

Victoria Moreira

Professor Weaver

English 1102M

07 December 2010

When signing up for my 1102 multicultural class with Professor Weaver, I had only a basic idea of the American Indian journey—the elementary impression that Squanto helped the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock to survive their first winter and that many later suffered and died on the Trail of Tears. In this portfolio, you will see how my ideas and knowledge of American Indian life have developed since the beginning of the semester. Progressively throughout this portfolio, elements of their history before and after they were forced to move on reservations can be seen through each of my exhibits. I did this to share the knowledge I have gained of this culture with my audience. I specifically chose the elements of this portfolio to show how my perspectives of American Indian culture have progressively deepened.

My callow knowledge of American Indians limited my perspective on their culture. My bare frame of knowledge for these people initially came from my AP United States history class in high school. There, I learned that Native Americans, as a whole, suffered while their land was taken away by the United States and were forced to move out West. I then learned that these people were then forced onto reservations and were later provided “welfare” by the United States government. I learned the straight “facts” from a dry and biased opinion—what my history book told me was important. This impersonal approach left out much of the human perspective of the individuals involved. For example, I did not want to accept that between 2500 to 6000 Indians died on the Trail of Tears. I wanted to know about the men, women, and children—not the collective group called “Indians”—that were forced to endure this brutal trial. The pages of my text book forgot to inform me of the actual adversity that American Indian *people* endured. In this class, however, I learned about these people on an individual

basis.

This course also gave me another outlook on American Indian life in the times of Indian Removal—different from what my earlier history class had taught me. In the course of the *Reacting to the Past* Game set in 1835 that my multicultural class played, I not only learned the history behind Cherokee removal but also the personal struggles that Cherokee people specifically endured while we settled the central issue of Indian removal. In the process of the game, three main factions were involved: the Ross faction (those opposed to removal), the Ridge Faction (those for removal), and the White Faction (those also for removal). Described in my second essay, for example, as I played the role of Elijah Hicks in class, the chief editor of the Cherokee newspaper entitled *The Phoenix*, I understood the complexity of removal among the Cherokee people. As I argued among my own friends in class of the opposing faction, I understood what it felt like to be divided even among friends on an issue that would affect an entire people. Additionally in this game, my viewpoint on Cherokee removal was further shaped by a special project I took on. I chose to end my portfolio with this project as my Wildcard because it best represented all of the varying arguments that helped shape my opinions on Removal. In the game, I was asked to put together a full-length edition of *The Phoenix*. In this edition, I was asked to collect articles from the people in both the Ross and Ridge factions, including a personal editorial that I wrote to the Cherokee people. This newspaper was a collection of viewpoints on the central question at hand on whether the Cherokee People should be forced to leave their home. In this full-length edition, I was forced, because of a vote in our game, to publish both faction's viewpoints on removal. While I tried to show that my faction was the most persuasive, the arguments from the opposing faction were also very convincing: I could see how many at the time were torn about this delicate issue. Further into the gameplay as I read the primary documents that consisted of court cases, letters, editorials, and essays on the topic of removal, I began to understand the varying facets that came with the central question of removal—like the way bribes were taken by some of the

Cherokee for votes among the Council and how the role of a third party White Faction had much influence over the division between the two majorities. The game play and the literature we read shaped a significant part of my full comprehension of the individual Native American's attitude and culture.

As demonstrated in my portfolio, throughout the course of this semester I also gained a better understanding of modern American Indian culture. In my first revised essay, I compare the struggle of identity among modern American Indians as they wander between the reservation life and the new city life. In this essay, I organize my paper based on the contrasting perspectives of the protagonists in both Nila NorthSun's "Up & Out" and in Nora Naranjo-Morse's "Mud Woman's First Encounter with the World of Money and Business" and the way they navigate in each of the worlds. As depicted in the polished copy of this essay, each character responds to each world in a different way. Mud Woman is left vulnerable to the unfamiliar business world after leaving her treasured reservation life, and NorthSun's speaker nostalgically turns back to the reservation life after trying out the trite city life. In these two works, I can understand the struggle of the individual as each tries to assimilate into a foreign culture. Before taking this class, I had never mulled over the gravity of the struggle that American Indians face today. As they try to hold on to their traditional culture, the city life begins to collide with everything they used to know. They have trouble fully adapting and committing to one world. Other short stories and poems that we read written by many native people caused a shift in my perspective. I was finally getting a personal viewpoint on Native American culture. Slowly, as I began to read works like Sherman Alexie's satirical poem on typical stereotypes of American Indians entitled "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel," my previous misconceptions and images of Native Americans began to crumble—I began to abandon my former image of "Indians" as the collective group I had once learned about in my AP US history class and began to see them as individuals with a story to share. As I explored the in-depth history that belonged to American Indians, I began to feel for

the main characters in each of these short stories and poems. This course effectively showed me yet another perspective on modern American Indian life that I had not seen before.

Overall, my portfolio reflects how I changed my entire viewpoint of American Indian culture. This class has broadened my ideas and opinions about this beautiful people. I now know that history from textbooks is more complex than it seems—superficial facts alone cannot describe an entire culture that has many times been left forgotten. I purposefully placed each exhibit in this portfolio so that you can see the progression of ways my perspective has deepened. Through this class I was able to explore a great Nation that I had never really understood.