Education is increasingly seen by many to be one of the keys, if not the key, to solving such problems as crime, unemployment, welfare dependency, and other socioeconomic ills. Education is the major factor affecting a person’s life chances – the ability of one to participate fully in political, social, and economic life. (Wright 20)

Despite the efforts of leaders in the State Department of Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Federal Department of Education, it seems that

because of a lack of clear policy initiatives and leadership, efforts have not only failed but have left in their wake a resentment and a resistance to relying on the government for protection.

As a result, Native American communities nation-wide are now pursuing a policy of regeneration and empowerment, titled “self-determination.” The next section will detail the efforts of community activists and local teachers to regain the classroom.

Chapter 5: The Goals of the Onondaga Nation

The demands of a multicultural education for all public schools while maintaining privately controlled tribal schools may seem contradictory. However, the Onondaga Nation argues that it is the government's responsibility to fulfill the promises made to them. In response, individual and independent efforts have been made to respond to this issue.

I. Self-Determination

The term self-determination came out of a period in the 1960s and 1970s in American when the federal government and several private foundations undertook studies of Indian affairs, including administration, education, and health standards. The reports include the Study of the United States Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs (1961), the Report of the Commission on the Rights, Liberties and Responsibilities of the American Indian (1961), the Coleman Report (1966), the White House Task Force on Indian Health (1966), the Report of the Special Senate Subcommittee on Indian Education (1969), and the American Indian Policy Review Commission Report (1975).

All of these studies found that Indian social, educational, and health conditions had improved little since Congress's last review of the situation, published in the Meriam Report. Termination policies had clearly failed to 'liberate' the Indian people...Indian education was a 'national tragedy.' President Lyndon B. Johnson referred to Indians as the 'forgotten Americans.' (O'Brien 86)

The studies advocated for a policy of self-determination. Essentially this means that locally and tribally controlled schools do not receive State money, and therefore are not subject to the mandates of the State. These tribally-controlled schools can apply for federal grant money, but rely more on fundraisers, parent contributions, and the community. These schools, such as the Onondaga Nation School, are able to teach more in-depth topics such as Native American history, language, heritage, contemporary relevance, and cultural rejuvenation.

This new Indian assertiveness [self-determination], in its multiple manifestations, had a major impact on U.S. policy. In 1975, responding to 'the strong expression' of Indians, Congress committed itself to a policy of 'self-determination' to provide 'maximum Indian participation in the government and education of the Indian people.' From now on, the government was saying, it not only would attempt to listen to Indian views and honor Indian agendas but would grant to Indians a central role in the implementation of policy. (Meyer 105)

However, most Native American communities do not have the resources to maintain a school system. The Onondaga Nation School is absorbed into a local school district in order to receive federal education money, while not being subject to the demands of the state.

The New York State Department of Education has made definitive efforts to accommodate this policy. Currently, the State contracts with 13 school districts located in close proximity to reservations. Contracts provide guaranteed education at a reservation school, pay tuition for schooling provided at a district school not

on a reservation, and pay for the transportation of reservation children to reservation schools and public schools. Onondaga Nation is currently contracted with Lafayette Central public schools, but not Syracuse City Schools (White).

There is an incentive for school districts to contract with reservations because part of the agreement for contract schools is that for each Native American child in the school, the school will receive a double allocation of money from the State. Today much has changed. The Johnson-O'Malley Act provides money to public schools educating Indian children. However, current JOM programs must be supplemental programs, like Title VII, the program headed by Shirley Villafane (Campbell 50).

With the money provided by the Johnson-O'Malley Act, the Lafayette schools take special efforts to reach out to Native American students. They have assembled an interactive internet website on Blackboard.com that offers extracurricular articles, activities and facilitates communication between parents and the school administrators.

Efforts like this have been taken across New York State. Sue Herne is director of the Akwesasne Cultural Center in Hogansburg, NY. As an Akwesasne Mohawk, she works with the contract-public schools in the Salmon River school district to encourage teachers to use the money for educational purposes. She applied for a federal grant to teach American history with the help of the Salmon River School District and St. Lawrence University.

This program sought to create educational tools for teachers in classrooms and help with the professional development of teachers. The School District had

to apply for a Federal grant, because no such grant exists at the State level. She similarly believes that despite all the efforts taken to reform education by local teachers, schools are not sufficiently teaching Native American history or cultural relevance. However, she realizes that schools are trying to do what they can with their limitation of budgets, testing obligations, and time.

However, a problem with the theory of contract schools is that often schools and areas nearest to reservations harbor the most concentrated prejudice and anti-Native American sentiment. Essentially the state began sending Native American children into schools with great bias and resentment (Elm).

In Syracuse, Dr. Elm's boycott in 1971 was in response to this problem. At the time, he was a social studies teacher in Lafayette Central School. His supervisor applied for a federal grant under the federal Title II Act to update textbooks in the school. Under Title II, schools that contain Native American students are encouraged to apply for federal money. Contract schools operate with an open-check policy, meaning that if they can illustrate the need for money the State will almost unquestioningly provide more money.

Lafayette School District applied for a grant based on their quota of on-reservation students. However, none of the money was ever given to children from the Onondaga Nation. Dr. Elm confronted a supervisor, but was only told that the money was in the best interest of the school district. Soon after, Onondaga parents and leaders took their children out of school until the State Education Department agreed to meet with them and discuss problems inherent in the system. Commissioner Ambach met at Longhouse on the St. Regis reservations with

representatives from the Haudenosaunee. However, it was discovered that similar problems were occurring at other contract school districts throughout New York State.

As a result, the Board of Regents formed their Native American Advisory Committee chaired by Dr. Elm. The committee included a long-list of grievances, such as the State's refusal to offer Native language education, even with the federal government's money. In response, the State Department of Education admitted that it did not classify Native American students as having special and cultural needs. However, at the time the Federal Indian Education Act 1972 passed which declared that children do have special cultural and education needs that need more resources than other children. The state quickly was forced to revisit its Native American education policies (Elm).

It was after this that local schools began offering language services that it had never had before. Though there was still heavy resistance within these schools from other teachers, these developments were tolerated because of the extra money coming into the school. At Lafayette Central, Audrey Shenandoah was the first paid school teacher in Lafayette to teach Onondaga language (Elm).

However, Dr. Elm states that after all of this the State and local schools never pushed for the reforms recommended by the Board of Regent's Position Paper. Eventually the reforms advocated by the State Department of Education were forgotten.

The social studies syllabus remained exclusive rather than inclusive of Native American students. According to Dr. Elm, this means that the curriculum

has always been concerned with the “mythical notion of what it is to be an American.” However, this vague idea does not incorporate all of the cultural groups that make up America (Elm).

Some of the conflict comes from the Native American community itself. Much of the struggle is in getting the Haudenosaunee to agree on a coherent set of policy and curriculum. He says the Western Consortium for New York State is much more active under the control of the Seneca but often community leaders try to impose their will on the Onondaga. The barrier between the nations has caused a new complex set of problems that make it even more difficult to incite reform.

Dr. Elm states that because of this, the provisions in the Board of Regents for New York State still were not attended to and the problems discussed were never resolved. The State and contract schools never pushed for the reforms recommended by the Board of Regent’s Position Paper or Commissioner Ambach and eventually, the issue was forgotten. Today, the curriculum remains outdated and insufficient despite attempts by the State to encourage Native topics and participation.

II. Tribal Schools

Since that time, Native American educators have been struggling to retain control of education for Onondaga children. While self-determination fights for control and autonomy over education of Native American students, tribal schools also need funding to operate and want graduates to be able to attend public high schools and universities. These realities have somewhat deflated the original idealism of the movement. Self-determination now allows tribal schools to have

some autonomy over the curriculum while still being held to federal standards and guidelines

An alternative to Syracuse City public education for Native American families is the Onondaga Nation School, a community-oriented day school. The School is located in Nedrow, New York on the Onondaga Territory and has been in operation since 1910 (Onondaga Nation). The School was created as a land agreement between the State of New York and the Onondaga Nation. The Onondaga Nation permitted New York State to build Route 11 through their Territory in return for a lawful, recognized and well-funded school. Onondaga Nation School is a public institution funded by the State, currently with eighty-eight students enrolled in grades from kindergarten to the eighth grade. The School is designated as part of the Lafayette School district and participates in the state standards while incorporating culture, history, and language lessons. The walls of the two story building are lined with nostalgic pictures of Onondaga in their community from generations past.

The goal of the School, similar to the Title VII program, is to provide a foundation for Onondaga students before they enter public city schools. One of the greatest threats to the Native American community is the loss of sacred values apparent the younger generations. As Native American University Professor Beverley Klug states, “If we are unable to appreciate our own culture, language and roots it is difficult for us to accept the importance of culture and language use and preservation in American Indian communities” (Klug 105). Denise Waterman, educator at Onondaga Nation School, believes that the School

provides a positive environment which is an asset to any young student. At Onondaga Nation School, students learn about the Onondaga language, heritage, culture and the legacy and pride of being a Haudenosaunee.

Indian-controlled schools place a high priority on the teaching of tribal culture. When this emphasis was achieved at the expense of other subjects, Bureau educators criticized the schools for developing an unbalanced curriculum...The tendency to stress Indian culture is only natural...since mainstream culture has been imposed on Indian pupils for the entire period of Indian education and since federal education itself has been thrust on Indians who have no say in the matter, an opposite reaction is only to be expected. (Szasz 195)

Denise Waterman, Onondaga educator, states that the ultimate goal is to give students a real history of New York State and to get people to realize that what is currently taught is not an accurate representation of his culture.

Similarly, Sue Herne is a parent of a student that attends Akwesasne Freedom School, a tribally-controlled school on the Akwesasne Reservation in Hogansburg, New York. She says it is much more difficult to send her children to these schools. She states, "You can't just send your children on a bus to school." Parents have to remain much more involved in the education process. Teachers do not get paid as much as they would in State public schools. Additionally, the Akwesasne Freedom School suffered from a fire and has been unable to renovate the new school due to lack of funds.

III. Criticism of Self-Determination

Critics argue that self-determination policies also have left in their wake lower educational attainment, insufficient levels and types of participation in the labor force, poor health conditions, and impoverishment. (Ward 6)

The Self-determination and Education Assistance Act has provided the machinery for Indian control, but has given neither the flexibility nor the funds to insure truly successful programming. It has allowed the BIA to keep contracted services in their bailiwick, yet does not interfere in the bureau's extensive bureaucracy. (Senese 133)

In Senese's estimation self-determination has offered Native Americans an opportunity to show that they can run their own institutions. However, it does not provide the flexibility or resource availability required for the efficient operation of a school. "...it allows the BIA bureaucracy to maintain indirect control... In PL 93-638 we see the codification of a series of Indian self-help schemes intended to provide not only the illusion of control but the illusion of competency" (Senese 91).

He believes that the most serious roadblock is the inability of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to disburse funds quickly to schools and administrations. "Any delay in the process of administering payments at the agency, area or bureau level results in a shortfall of cash at the site" (Senese 128). Without funding, the school cannot function.

Phyllis Young, a member of the American Indian Movement stated,

Aside from some cosmetic alterations like the inclusion of beadwork, traditional dance, basket weaving and some language classes, the curriculum taught in schools remained exactly the same, reaching exactly the same conclusions, indoctrinating children with exactly the same values as when the schools were staffed entirely by white people. Only now it was supposedly more credible to grassroots people, because people who were visibly Indian were doing the teaching and administering... You've got to hand it to them in a way. It's really a perfect system of colonization, convincing the colonized to colonize each other in the name of self-determination and liberation (Noriega 387)

Despite the criticism, self-determination through the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, has allowed Native American communities to reclaim their education. It is implicit in this doctrine, that even though The Onondaga Nation School and public schools apply for grants and help in administering education, the Onondaga Nation does not renounce any claims to their sovereignty. "The policies of self-determination and local control have led to the training and certification of Indian teachers and the development of local leadership through parent committees, school boards and tribal councils" (Reyhner 55).

These schools must meet State education standards but should also emphasize Native American culture. Merging these two goals has allowed communities to collaborate and work toward their greatest asset, the prosperity of their children (Malott 72). Research has shown that Native American students

perform better under Native American teachers. These teachers become role models students and raise sensitivity and awareness among other teachers (Reyhner 55).

While self-determination has had positive effects for on-reservation students, the Syracuse City School District hosts a large enough percentage of Native American students (Comprehensive Info Report), to warrant federal attention and recognition.

Furthermore, due to the limitations of on-reservation schooling such as funding, increased parental involvement, many parents send their children to State public schools for ease. Moreover, despite the Onondaga Nation School's intentions, according to a study done by city-data research, ONS students were below State standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics at almost every grade level (City-data). Due to these factors, parents may opt to send their children to schools in other school districts.

Furthermore, for students of non-Indian descent, living in close proximity to the Onondaga Nation, their education should be enriched by factual historical information about the formation of American, knowledge, exposure and cultural sensitivity to other minority groups within America. If the ultimate goal is really to "empower them to become full participants in their communities, the country, and the world" (NYS Curriculum Standards) all students in public schools across America are in need of reform.

Due to this, the tenant self-determination raises an awkward, chronic question. If Native American communities are achieving locally controlled education, “What is it that the Indians want?” (Meyer 105)

According to Bill Pensoneau, former president of the National Indian Youth Council, what the Indians want is ‘survival.’ In his view, it is not individual survival that is of primary concern. What is at stake is the survival of Indian peoples: the continued existence of distinct, independent, tribal communities. Among other things that means jobs, health care, functioning economies, good schools, a federal government that keeps its promises. (Meyer 105)

Essentially, what the Native American community wants is a nation that understands their history and cares about their well-being. Self-determination rose out of the Native American community’s final resolution not to believe in the promises of the federal government any longer.

The next section highlights critical educational reforms supported by leading activists and educators throughout the country and will suggest remedial actions that could attempt to heal this divide.

Chapter 6: Remedial Actions

The previous sections have illustrated that there is a great divide between the Onondaga Nation and the State Department of Education in terms of their definition of the quality of education. Fortunately, there are actions that can be taken to close the gap in understanding and to remedy this issue.

I. Reform of State and Federal Policy

The No Child Left Behind Act was intended to fix many of the social problems in our nation's schools and to individualize education for all children. However, this reform has led to further problems in schools. Perhaps instead of sweeping generalized programming, the State and Federal Departments of Education can reform traditional school practices that have created these problems and shift the culture that reinforces them. Studies have shown that low achievement in school was often linked to poor communication practices between teachers and students (Erikson, 1996; Heath, 1983; Michaels and Collins 1984; Philips 1972). This means that many problems arise purely because of the system and its inherent flaws.

One practice in need of reform is the excessive reliance on testing as the sole signifier of success in the classroom. Fern Cruz, a principal at P.S. 65 in New York City stated,

What happens after a time is that teachers start to judge their own performance solely by these scores, so they subordinate their own perceptions of their students to these numbers. Instead of teaching them to

function with autonomy and creativity, it teaches them dependency. This “thing” prevents real thinking. (Kozol 307)

Superintendents and school administrators who dislike these methods continue to accede to them because of the pressures brought to by boards of education. Principals of schools are under pressures to avoid drops in test scores. Furthermore, schools have already spent large sums of money to purchase scripted programs and train teachers. Schools have received a significant drop in funding over the past decade and administrators cannot afford to challenge the system.

Even the *New York Times* stated, “Rather than fight school segregation, members of the Bush administration claim that “they would like to see increased diversity in education. If that is indeed their goal, they should begin by coming up with a plan to reverse the present trend...” Instead, the administration “told minority parents that their child’s best change of attending a good college’ is to be found in segregated public schools – with alleged improvements” (Kozol 309). Furthermore, district policies regarding curriculum, testing, and school record-keeping allow schools to pass students around and eventually fall through the cracks (Lewis 2).

President Barak Obama has called America’s education policy “morally unacceptable” (Stout). At a press conference on March 10, 2009, President Obama pushed reforms for the public charter schools system and a merit-based system for teachers. He stated, even though a number of teachers are “doing an outstanding job under difficult circumstances,” states and school districts should

be able “to move bad teachers out of the classroom” (Stout). He also supported the idea of a longer school year and extended school days, but has yet to set goals for the nation’s public school system.

To accomplish this, New York State can play a more active role in the long-term development of their public schools by defining their view of education to the community and presenting a vision for the future. They could supplement this with evaluation and review of the curriculum on a frequent and regular basis.

New York State also can provide localized funding for alternative programs such as field trips and guest speakers to improve the accessibility of social activities for cities in close proximity to Nations. These actions have been taken in the past, but do not occur every year. Mr. Maynard, field coordinator for the Syracuse City School District curriculum, states that students have taken field trips to the Haudenosaunee Longhouse and have hosted guest lecturers, but they would like to offer these events on a regular basis.

II. Community Oriented Short-Term Change

These long-term reforms will require years of development and diligence to challenge the status-quo. President Obama is taking steps to produce this change, by bringing attention to the issue, but this impact will still take years to unfold. Furthermore, with the current economic downturn, New York State was impacted severely. The state is now operating with a massive budget deficit which is estimated to continue for the next two years (McNichol 2). The state currently may not have the ability to provide for many of these services.

Fortunately, as shown in previous sections, much of the responsibility for teaching is vested in local classrooms and teachers. There are several immediate actions that teachers can take to make progressive changes in education for Native American children. In fact, the success of local programming, training workshops, and collaboration between school districts may prove the only way to ameliorate this issue.

The Onondaga Community can work to get more Native American representatives on the local school board to work with the bureaucracy on the issue. Onondaga parents can also network to bring concentrated complaints to superintendents and officials in the State Department of Education. Professor of Education David Wright states, “The best way for Native Americans to influence educational policymaking may be to place representatives into school board, administrative, and teaching positions, which involves the notion of a representative bureaucracy” (Wright 20).

III. Providing Support for Students

Another way to influence what is being taught locally is to reach the teachers in the Syracuse City School District. Though the Onondaga Nation School holds workshops for teachers, the school district could invite Native American educators to their schools to give guidance to teachers on how to best educate Native American students. An Education Professor at the University of Michigan, Kathleen Collins, noted that teachers who have been successful in teaching often exhibit a pattern of behavior. Teachers generally, “believed that all students were capable of academic success,” “demonstrated a connectedness will

all of the students,” “developed a community of learners,” and “encouraged students to learn collaboratively and be responsible for one another” (Collins 179). Research has shown that when teacher’s changed their attitudes to teaching Native American students, the attitudes of other students, as well as the performance of Native American students, benefited.

Teachers can also take several steps to ensure that the classroom creates an environment of acceptance. What schooling does is to valorize...some values, perspectives, ways of speaking, and saying...and thus to render all other ways of life/thought/feelings/embodiment as invalid in comparison...Other ways are diluted, denied, distorted, above all deformed...” (Abu-Saad 28).

Many students feel that their knowledge is not honored and that schools actually prevent them from gaining knowledge. When students challenge teachers about a lesson, teachers often respond defensively and reject the student. When teachers truly cannot factually dispute the claim, they can challenge the student to explore their thinking and provide scholarly evidence to support their points. Taking these measures, created and supported by experts in the field of education, does not mean that the teacher must forgo learning the curriculum. These methods can be employed side-by-side as a means of engaging students to learn the material.

For the Onondaga Nation, Native American leaders in education have long supported a change in curriculum that reflects the historical experience, culture, and values of the local and regional Native communities (Fenelon 33), but other steps can be taken if the State remains hesitant to change the curriculum.

Teachers should become familiar with Native American cultures and ways, valuing their background as an important part of the way the student develops and learns, meeting the parents and engaging in the community, giving the students respect – showing that one culture is not superior to another (Gilliland 21).

Teachers should also include lessons on the contemporary relevance of Native American nations through topics such as Native language. Language and culture develop together. For Native American children, being forced to speak only English reinforces the idea prevalent in many schools that Native language and culture are of little or no value, effectively destroying the self-concept of many students (Gilliland 143). For all children, these techniques could be used to provide a deeper understanding of the culture.

Christensen believes that actions can also be taken for students of all races, by getting them to write about themselves and present their writing to the classroom. This makes the classroom a more comfortable place. She advocates writing about subjects such as, “Where I’m from,” “What my neighborhood looks like,” “Where my name came from,” “What I like about myself and my family.” She believes these writings make the student feel significant and cared about. In social studies, teachers can have their students write about their country of origin or heritage. This helps students talk to their parents about their unique history and present it to the class (Christensen 18). These tactics also serve to bridge the student’s home and school experiences (Abu-Saad 27).

Teachers who see success in the traditional model of teaching may be unwilling to change their methods. Schools often blame the students and

environment, students blame teachers and establishment, and students leave the school in desperation. (Haycock 3)

It is necessary to take reform this model because the traditional approach is not working for a countless number of students, especially those in low-income, minority communities. Taking this time to creatively incorporate new methods of teaching for students requires more hard work and creativity that could greatly impact the development, identity, and achievement of the student.

IV. Local initiatives

Some of these actions are taken by teachers in the Syracuse City School District. Currently the Onondaga Nation School holds workshops for local teachers to share lesson materials and ideas. The Onondaga Nation could extend these workshops and work with education students at universities and colleges throughout the area. This would educate the future generation of teachers.

Denise Waterman believes that they are extremely successful in reaching out to other districts. Also, the Lafayette School District provides classes to teach the Onondaga language in their schools. The Syracuse City School District relies more heavily on the Title VII program to educate the Native American students, rather than mandating a change of materials and teachings in the classroom.

Still, reforms in the curriculum have not been abandoned. The next wave of progressive education is the brokering of U.S. History through the use of source documentation. This cause has been pursued by Professors Jack Rossen, Chris Sperry and Brooke Hansen at Ithaca College in New York. These professors are developing a media literacy project that uses primary documents and images

to produce web-based lesson plans, called Project Look Smart. One issue they are specifically highlighting is the fourth grade module of education to include historical, obscured events such as the Clinton-Sullivan Native American genocide and the Haudenosaunee influence on the U.S. Constitution. The goal is to establish a debate on these topics using the “purest” source materials and documents and possibly contradict conventional historical texts, because so much of what is taught in schools has been disproved through recent academic research.

Through this project, Professor Jack Rossen is called into fourth grade classrooms and has found substantial interest in teaching about the Onondaga creation stories, cultural stories, and basic information about the Confederacy of Six Nations of the Haudenosaunee. Professor Rossen is now applying a second time for a grant through the New York State Legislature, rather than assembling several local school boards, where it is harder to attain funding. He is optimistic that this project will receive funding because Project Look Smart “has created quality materials, the need, and the initiative.”

Though Rossen remains optimistic, the impact of Project Look Smart has yet to be seen. In fact, through the past several years, the intensity of the fight for education has dwindled. Neal Powless, son of Chief Irving Powless, adds that it is not so much that the issue has gone away, but it is about, “having resources and the availability of people to fight each fight. There are so many different issues at so many different levels that we’re fighting the fight.”

Professor of Religion Phil Arnold believes a radical change in the curriculum is imperative, but states that after the failure of the Haudenosaunee

Curriculum in 1988, many grew tired of pushing for reforms. He believes that, nationally, more and more communities are seeing the enormous deficit in education. However, in order to achieve real reform New York State and the Onondaga must agree that multicultural education benefits all citizens of New York.

In the past decade, the internet has become the new medium for exchanging ideas among teachers and parents. Curriculums, lesson plans, craft activities, and ideas are freely traded among educators and independent text book creators, such as SUNY Cortland Professor Dr. Ellis McDowell-Lowden, Onondaga Nation School teacher, Bradley Powless, and the Office of Indian Education. Websites such as “City Search” have networked parents with questions about their child’s level of education. The internet has provided a means for those who cannot externally change the factors in the school district.

Denise Waterman states, “Education is a priority when Central New York as a community depends on each other for survival. We must work together to support land and resources. Only the power of working together will support each other.” In this sense, the efforts to change the systemic disappointments in education are not only a local conflict, but a national imperative.

In spite of all of these efforts of the local community and members of the State Department of Education, there are still obstacles in the way of a path to reform. There are no shared goals or objectives among all parties, nor is there really a shared understanding of the problem. The first step in identifying a problem and a means to a solution is to provide a vision that all parties can agree

to, agreeing on the things that stand in the way of achieving the vision, clarifying specific and tangible objectives that all parties agree to work toward, and identifying priorities that will be the focus of all the short-term efforts.

It is evident that any short-term reform will need to come from local leaders dedicated to changing the status-quo. This includes collaborative efforts between Onondaga Nation and Syracuse teachers and a commitment to hosting field trips or guest speakers regularly.

However, a greater problem persists in the bureaucracies Federal, State, and local governments. These institutions need to come together to reform education practices and commit to achieving certain goals in education. Perhaps all of these partial programs, such as initiatives in some school districts and not others, are part of the problem. These partial programs and initiatives allow many people to have an illusion of doing something, but no one seems to provide clear objectives and definitive milestones at any level

The educational system will only be reformed in the future, through a clear imperative, with leadership by the State and Federal Departments of Education and the Syracuse community to finally take steps to resolve this issue.

There are no existing, definitive models in which a dominant culture has expended significant resources in educating a native culture. Resolving this issue might be a very difficult and revolutionary circumstance in the history of the world, one that may have no historical parallel and one where perhaps no easy solution exists.

Written Summary

This intent of this paper is to research Native American education in the Syracuse City School District. This paper examines the relationship of the Onondaga Nation and the New York State Department of Education.

The Onondaga Nation is a Native American Nation that neighbors the City of Syracuse. The Nation is one of a Confederacy of Six Native American Nations in New York State called the Haudenosaunee.

Native American students across the United States have extremely low graduation rates in city public schools. The Onondaga Nation attributes this to policies of marginalization and insensitive curriculum in public school. This idea is supported by education scholars nation-wide. Many theories have been proposed that minority students often suffer from a lack of self-esteem in the classroom due to culturally insensitive teaching methods and materials. In fact, it has been proven that a multicultural education has positive effects for students of all races by fostering a welcoming classroom environment.

Furthermore, the Onondaga believe that public schools teach false information in school and that all students in New York State should have knowledge about the history, contributions to society, culture, and contemporary relevance of their Nation.

I originally engaged in this project as part of an internship at Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation. My task was to investigate this claim in the Syracuse City School District. I interviewed local Syracuse City school teachers, Education

Professors from around New York State, members of the Superintendent's office for Syracuse City schools, an Onondaga Nation School teacher, a member of the Akwesasne Mohawk, a representative from the New York State Department of Education, and the head of the Title VII program in Syracuse City schools. I read over 50 books and articles detailing the issue to attain a greater understanding. I also took a class titled Haudenosaunee and New York State Relations in the Native American Studies department of Syracuse University. From this I was able to piece together the narrative and the turbulent emotions behind the issue.

The Onondaga Nation is contracted with the Lafayette School District so much of the attention and money to teach Onondaga students is appropriated to that school district. However, Syracuse has a substantial enough Native American population to also warrant federal attention. Many parents of Native American students feel that the education is inadequate and take their children out of Syracuse City Schools.

The first chapter highlights the long and arduous history of Native American and federal government relations. Since the colonists arrived on the continent, the Onondaga have been After the American Revolution, the United States government and the State of New York engaged in a power struggle over Native American affairs. Schools were established in New York to assimilate Native Americans and gain access to their land. This continued until the Civil Rights Era forced governments to abandon these policies.

The second chapter supports the claim that even though the Onondaga Nation maintains its tribal sovereignty, but in fact, the federal government,

through a history of Supreme Court cases has the obligation to teach all Native American students

The third chapter introduces the Syracuse City School District and all of the key players within the district. One major player is the federal Department of Education. The federal Department of Education has greatly ceded much its role in education to the States. It now provides general curriculum standards, guidelines and much of the funding for public schools. However, George W. Bush passed the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 which has greatly impacted the actions of state and local schools by imposing harsh restrictions on schools. Schools are evaluated on the scores of the Regents Examinations. Funding and appropriations for schools are entirely dependent on these scores. Therefore, teachers and administrators are work to prepare the students for the Regents Examination, rather than teach a broader array of material.

Another key player is the New York State Department of Education. The State delegates much of what is taught in the classroom to local teachers and administrators, but controls the overarching standards and guidelines for what is taught in each grade level and administers the Regents Examination, the yearly evaluation for student performance. The State Department of Education contracted with the Haudenosaunee in the late 1970s to change the social studies curriculum, but these reforms were abandoned when the two parties were unable to broker a fair assessment of New York State history. The state issued a new social studies curriculum in 1994 which has not been evaluated since that time

The third key player in this issue is the Syracuse City Schools. Syracuse City School District is a low income school district that lacks appropriate funding to engage in many supplemental programming. Though Local teachers have a lot of latitude and discretion in their classroom issues they are especially to the No Child Left Behind regulations in order to guarantee federal funding. Native Americans comprise 3% of the Syracuse student population which qualifies the Syracuse School District for the Title VII after school supplemental programs. Established by a federal act in 1975, Title VII is a supplemental after school program designed for Native American students in public schools.

The final key player is the Onondaga Nation. The Onondaga Nation takes a firm stance that the teachings in the social studies curriculum are inadequate for students. Many Native American parents have taken their children out of Syracuse City Schools. The Onondaga Nation maintains their status as a fully sovereign nation and hosts the Onondaga Nation School, a small elementary school located on the Onondaga Nation. The Onondaga Nation School is located within the Lafayette School District and receives federal funding. This school provides elementary education taught by Onondaga activists and educators for children on the reservation. Essentially, what the Onondaga community wants is a nation that understands their history and cares about their well-being.

The fourth chapter suggests that New York State engage in progressive, multicultural education. Both the state and federal departments of education already advocate a multicultural view of education, although many in the community feel that this is not being achieved. Their commitment to multicultural

education also means that they have also given themselves this obligation of teaching Native American students and incorporating Native American events into the curriculum.

The fifth chapter examines the goals of the Onondaga Nation and how their struggle for education fits into their goals as a society. Since the Civil Rights Era, the Onondaga Nation, and Native American Nations nation-wide, have supported an idea called Self-Determination. This idea maintains that Native American nations are fully sovereign nations and want full control over their children's education. However, most nations rely on federal funding. The Onondaga Nations believe that the federal government has the obligation to help their Nation, and that this does not contradict or lessen their autonomy and national sovereignty.

The sixth chapter looks at possible remedies. There seems to not be an impetus for change at the state or federal level, though the social studies curriculum is up for review this year at the New York State Department of Education. Hope for the future in the short-term exists at the local level by continuing with workshops, parental involvement, getting more Native American representation on school boards, and possibly the formation of specialty education efforts that could research and work consistently with teachers. Local teachers, have made students more aware of the issues of the Onondaga Nation by incorporating newspaper articles, field trips, and speakers into regular lesson plans.

From examining all perspectives of the issue and factors involved I have found that the social studies curriculum is lacking in its treatment of the Haudenosaunee and the Onondaga Nation. Native American subjects are taught in conjunction with the lesson on the American Revolution. The textbook's brief mention of New York State includes a reference to the Iroquois, the colonial French name of the Haudenosaunee.

Despite best intentions, many local communities continue to use textbooks and teach the same outdated material year after year. The demands of the Onondaga Nation, that culturally relevant materials be better incorporated into the public school curriculum, are not only warranted but are in keeping with the State's own affirmed goals and mission. The fact that the efforts of Native American educators, parents, and students within the school district are going unnoticed and unfulfilled serves to inflame the distrust and disappointment in the public school system.

Furthermore, the brutal history of assimilation has contributed to a cultural aversion to Western Education. Native American communities still feel a lingering fear of the U.S. government. The New York State Department of Education and the federal Department of Education state that they are working to correct these problems, but no significant change has been made at the local level. This has obviously contributed to the mistrust of New York State and federally funded public schools today.

A greater problem is the miscommunication between the State Department of Education and the Onondaga Nation. I believe the State Department of

Education has the intentions to incorporate Haudenosaunee perspectives in the local curriculum. However, the Department seems to have no clear leadership or policy action to make this happen. Due to the State's slow response, many Onondaga feel that the State plainly does not care and will not take efforts to bridge these cultural miscommunications.

This issue transcends education. Education is a microcosm of the problems that exist between Native American communities and the federal and state governments, whether they be religious freedom, land claim rights, or tax exemption. All of the interviews with advocates of the Onondaga Nation and members of the Onondaga Nation have linked education issues inextricably with land rights, environmental problems, and the struggle for survival.

Efforts to improve education would be a triumph in relations between the two parties because, in effect, states that the United States government is invested in the future of the Native American people and that the government will do what it can to aid in their survival. In this sense, the successes in education would be monumental and the disappointments and bureaucratic missteps are devastating.

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Appendix i

Civic Report

No. 31 November 2002

Public School Graduation Rates in the United States

Table 7: Ranking of Native American Graduation Rates by State		
Rank	STATE	Native American Graduation Rate, 2000
1	ALABAMA	86%
2	ILLINOIS	76%
3	OKLAHOMA	68%
4	TEXAS	63%
5	CALIFORNIA	61%
6	LOUISIANA	58%
7	NORTH DAKOTA	56%
8	WISCONSIN	54%
9	COLORADO	52%
10	NEW MEXICO	51%
11	MONTANA	50%
12	NEW YORK	49%
13	ALASKA	49%
14	OREGON	49%
15	NEVADA	48%
16	MINNESOTA	44%
17	NEBRASKA	40%
	ARIZONA	NA
	IDAHO	NA
	KANSAS	NA
	KENTUCKY	NA
	MICHIGAN	NA
	NEW HAMPSHIRE	NA
	NEW JERSEY	NA
	NORTH CAROLINA	NA
	OHIO	NA
	SOUTH CAROLINA	NA
	UTAH	NA
	VERMONT	NA
	WASHINGTON	NA
	National	57%

Taken from the Manhattan Institute 2002 Civic Report on Native American Graduation Rate

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/cr_31_table_7.htm