

Coming Full Circle Linguistically: The Critical Role of LCMND in Preserving North America's Indigenous Languages (Case in Point: Dakota)
Bruce Maylath – North Dakota State University

At the 2008 LCMND conference, I presented a paper in response to the keynote address that Michael Halloran delivered in 2007. In my response (Maylath), I highlighted the importance of the frontier experience in shaping the language and memory of European-Americans as they forcibly took vast expanses of this continent for themselves. In particular, I directed listeners to historian Patrick Griffin's recent book, *American Leviathan*, and its investigation of the American Revolution as played out on the United States' frontier West, which at that time was western Pennsylvania and the Ohio River Valley. Griffin exposes the roots of American exceptionalism in this period and place, and he traces the attitudes that emerged—attitudes that led directly to federal and state policies designed to exterminate the sustenance, culture, and language of Native peoples and even the people themselves.

My 2008 paper exposed how the frontier mentality and attitudes of American exceptionalism were being perpetuated in the Republican presidential campaigns led by Senator John McCain and Alaska Governor Sarah Palin. This current article, by contrast, describes how North Dakota State University has taken a step toward expunging the earlier mentality and attitudes by placing the culture and language of its namesake people prominently into its curriculum.

Although its conference sessions are usually held in English and French, the dominant languages of the region's invading peoples, the meetings of the Linguistic Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota (renamed at its 2009 annual meeting as the Language and Culture Circle of Manitoba and North Dakota) have played a critical role in fostering the preservation of at least one of the region's indigenous languages and bear the promise of continuing to do so in the future. LCMND played a crucial role in 2007 in initiating the Dakota Studies program at North Dakota State University. What follows is the history of this endeavor, one which might serve as a model for LCMND and native language preservation efforts in the future.

Both formally and informally, conferences serve the purpose of bringing persons together in common interests to further their goals. The 2007 meeting of the LCMND did so magnificently when it featured panels on Dakota language and tribal culture. Both the panels themselves and the audiences that came to hear them brought together those interested in reinforcing the preservation efforts for Dakota language and culture. As a result, those with this shared interest met for lunch on the conference's last day to discuss what might be done next.

The outgrowth of this lunch meeting was a two-year effort to bring an instructor of Dakota language to North Dakota State University. However, the results at the end of two years went far beyond the initial objective of helping to preserve the language by offering it at NDSU. Rather, with the recruitment of Dr. Clifford Canku, who retired in 2009 from Sisseton-Wahpeton College in South Dakota, NDSU was able to offer,

through three departments, an expanse of Dakota Studies courses, including the initial two-semester sequence of beginning Dakota language, Dakota Tribal History, Dakota Religious Studies, and Dakota Tribal Culture. Further, with the help of the Office of Residence Life and the Multicultural Student Services Office, he took an apartment on campus, conducted programs with Native American themes in the residence halls, and met with students periodically in the campus's Multicultural Center. The 2007 LCMND was the fulcrum on which all subsequent efforts were leveraged and achieved success.

This is not to say that all has been accomplished. NDSU has taken a step and has many more to take. Future objectives include adding more courses, especially in language. Eventually NDSU would like to be able to offer four years of Dakota Language courses. NDSU's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences is also working on assembling a minor in Native American Studies, for which nearly all the courses already exist, with a Dakota emphasis one of the earliest options.

In the long term, NDSU would like to add similar offerings for North Dakota and northern Minnesota's other Native languages: Ojibwe, Hidatsa, Arikara, Mandan. The task will not be easy: 2008 saw the death of the last fluent speaker of Mandan ("Last"). This was tragic and cannot be allowed to continue to happen with other languages. However, it need not mean the language can never be retrieved and revived. It has been done before, most notably with Hebrew.

Ojibwe, as you may know, can more readily be added. The language, called Anishinabe by tribal members, has many more fluent native speakers, not only in Minnesota but especially in Canada. It is taught in schools not only on reservations like Red Lake and Fond du Lac but also larger mainstream school districts, like Lakehead, the school district for Thunder Bay, Ontario ("Aboriginal Education"). At the college level, it is taught at Rainy River Community College in International Falls, the University of Minnesota—both the Twin Cities and Duluth campuses, and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

Some Native American tribes are doing their best to revive their languages through language immersion schools for their youth, starting with kindergarten. Perhaps the best example is in Browning, Montana, where the Blackfeet Nation's Piegan Institute runs the K-8 Cuts Wood School completely in the tribe's native language, Pikuni ("Cuts Wood School").

Most striking in bringing all parties together to make Dakota Studies a reality has been the acceptance and enthusiasm from all quarters. The response heard over and over was, "It's time." If NDSU is indicative of larger developments in society, there seems to have been a sea change in mentality and attitudes among European Americans. The change has been emerging gradually over many decades, but they were becoming evident even before the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, in which the Obama-Biden ticket won and the McCain-Palin ticket lost. Certainly, there are those who cling fiercely to their self-image as settlers on the western frontier. Certainly, many of them have become shrill as they sense that they are now a shrinking minority. A growing and strengthening

majority, however, has given clear signals that it values a multiplicity of cultures and languages, including and especially North America's indigenous languages.

As an example, we can look to the city of Bemidji, Minnesota. Long known among Ojibwes as a town with a deeply racist white population, in recent years it seems to have made a 180-degree turn. In July 2009, Bemidji businesses made news when 20 joined an Ojibwe signage program, posting signs in their store windows, on their restroom doors, on their menus (Robertson). They are truly committed to making the Ojibwe language ubiquitous, not only as signs of welcome to their many Ojibwe customers but also as an expression of local identity and pride for the residents of Bemidji. Asked why they are leading this effort, two white business leaders said it is not only to welcome Indian customers but to teach non-Ojibwe-speaking customers a little of the language (Robertson).

This small example should not be overlooked. Communities in peril survive and thrive when they are assisted by larger, neighboring communities. Historically, it has not happened sufficiently when Native or First Peoples have been threatened. However, emerging evidence suggests that we are seeing a fundamental shift, one that could lead to a revival similar to the ones that in the preceding two centuries saw the Czech language, threatened by German, halt its disappearance and then flourish, and later saw the same with Hebrew.

An example of such evidence comes again from Minnesota, where, despite one of the worst budget shortfalls in living memory, the legislature voted in May 2009 to dedicate \$2,000,000 in state funds to help the state's tribes preserve and teach their languages (Nelson). Interestingly, these funds came via a constitutional amendment, approved in a 2008 statewide referendum, to impose a sales tax of 3/8% to go solely toward programs to improve and maintain the outdoors and culture.

When state-level institutions get involved, the results can be impressive. Montana provides one example, where the state government mandated that the history and culture of its seven Native American tribes be part of its public schools' K–12 curricula (Zehr). However, the best example is Hawaii, where the state government started Hawaiian language immersion schools in the 1980s. With federal funding added, starting in 1989, the number of schools and students expanded. I had the opportunity to visit one of the earliest immersion preschools on Maui in 1991. Thus, it was thrilling to see the news that the first high school class has graduated, having taken all their schooling, K-12, in Hawaiian (O'Brien, Enomoto).

Changes are finally happening on the national level, too: In 2009, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution apologizing to American Indians for years of “ill-conceived policies” and acts of violence by U.S. citizens (“U.S. Senate”). Sponsored by Sen. Dorgan of North Dakota and Sen. Brownback of Kansas, the resolution was attached to a defense spending bill—apparently with no sense of historical irony.

Most importantly, however, for Dakota Studies initiative at NDSU was its coinciding with the university president's Tribal College initiative, which itself was an outgrowth of his establishment of a Division of Equity, Diversity, and Global Outreach. During the summer of 2008, a delegation from NDSU, led by the president, visited every tribal college in North Dakota. Since then, administrators from the tribal colleges have been visiting NDSU to negotiate articulation agreements with the university in 2+2 arrangements. Additionally, Robert Pieri, an NDSU professor of mechanical engineering and a longtime unofficial liaison to tribal colleges, was appointed as NDSU's full-time professional liaison. As administrators have arrived from Cankdeska Cikana Community College at Spirit Lake and Sitting Bull College at Standing Rock, their delight on hearing about NDSU's Dakota Studies courses has been palpable. My hope is that, in the next few years, the campus will work together with Dr. Canku and his language classes to create campus signage in Dakota, along the lines that the businesses in Bemidji have modeled for us with Ojibwe.

LCMND conference panels devoted to indigenous languages dovetail with First Peoples' language preservation efforts, exemplified by the annual Lakota/Dakota/Nakota Language Summit, launched in 2008 (Carlow). For NDSU in particular, we would like to expand course offerings to include other indigenous languages and cultures so that a minor in Native American Studies can be offered with emphases. For LCMND member institutions—and indeed for academic institutions wherever the preservation of native languages is a concern—we hope that our discussions and the model now operating at NDSU can further the goal of not only preserving but expanding First Peoples' languages and cultures and scholarly attention to them. With the help and attention of LCMND, indigenous languages in Manitoba and North Dakota, and even South Dakota, Minnesota, and Ontario stand a better chance of being preserved and maintained.

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