Student Activism in an Age of Cultural Diversity

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of 1990 presented such an opportunity to them and they reached out and grabbed hold with all their might. McMackin was asked to deliver the graduation speech that year at Mills and her comments spoke to the kind of emotion that often drives student demonstrators: “Emotion is not a weak quality. It’s passion, and passion more than logic leads to change.” For McMackin, passion for deeply held convictions can turn defeat into victory.

In a hidden cranny in a small courtyard near the Mills College Student Union stands a bronze sculpture of a woman standing straight and proud, head and arms raised to the sky. The seven-foot-tall statue is the work of Roberta Weir, a 1986 graduate of Mills. The sculpture captures the image of a proud woman at her moment of triumph. Weir’s work became the symbol of the strike of 1990 and its image was often depicted by students along with the phrase “strong women, proud women.” Like Weir’s statue, the Mills College strike of 1990 is a monument to women’s power and pride.
family, my cousins look up to me. And the thing is that if they take the waiver away, my cousins will not have a way to go to college. . . . I think most people will just feel like college is not for them. College is too much trouble. They don't have the resources without the waiver.” And Windstorm, a first-year student studying marketing, saw the tuition waiver as a key program for improving the educational attainment of American Indians. Without such programs, she believed, tribes throughout the state would continue to suffer economically. For Lula Brewer and Hanna Windstorm, Governor Engler’s assault on the waiver program was one more example of legislative betrayal by people who make agreements and then forsake them at the state or federal government's convenience. The general feeling between Brewer and Windstorm was that if the government can break treaties whenever they please, then they are not worth the paper they are written on.

Sammy Walker, a junior, also discussed Engler’s actions in terms of a language of government betrayal. “It showed once again that breaking treaties is something that has lasted for two hundred years in this nation. Everybody looks at it and says that violating treaties was something that was done in the past. That treaties were only broken back in the late nineteenth century. And that it doesn’t happen today. But it does happen today. It happens all the time. It is happening right now and nothing has been done about it . . . . So most of what would be called ‘liberal America’ say they are outraged by the treatment of Native Americans and they speak about it as if it all happened in the past. It is happening right now and there is no outcry.” To Walker, Engler’s efforts represented just one more broken promise to pierce the hopes of his people.

Because of his position on the tuition waiver, Engler had clearly become the primary antagonist and the target of student outrage and counterattacks. Walker held little back in discussing the governor. “As far as I am concerned Engler is an evil, evil man. He is evil personified. He is a political animal.” Walker felt that Engler simply wanted to take the money from the state’s poorest—American Indians—and then give a tax break to the middle and upper classes. Because many Indians do not vote, Walker supposed that Engler knew little damage could be done to his political support. He imagined what Engler was thinking: “What are Natives to me? Do they vote? No, for the most part. They don’t go out to the polls. So what do I have to lose? I have nothing to lose and I have everything to gain. I can gain [$3 million] for the budget. I don’t lose anything politically. What do I care if it hurts somebody?”

As the 1995 spring semester came to a close, most of the more than one hundred MSU American Indian students headed home for the summer unsure of what their future held. After much debate and politicking between Governor Engler and members of the state legislature, the tuition payments for the 1994–95 year finally had been approved, but the governor was making no guarantees about the future. At the close of the school year, Paul Dearhouse was finishing up his last year of college and hoping to get his degree in material science and engineering the following year. He had been supported by the waiver program and was skeptical about what the future held for himself and others within the Native community at MSU. “I would say that the attitude was one of hopelessness. Because a lot of people, including myself, were feeling like ‘What can we do that would influence their thinking in the capital?’ You know. . . . What kind of contact do they have with students on a daily basis? What do they know about us? Why should they even care about the waiver program or our people’s struggles? . . . There was a lot of despair. It’s like ‘Damn you Engler!’ He is really coming after us. . . . So I assumed that he would just kill it off.”

Lula Brewer, Hanna Windstorm, Sammy Walker, and Paul Dearhouse saw the academic year come to a depressing halt as they battled feelings of resentment, anger, and uncertainty. Contributing to their emotional state was an attitude among many of their fellow MSU students that American Indians did not deserve “special” treatment. Indian students found themselves quietly walking away from conversations so as not to stir more bitterness as they overheard negative comments from their peers. Maintaining positive relations was important, and confronting others about their lack of knowledge and understanding of the situation was difficult. But more than a few students were assertive enough to challenge others to learn the history of the waiver. “If they only knew why the waiver was created in the first place, then maybe they wouldn’t be so quick to condemn it,” said Angie Shinso, a sophomore in mathematics during the 1994–95 school year. She saw rallies and demonstrations as tools for educating other students about the tuition waiver and its significance to the Native population. Shinso explained that the key to their struggle would be to gain support from the people and from other MSU students. The only way this could be accomplished was by telling everybody about the program and its history: “Let everybody know. Educate them. . . . Once people find out what the real reason is—why we have the tuition waiver—they will support us.”
In 1934, Governor William Comstock approved the transfer of lands from the federal Indian School at Mount Pleasant, a small community about fifty miles north of the state capital of Lansing. In exchange for the property, the state of Michigan was to provide free education for Native residents throughout the state. In a letter addressed to the Honorable Harold L. Ickes, Secretary of the Interior, Governor Comstock acknowledged the following: “As Governor of the State, in accepting this grant [the Indian School and property at Mount Pleasant], I acknowledge the condition that the State of Michigan will receive and care for (in state institutions) Indian residents within the state on entire equality with persons of other races and without cost to the federal government.” The letter confirmed the responsibility of the state to “receive and care for” American Indian students. At the time of Comstock’s signing of the agreement, education for Native students simply meant providing free transportation from reservations to the nearest school. In the 1920s, few rural residents of Michigan, including Anglos, went much further than the eighth grade. Consequently, at that time the “free education” agreement was not applied to postsecondary education.

William LeBlanc, Executive Director on Indian Affairs with the state of Michigan, highlighted the recent history of what had come to be known as the Comstock Agreement. He explained that in 1964 Michigan Governor George Romney appointed a task force to study American Indians within the state. The task force presented a report on the “Indian problem” to the governor, which eventually led to the creation of the Michigan Commission on Indian Affairs in 1965. Governor Romney charged the commission with two concerns: to focus on the (1) health and (2) education needs of American Indians throughout the state. As part of the latter concern, the commission was to clarify the role of the state in supporting higher education for the Native population.

The commission eventually funded the Touche Ross Report, which sparked an interest in reevaluating the “free education” article within the Comstock Agreement. The Touche Ross Report revealed the abysmally low socioeconomic standing of the state’s American Indians and noted that only 3 percent of urban and 2 percent of rural Indians had completed college. Despite the state’s having received federal funds over the years for the education of American Indians, it was quite apparent that that responsibility had not been taken seriously. As a consequence, in 1976, under the sponsorship of State Senator Jackie Vaughn III and with the support of Indians throughout the state, Republican Governor William Milliken signed into law Michigan Public Act 174, which recognized the state’s historic obligation (due to the Comstock Agreement) to educate Native students. Two years later, greater clarity was provided as the state legislators passed Michigan Public Act No. 505, which reads as follows: “A public state community or public junior college, public college, or public university shall waive tuition for any North American Indian who qualifies for admission as a full-time, part-time, or summer school student, and is a legal resident of the state for not less than 12 consecutive months.” The act went on to define a qualifying Indian as any person who is not less than one-quarter Indian as certified by the person’s tribal association and verified by the Michigan Commission on Indian Affairs. The act of 1976 and the revisions of 1978 are generally referred to as the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program (MITWP).

From Governor Engler’s perspective, the tuition waiver program is simply a legislative act subject to revision. Furthermore, like many conservatives around the state, Engler sees it as an entitlement program that should not exist. Opposing Engler are many liberals who see the program as falling in line with the philosophical ideals of affirmative action. However, both arguments anger many of the Native students at Michigan State who see the waiver neither as an entitlement nor as a part of the state’s commitment to affirmative action. Simply stated, they view the waiver program as part of an official arrangement representing a legal and moral obligation of the state to its Native population. For them, the waiver program is legislatively rooted in the Comstock Agreement and therefore should not be restructured without serious discussion involving their input and approval. American Indian students complain that many citizens around the state fail to recognize the historic relevance of the exchange of property at Mount Pleasant. The land exchanged was permanently given up, and therefore what was offered in return should be just as permanent. Additionally, in claiming the site of the federal boarding school for Indians, the state assumed the responsibility for the education of American Indians in Michigan, a responsibility thus relinquished by the federal government. This meant an end to the federal practice of shipping Indians off to boarding schools.

For nearly twenty years, fifteen thousand students who were members of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan, Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, Hannahville Indian Community, Lac Vieux Desert Indian Community, and Bay Mills Indian Com-
munity attended public colleges and universities throughout the state with the financial support of the tuition waiver. In 1993, for example, 2,390 students attended Michigan colleges under the tuition waiver program amounting to $2,605,289 of state funding. Northern Michigan University had the largest enrollment of American Indian students with 179. Lansing Community College was next with 160 students. Michigan State University, with 111 students enrolled in the program, had the seventh highest total. Although these numbers are certainly not extremely large, they nonetheless would be cut significantly if the waiver program were eliminated.

**The Pros and Cons**

Native students at Michigan State and Lansing Community College and the other Michigan public colleges and universities survived Engler's 1994-95 attempt to end the waiver program, but in the fall of 1995 they returned to campus to face a renewed effort on the governor's part. In the summer of 1995, Governor Engler sent out a warning shot for those students returning to school: "As Michigan public colleges and universities begin the 1995-96 school year, they must understand that I will not support further appropriations to reimburse them for tuition waived for Native American students." In fact, the 1996 Executive Budget proposed by Engler and submitted to the legislature in February of 1995 excluded the tuition waiver program entirely. Engler offered four reasons why he did not support the program. First, he argued that it discriminated against other minorities, such as African Americans, who are not eligible for the waiver. Engler's spokesperson, John Truscott, commented that Engler wants to end the program because he believes it is unfair. "There are a lot of minority groups that should have this kind of program. Why should Native Americans be singled out? He believes that everyone should be treated equally." Maureen McNulty, press secretary for the Michigan Department of Management and Budget, supported Engler's position: "This isn't about keeping education away from American Indians. It's about giving equality to all students."

A second reason Engler gave for not supporting the program is what he perceived as potential abuse of the program. Administration officials have expressed concern that the tuition waiver program is "the only state-funded scholarship program that has no limits on enrollment or expense, nor a means to limit funding to the most needy." State Representative Timothy Walberg called the proposed cutting of the program long overdue because it operates "without any checks or balances. There was no way to ensure that the applicants really were Indians." A third reason often given was that the financial situation for American Indians had changed for the better as a result of extensive gambling revenue obtained from reservation casinos. And fourth, the governor believed that the most needy of the current recipients of the tuition waiver would be able to replace the waiver with other state scholarships which Engler had proposed be increased by almost 10 percent.

Once the semester resumed, MSU American Indian students, joined by faculty, staff, and community members, were quick to counter Engler's offensive. In a variety of public forums, the students pointed out that if the program were need based, it might only cover the very poorest Indians around the state, and the reality is that many people who do not qualify for financial aid (such as part-time students) still have a difficult time making it through college. For American Indians, who already have such low college attendance rates and high attrition rates, the added financial burden is just one more barrier. And besides, as many students were quick to point out, the waiver is not simply a legislative program—it is part of an agreement involving the exchange of land. A sign held at the demonstration at the capitol the previous spring stressed this point: "Give us the waiver or give us the land."

Pat Dyer-Deckrow, a part-time graduate student supported by the waiver, had strong feelings about the program: "Because it is an obligation that was supposed to be kept, we should never have had to take out student loans for any educational programs at all. It was supposed to be an exchange for the resources and not just the land itself. . . . My grandmother is ninety-two years old. She never had anything paid for by the state. No education. Nothing. So somebody paid for us, for our generation and others to follow so that we would have something."

Contemporary American Indian students see education as a solution to the economic woes of their communities, and the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver Program is obviously part of that solution. Hanna Windstorm, for example, believes that education is one of the keys to solving tribal problems and conflicts. She argued that tribal politics often get in the way of forming a unified front to fight governmental efforts to end programs such as the tuition waiver: "Education is going to bring us out of . . . I don't want to say poverty, but it can change our economic status. It can help rework the tribal system. Like hiring people because
they know what they are doing. People should not be hired because their family member knows somebody who knows somebody who will get them a job in the tribe. Education is going to change the whole workings of the tribal network. . . . I think if you just get really good people who know what they are doing and are dedicated to a cause, then things would change as far as tribes being able to work things out. People can see that we are trying to fight to keep the tuition waiver but they also see that we are always fighting each other."

The reality is that most American Indian students are nontraditional (twenty-five and older) and have limited access to other methods of paying for college. Loans are not a good option, as many plan to return to lower paying jobs in Indian communities or on reservations. Some students have access to federal grants, but primarily this option only works for full-time students, who are in the minority among MITWP recipients. Data compiled by the Native American Institute at MSU revealed the following characteristics about MITWP recipients. Sixty-seven percent of the students who use the tuition waiver are part-timers and thus are not eligible for most forms of financial aid. The 67 percent is twenty points higher than national data that reveal 47 percent of college students attend part-time. The average age of MITWP recipients is thirty years. And interestingly enough, among current recipients of the tuition waiver, approximately 70 percent are female.13

The preceding data, as well as the narratives of undergraduate students such as Lula Brewer and Paul Dearhouse and graduate students like Pat Dyer-Deckrow, provide insight into the unique struggles of American Indians at Michigan State University. But the problems these students highlight are not unique to a single university and in fact extend throughout much of American higher education.

American Indians in Higher Education

From the earliest days of higher education in North America, Indians were the targets of missionary strategies which sought to educate "savages" in the ways of Christianity. In the late 1700s, and following over a hundred years of missionary work, an Anglican educator commented that Indians possessed "an untameable savage spirit, which has refused to hear the voice of instruction."14 The "untameable savage spirit" referred to in Gerald Goodwin’s work became the title for an article later written by higher education historian Irvin “Bobby” Wright, himself a Cree from Montana, as he traced the cultural dilemma of American Indians and higher education:

When we contemplate the historic mission of higher education, particularly in relation to American Indians, and, more importantly, when we view that mission from a native perspective, we discover the historic roots of cultural persistence that continue today to result in their rejection of the higher education enterprise. American Indians have adamantly refused to surrender to an institution which for centuries has sought to assimilate them, to remake them in the image of their European subjugators.15

The resistance described by Wright was mentioned by Pat Dyer-Deckrow as she discussed her own life and experiences in education: "I come from a very matriarchal family and my grandmother really pushed education. So a lot of my family members are very educated. And it has helped us to get out of poverty. But my grandmother also made sure that we knew our values and who we were as a people before we went off to college. I know some Native American families are afraid that if their children go to college to get a higher degree, when they come back they won't know them. They will be totally removed. They won't value their culture anymore."

Chad Waucausah was a junior majoring in parks and recreation during the academic year 1995–96. He was involved in the demonstrations to preserve the tuition waiver program. Waucausah had strong views on the education of American Indians and how their culture had been denigrated in the process: “The educational history of Native Americans compared to Anglo Americans is a lot different. Anglo Americans come from the perspective of learning by emphasizing writing. Like writing things down in a classroom. Teaching stuff like that. Native people come from more of an oral culture. They convey meanings through stories and stuff like that. . . . Everything has a reason or symbol behind it. A spiritual or cultural symbol is used to help get the message across to somebody. What I believe really damaged Native people's views toward education was [that] in the past, instead of using the abilities they already had and the concepts they had already learned, teachers tended to ignore all that the Native Americans already knew.” The suspicion and contempt that some of his elders have toward a college education make perfect sense to Waucausah: "So when students go back to their Indian communities after being away at college, they do not know where to fit in. And so I have heard a lot of people, elders, say that it's kind of a 'pain in the bones'
because there are so many other things that a college education is not teaching them. It is seen as taking away their identity. Taking away any kind of cultural ties through all these other motives that surround Anglo education.”

Waucaush offered an example of Anglo American educators rejecting Native culture: “Anglo educators would use punishment if Indians used their Native language in the classroom. They would humiliate them. I have heard stories from elders. Teachers would put boards in their mouths in front of the classroom and use a lot of cruel ways to humiliate the person so that they wouldn’t do it again. . . . Whenever you mention education, you hear stories from our elders about why our grandparents dropped out in fifth grade, eighth grade, or tenth grade. After so many generations of not getting hardly any education, it is hard to talk about today’s kids going to college. That was not what was expected of me.”

Native youth such as Chad Waucaush often adopt a different stance toward higher education than their elders and see a college education as necessary for survival in today’s world. Sammy Walker also talked about the importance of getting an education: “The larger issue is that we need to be educated in order to effectively deal with the majority culture in the U.S. We have little choice but to have to play by their rules. If we have to play by the rules, then the best thing we can do is know the rules of the game as best we can. And going to college is one of the ways to learn the rules. And if you are not educated, then you are not on a level playing field. We are already disadvantaged as it is. The playing field is already slanted, so the best that we can do is to try to become educated.”

As of the early 1990s, Bobby Wright was one of only a handful of scholars who had begun to address the unique problems of American Indians in higher education. William Tierney was another scholar who explored some of the issues raised by Wright’s research. Tierney conducted an extensive qualitative study of American Indians in higher education and challenged integrationist views of the role of higher education. Specifically, he raised questions about the application of the work of Vincent Tinto, who had developed theories of student departure based on social and academic integration. Essentially, Tinto argued that the key to student success, as measured by persistence, was for the student to develop a sense of connection to the institution.

Alexander Astin’s “student involvement theory” parallels some of the assumptions underlying Tinto’s work in that Astin argued that increased institutional involvement on the part of the student lends oneself to better academic performance. “What I mean by involvement,” ex-
its structures might be modified to better reflect the cultural identities of Indians as well as those of other culturally diverse students. For example, if some cultures favor more collaborative learning styles, then why not incorporate such options into pedagogical practice? Furthermore, if a large percentage of students at a particular institution have Spanish as their first language, why not at least hire some employees proficient in their language? Such considerations become part of the decision making in a multicultural organizational context.23

Tierney placed the need for change squarely on the shoulders of colleges and universities and not on the diverse students who often feel disempowered within mainstream educational settings. Kathryn Tijerina and Paul Biemer addressed this same concern when they wrote, “Creative thinking about how to successfully connect American Indian students to the university must be balanced with methods to make the university more responsive and welcoming to the Indian student.”24

Pat Dyer-Deckrow spoke to the dilemma identified by Tierney, Tijerina, and Biemer, and other multicultural theorists: “For American Indians, this balancing of two worlds is a struggle. It doesn’t matter what social class you are from. I think the Indian students who are truly, truly successful, materially speaking, a lot of times abandon their cultural roots. And then when they want to try to come back, to reclaim their Indian heritage, it is hard because we are mad at them because they gave up a lot of our culture in the process. And so the kid is really well off financially now, but how do you think he feels about having lost his family in the process of succeeding?” She also alluded to different values that may be at work for Indian students: “I think for a lot of Indian students it is hard to make decisions about college and about a major. It is hard to narrow down what you want to do for a career, because the main intent is not to try to be the richest, but rather it is more important to find out, as an elder once said to me, ‘What is going to make you happy?’ And sometimes this is a difficult question to answer.” Dyer-Deckrow concluded her thoughts by pointing to a passage she had read from Bobby Wright’s work: “For many, success in education means mastering white ways on one’s own terms by maintaining some commitment to Indian values and tradition.”25

Hanna Windstorm reinforced some of the points made by Dyer-Deckrow: “I think lots of students think that when they graduate they are going to work for the tribe. They are going to raise their family near the community. They are not looking to aspire to make more than $30,000. They are just trying to stay in their little place and have a comfortable

spot.” She also shared her thoughts on the cultural conflict that many American Indians have with regard to education. “It is a real funny thing because there is a conflict among Native Americans. There are people who are for education and there are people who are not. Some people see it as abandoning your culture. My feeling is that people look at it with mixed feelings because the whole thing of the last five hundred years has always been that education has been pushed on Native American people. So I think there is a lot of hostility towards education. I am trying to say that when you get a lot of education you are seen as pulling away from the community automatically because you are seeing different things besides what is just inside your reservation or your community at home.”

For a variety of cultural and structural reasons, American Indians have the lowest high school and college completion rates of any racial or ethnic group. For example, most studies reveal that only about 6 percent of all American Indians go on to earn the baccalaureate. This contrasts to 23 percent for Anglo Americans, 12 percent for African Americans, and 7 percent for Hispanics.26 With such figures in mind, it is imperative that programs such as the Michigan tuition waiver be continued as a means of contributing to educational achievement for American Indians. Also, programs with great flexibility such as MITWP are better suited for Native students, who because of cultural and tribal commitments may need to move into and out of college at varying points in their lives. Federal student loan and grant programs do not generally provide the kind of flexibility beneficial to these students. As already mentioned, the argument that the waiver program should be supported because of the limited educational attainment of Indians falls within the general philosophical parameters of affirmative action.27 However, for many of the Indian students at Michigan State University such logic is seen to be dangerous, since affirmative action decisions are always open for debate and legislative whim, as evidenced by recent decisions in California regarding the passage of Proposition 209. Thus, the student activists who have organized resistance against Governor Engler have focused on the historic merits of the program and its ties to the Comstock Agreement of 1934. They do not think of themselves as receiving special treatment or minority entitlements.

Early Unrest

As early as the academic year 1993–94, Governor Engler had sent notice that the tuition waiver program was in trouble. Students in MSU's
North American Indian Student Organization (NAISO) were slow to respond at first, but soon they gathered momentum as the fall semester progressed. Two major protests were eventually planned and carried out during the academic year.

The first large-scale demonstration by American Indian students took place in the spring of 1994, after students got wind of the governor's desire to eliminate the program. The demonstration was a march from the "rock" through the main administration building and then out to the Student Union, where a series of speakers addressed educational concerns. The large rock that marked the gathering site for the protest is a famous MSU landmark that students paint, on nearly a weekly basis, as a means of promote or celebrate campus events. "Class of 1994," "Gay Pride," "Welcome Delta Epsilon Alums," or "Beat U of M" are just a few of the phrases that might appear on the rock, only to be covered over the next week with a new coat of paint and a new slogan. The rock is situated in the heart of the campus next to the Red Cedar River and is only a few buildings away from the main administration building where President Peter McPherson's office is located. Every MSU student understands the meaning of "Let's meet at the rock," and so it was an obvious place to begin the march.

The demonstration was designed to call attention to NAISO's concern about the threat to the tuition waiver and to foster support among fellow students and faculty. As Paul Dearhouse explained, "The march was designed to educate students and bring the issue out in the open. To get people thinking about or at least hearing about it." Dearhouse went on to describe what he saw as the students' role: "I kind of view the students' job, as far as the tuition waiver goes, is to make our voice heard. When you hear student voices, or a group of students protesting, generally people pay attention to them."

About 150 demonstrators gathered at the rock with a collection of signs and banners reflecting their dissatisfaction with the governor. A group of students representing a Native dance group wore traditional clothing including such items as calico shirts with ribbons, feathers, and geometric designs hanging from them. Several women wore frocks, vests, and knee-high moccasins. Many carried hand drums and rattles as well as other traditional instruments. The first stop on the march was the main administration building, where the students proceeded to move through the building from the first floor to the fourth and then back down. They then made their way to the Student Union, where a series of speakers were set to address the protesters.

The march was composed of a respectful group of students who simply wanted what they believed was owed to them. Several of the students were not even sure they had the nerve to join the march. But with the support of Hanna Windstorm, Paul Dearhouse, Lula Brewer, and Pat Dyer-Deckrow, and many others, they took solace in walking peacefully with one another. How different this group of protesters was compared to the nearly three thousand highly agitated students who in the spring of 1970 stormed MSU President Clifton Wharton's office demanding that he pay tribute to the students killed at Kent State.28 Many of the Indian students involved in the current demonstration were not even born until the mid-1970s and all the talk by their professors about the activism of the 1960s seemed to have little meaning to them. The events of "Freedom Summer"29 may as well have been centuries away from these students, and yet the narrative of democracy's struggle was being reenacted. In the summer of 1964, over one thousand volunteers worked to register Black voters throughout the state of Mississippi, and now some thirty years later, close to a hundred American Indian students were engaged in freedom's march once again, this time in the state of Michigan. And although the words of Freedom Summer's anthem—"We Shall Overcome"—likely did not ring in the ears of these contemporary activists, its spirit surely did.

Like other Indian students around the state, Waucaush resented Engler and his fiscal conservatism that sought to eliminate budget items regardless of their social and moral implications. "There was a lot of hostility towards Engler. A lot of questioning because we thought it was a successful program. It affected our lives. We saw the lives of our families getting changed by it. We have had families that were never in school but now we have different relatives attending college. We were questioning, if it is such a successful program, then why do they want to do away with it?"

At times the whole ordeal became deeply frustrating for Hanna Windstorm. "I have mixed feelings about a lot of things. I see the good in protesting as far as bringing people together for a common cause, but thinking that you are going to have an effect on the people inside that building [the MSU administration building] or if you go to the capitol—I have mixed feelings about it because they are just doing their job. They are going to go forth and play whatever game they want and get the votes they want, and I don't really know if I can make a difference or not. . . . It is like we are protesting, but why? Are we just putting on a show? I have mixed feelings about it because I guess I am not very vocal, very loud." Windstorm was not convinced that students yelling "Let's rock Engler!"
or “Let’s get him!” or “Engler is awful!” was the solution. She believed that Engler was just one man on the totem pole and if it were not he, it would be someone else trying to take what was rightfully theirs. “It is a bigger game than that. You can’t [vent] all your anger at one person. It is the whole body of people making these decisions. . . . He is not the problem. The problem is the whole attitude of the state. You can’t go about changing people with signs like ‘Engler dies today!’ Maybe focus on another issue besides a person. Focus on the issue. I think it is just hard for us to educate people.”

Lula Brewer was another of the students with unanswered questions and who had played a key role in planning the spring 1994 march. She talked about her fellow students and the significance of terminating financial aid: “Most of the Indian students who are on the waiver are either first generation or maybe their parents went back to school after their kids grew up. For people to say that we have gotten somewhere and we don’t need it anymore is totally wrong. . . . A lot of American Indians are first-generation students, and for them to be taking it away makes you look at things in a different way. How unfair things can be. Maybe people have good reason to get a little more cynical about the government after stuff like this.”

Windstorm, Brewer, and Waocaush also were among the few hundred students and community members who rallied at the capitol in March one year later. The students described their efforts as fairly successful and cited some of the support they had won among state legislators, including many Republicans. At meetings of the House Higher Education Committee and the Appropriations Higher Education Sub-Committee taking place during the same week as the capitol demonstration, several representatives spoke out against Engler’s efforts. For example, Representative Lingg Brewer, a Democrat, stated that the tuition waiver is part of a treaty and thus can only be dissolved if both sides are in agreement. “This looks highly unilateral. It looks like this is being done by the people in power.” Representative Paul Tesanovich, a Democrat from Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, stated, “I have two federally recognized tribes in my district, and I’m angry that this is even in jeopardy.” Two Republican Representatives also spoke out in support, arguing that confusion about the waiver contributed to its opposition. “Some see this as a free ride all the way through college,” explained Dan Gustafson. “But it’s tuition-only. It doesn’t include room and board or books.” And Jim McBryde of Mount Pleasant, the site of the original Comstock Agree-ment, commented, “There is a misconception that you check a box on a form and that makes you eligible for the tuition waiver.”

In spite of the Republican governor’s opposition, the waiver program continued to have bipartisan support, and as a result of legislative maneuvering in the spring of 1995, influenced by student and community direct action, attempts to cut the program from the budget were short-circuited. For the time being, the students had won the battle, but the war would persist into the 1995–96 school year.

Reluctant Warriors and Their Comrades

Lula Brewer, who like Hanna Windstorm eventually would serve a term as president of NAISO, originally was born in South Dakota and is officially affiliated with the Ovawella Dakota tribe. Because her mother is full Odawa Indian, Lula is considered half Odawa and half Ovawella Dakota. In the spring of 1994, Lula Brewer was working in the residence halls as a minority aide, a part-time position in which students provide peer support to other minority students. She recalled her reaction the first time she heard about Engler’s proposal to cut the tuition waiver: “When I first heard about the tuition waiver issue the university did not have a Native American coordinator in the Office of Minority Student Affairs. So the night I heard about it I made a flyer and sent it around campus telling people about what was going on.” Shortly after publicizing Engler’s proposal, Brewer joined other members of NAISO and staff from the Native American Institute to begin planning the protest march from the rock to the Student Union. From that moment on, Brewer’s entire college experience seemed to revolve around the battle with Engler. The last thing she wanted to have happen was to look back and say that the students did not try hard enough. “We want to at least do all that we can so that way if they ever take it away we couldn’t say that we watched them do it.”

American Indian students at MSU had begun battling Engler as far back as the fall of 1993 when they first learned of his opposition to the tuition waiver. Members of the Indian community, especially the older nontraditional students, started political work at that time. As the 1994–95 academic year progressed, the conflict continued and eventually active members of NAISO found themselves organizing letter-writing campaigns to legislators, recruiting speakers from the state’s American Indian community, educating other students about the issues, and encouraging whatever support they could muster.
For traditional-age undergraduates in NAISO, the whole battle was daunting at times and they often turned to elders who worked at MSU. They found staff members such as George Cornwell and Arnie Parish to be rich sources of knowledge on the history of the waiver. Students also lacked understanding of tribal politics, and once again staff and non-traditional students helped to explain the complexities of tribal issues, the debates about casino revenues, and the state's responsibility in the waiver matter. The whole resistance movement was for several students the most significant learning experience of their college years. They developed a deeper understanding of the cultural dilemmas of American Indians and the role of higher education. They came to understand the complexities of legislative processes, which to them often usurped the rights of Indians. Students also developed a more comprehensive view of Michigan State University and some of the political processes shaping the reactions of President McPherson and Provost Lou Anna Simon.

For example, some of the students openly discussed the fact that they understood that President McPherson could only do so much since he had only recently obtained a significant budget increase from the legislature for technological advances at the university. To come out publicly against the governor and his stance on the tuition waiver could jeopardize the university's budgetary gains in other areas.

In addition to turning to elders, members of NAISO also got significant support from other students of color. In particular, leaders in NAISO learned some of their direct-action strategies from a comrade in arms—Ernesto Mireles of MEChA (Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán). Through Mireles, as well as others within the MSU community, NAISO discovered a variety of tactics for attracting publicity to their cause. Some of the tactics, such as an on-foot pursuit of the governor's car during a homecoming parade, reflected the kind of radical efforts often employed by Mireles, who was well known around the MSU campus for the role he played in leading the campus "Grape Boycott." He and other Chicanos/Latinos had been involved in demonstrations over the past few years to force the university to end the purchase of grapes for campus dining facilities because of a concern that pesticides were causing serious health problems among migrant workers. Mireles and other Mechistas (members of MEChA) believed that Michigan State University, as the pioneer land grant institution and as a major agricultural research center, could be influential if it were to support such a boycott.

A significant chapter in the Grape Boycott came to a climax in the spring of 1996 after several students fasted for nearly a full week. In response to the fast, President McPherson supported a measure that would allow individual residence halls the authority to vote on whether they would support the boycott or not. Perhaps the most noteworthy incident in the MSU grape chronicles was when a group of MEChA students met with McPherson in his office. In the course of a heated debate about the university's position, a student of Mexican blood poured a bag of grapes onto the president's conference table and proceeded to climb onto the table and squish them with his feet. President McPherson did not find the incident amusing. After all, this was certainly not the kind of wine and cheese mixer to which he had grown accustomed.

Whereas MEChA in general, and Ernesto Mireles in particular, tended to use aggressive direct-action tactics, many of the students in NAISO leaned toward more peaceful strategies. Sensationalizing their cause was against the cultural norms embraced by NAISO members, and the militancy of Mireles and of MEChA left students feeling embarrassed at times. For example, Angie Shinios had mixed feelings about the rallies and the role of public demonstration in applying pressure to politicians and educational leaders. She feared that many within the American Indian community as well as the Anglo community might look at protesters "as a bunch of radicals whining about their problems." She also expressed concern about the image that people might have of NAISO and worried that some at MSU might see the organization as a radical student organization. "I think the demonstrations could have had a negative effect on our student group because people might think that all we do is protest and rally. That all we do is just cause trouble."

Shinios expressed the general sentiments of other Indian students including Lula Brewer, who also feared NAISO members' being labeled as "radicals." "There were other students who didn't feel right about protesting," explained Brewer. She went on to recall the spring 1995 demonstration at the capitol: "I think when we had our rally this past spring the State News [MSU's student newspaper] painted the picture that we were radical. We had one speaker who was from MEChA [Ernesto Mireles] and he had some radical things to say. But all we were trying to do is educate people, and the State News painted it like all we were doing was cry a lot about being minorities. The newspaper totally missed the point. The point that we were trying to make was that it was a legal issue—that it wasn't about minority entitlements—and they painted that picture anyway." Despite anxious feelings such as those expressed by Shinios
and Brewer, NAISO remained actively involved in political strategizing throughout the academic year 1994–95, at least until the spring semester drew near its end and summer vacation was in sight.

Once again, college life returned to a bit of normalcy as April arrived and finals loomed around the corner. NAISO students returned to their studies as some prepared for their last finals at Michigan State. It was an upsetting year for many, but they did not want to forget why they had made their way to college in the first place. Despite all the disruptions caused by their ongoing battle with Engler, the students were there to learn. As the last finals were taken and the campus emptied seemingly overnight, many of the American Indian students returned to their homes and communities for the summer. A few played softball with their buddies back home. Others made their way north across the expansive Mackinac Bridge and took positions at summer camps in Michigan's beautiful Upper Peninsula. Some took summer jobs working for small businesses in their local communities. And a few stayed in East Lansing and worked on campus or at local coffee shops, stores, or restaurants. The pace was slower than the hectic days during the semester. All the classes, part-time work, and the organizing with NAISO had taken its toll, and though they had won the battle of 1994–95, the war with Engler remained a fact of life for them.

Homecoming Weekend

As August came to an end, the students filtered back to campus and once again found themselves face-to-face with the tuition waiver issue. The governor had not relented in his efforts to end the program and members of NAISO went about the task of brainstorming ideas for campus demonstrations. During one of their September meetings, several students pushed the idea to disrupt homecoming weekend, and after a serious discussion, plans began to fall into place. Because Engler was named the parade marshal, the students saw the homecoming parade as an excellent opportunity to raise the waiver issue. After all, this was their institution and Engler was not supporting Indian students. “Why should he be in our homecoming parade?” was the question students raised. “Because of what Engler has done to the waiver, some of us might not be here next year,” said an exasperated Lula Brewer. “It just seems very ironic that a governor who takes away financial aid from students is in MSU’s Homecoming Parade.”

On Friday, October 6, 1995, a group of around seventy American students, joined by supporters from MEChA including Ernesto Mireles, marched alongside the motorcade escorting Governor Engler and MSU President Peter McPherson. They followed the motorcade from the Evergreen Grill in downtown East Lansing to Sparty, the statue of the Spartan warrior near the center of the MSU campus and close to the entrance to the football stadium (the distance the motorcade traveled was about half a mile). There Engler was supposed to stop and speak to the crowd, but the students carrying their signs, banging their drums, and chanting their slogans altered his plans. Brewer offered her recollection of the event: “Governor Engler just got scared. He never even came out of his car. . . . He had his children with him so I guess he felt it wasn’t safe for them. . . . We shouted and we had our signs. It was loud.”

Many of the spectators lined up along the parade’s route were annoyed by the demonstrators who seemed intent on ruining homecoming. Some of them yelled at the student protestors, “You guys are always trying to ruin it for everybody!” They did not understand the need for a dramatic show of discontent. Homecoming is an event intended to celebrate the academic community—a time when people come together despite their differences. Why were these students being so self-serving?

From the perspective of the American Indian students, they had a right to interrupt the parade, and if it meant ruining a piece of homecoming weekend, so be it. Their college careers were in jeopardy. Eliminating the tuition waiver was not simply a gubernatorial or legislative act; it was a violation of a longstanding agreement between American Indians and the state. Both sides made the agreement, and both sides should have to agree to alter it. “Promises made, promises kept,” was one of the phrases they chanted during the demonstration and at a rally a few days later as they protested Columbus Day. Engler’s stance toward the tuition waiver was one more example of how Indians around the country had been forced to give up their land for virtually nothing in return, because invariably the agreements and treaties would be altered or ignored. The tuition waiver was not something they were going to stand by and watch disappear from the state’s list of obligations to its Native population.

As was often the case, students expressed reservations about disrupting homecoming, and a few openly wondered if it was the right thing to do. In spite of the strong turnout, there was significant disagreement over the homecoming strategy that had first been mentioned by Mireles. “There were people within the organization who didn’t think it was right,” recalled Lula Brewer. The mood of some of the Indian students was that they “didn’t want to let our issue be known that way,” added
seeing other countries, cultures, and peoples as historically and culturally valued. Swallowing the bitter pill means rejecting a contaminated account of history and facing the kind of dangerous memories held by students such as Brewer, Dearhouse, and Windstorm, the kind of memories that provoke "the ability to hope in the face of continued defeat." And finally, swallowing the bitter pill involves embracing a more critical account of history such as that discussed in the work of Beverly Harrison:

We need to remember that those who exercise privilege and control in the present also control "official" history. "Official" history suppresses the stories of resistance and dissent against the status quo and presents the past either as the triumph of the deserving or as inevitable. Critical history breaks open the past, in its full complexity, and re-presents that past as bearing a story of human struggle against domination. Even failed resistance bears powerful evidence of human dignity and courage that informs our contemporary vocations. Our remembered forebears and colleagues in struggle energize our lives as we live through the pressures and risks that real resistance to oppression always involves.

Living dangerously, as many of the student activists described throughout this chapter and book have learned, requires opening up one's mind to a new way of thinking about the world of identity, culture, and politics. As Henry Giroux argues, "Dominant cultural traditions once self-confidently secure in the modernist discourse of progress, universalism, and objectivism are now interrogated as ideological beachheads used to police and contain subordinate groups, oppositional discourses, and dissenting social movements." A commitment to living dangerously was revealed in the following comments passionately offered by an American Indian student at MSU: "As far as I'm concerned, I was enslaved in 1776. My family was... I have mixed feelings at times too because as much as we complain, I would hate to be in the Middle East or I'd hate to live any place else... I guess maybe I'd be happier if this were a socialist country, and maybe, you know, that might be the next step... Well in many ways American Indians were communists... But I guess the thing that bothers me the most, and which is probably why I chose to study history, was that we were very self-sufficient economically, yet it was looked down upon like we were inferior, primitive. That was the richest time of our culture because we had all our needs taken care of... It is Western civilization that has pushed us to where we are now. Western thinking does not question technology. Harmony is not the goal. Mastering one's environment is. And I think we should have learned by now that mastery doesn't necessarily make people happier." This student went on to point out the problem with land ownership, and what she sees as one of the greatest shortcomings of modern societies: "A belief that someone can own the land, can possess nature. I think that's one of the biggest cultural conflicts because I think our philosophy is more Eastern... One of the biggest problems that we have is people come along and they buy up all the lake shore. In our culture, nobody has the right to own the land. It was for everyone. Now with progress, they buy it up and then nobody else can enjoy it but their family."

A number of the other students in this study shared their memories as they returned to the issue placed squarely before them by Governor Engler. "It is an old issue in a way because it is a treaty issue and I guess no one has kept their treaties," commented Lula Brewer. She went on to explain that in her opinion Engler is really trying to get at the sovereignty of Indians throughout the state: "The way that I see it is that Engler wants to go after our sovereignty, us having our own government on the reservation, and that is the real issue." Brewer believes that because the casinos have begun to be quite successful and have produced a good deal of revenue, the state wants to have more say in it and claim a larger piece of the pie. To her, it's the same old story: Once American Indians start to make their own way, it is construed as a threat and must be put down. One step forward. Two steps back. "Something else must be taken away—like the tuition waiver... Basically, we can only go so far. That is what I am trying to say."

Paul Dearhouse connected his battle with the governor to the larger struggle of American Indians and the constant defense of their own culture within educational contexts such as university life. He also spoke positively about the critical experiences he had during college that helped him to value his culture: "I know that in college you come of age and stand up more... In college you start thinking more critically about the issues that are affecting your people. Like you start to realize why things are bad in your community. You start to see maybe an historical basis for it. Then you stop to realize and you start to stand up a little bit more... I think that a lot of Native students our age are getting back more to their roots, as far as the language and the culture... My parents and grandparents were forbidden to speak their language. Boarding schools were designed to take the Indian out of the Indian—and assimilate and things like that... Today's generation of Indians is working to reclaim our roots, our heritage." Dearhouse went on to comment that he sees
the fight with Engler as part of standing up for Indian culture and identity and that the climate in the mid 1960s up until maybe the 1960s was that Indians should all be assimilated. “So I kind of think that things are looking up for us as far as going back to traditional roots. . . . We need a foundation. Otherwise we are just kind of lost in American society. Half of us have no sense of our tradition. . . . We need to push to reclaim our heritage and our identity.”

An interesting point that often came up was the cultural connection between American Indians and students such as Ernesto Mireles of MECHA. Many students noted the strong bond between Indians and Chicanos in particular. As Pat Dyer-Deckrow explained, “In some ways they are half us. . . . The border of Mexico has been changed by the United States. In fact, before there was ever a U.S. government, there were the aboriginal people of this continent—Mexicans and Indians. I guess that’s probably why we are connected on so many of these issues. . . . The border was imposed on us and imposed on them.” Paul Dearhouse also spoke of these connections: “It seems that as long as I have been here, we [American Indian students] have always done things with Chicoano students. Like done stuff together, supported each other. Whatever the issue, we have always been there for one another. I guess we are like one and the same people. . . . We are indigenous peoples. Chicoano students have their roots in Mexico, and the Spanish and the conquistadors came over and took over their land. We had the English to deal with. And in the north, the French came and took the land. In that respect, we are like the same people just from different regions.”

The points made by Dyer-Deckrow and Dearhouse in part explain why so many American Indian and Chicoano activists reject holidays such as the Fourth of July and Columbus Day. As Dyer-Deckrow explained, “It is not a day of independence for us. . . . Whose freedom is it anyway? It is not ours.” Many European Americans find remarks such as the ones offered by Dyer-Deckrow and other American Indians and Chicanos to be offensive. They might ask people who make comments such as these why they stay in this country if it is so oppressive. More than a few might even resort to that standard American logic of “If you don’t love it, then you can leave it.” But such thinking fails to empathize with the pain and suffering of non-European Americans, many of whom have ancestral roots dating back long before the arrival of the earliest European settlers. Their dangerous memories are threatening to Whites in this country, many of whom seem unwilling to examine the cultural complexity of minority identities and the passion they bring to their cause.

Through this lack of empathy and understanding, racism and social inequality get recycled from generation to generation. And thus we relive many of the cultural wars of the past as the quest for freedom marches into the next century.

Recently, a judge in California rejected a charge of racial discrimination filed by a group of African American employees. In rendering his decision, the judge explained that the employees should keep in mind the real suffering that “our forefathers” experienced and the great courage they exhibited as they made their way as pioneers across this great continent. A little bit of suffering such as racial discrimination is good for the soul or so it seems. One of the plaintiffs reminded the judge that she was an African American and that her forefathers most likely had not crossed the plains in covered wagons but instead had likely been dragged to this country with guns pointed at their heads and shackles attached to their feet. Why was the history that was so vivid to these African American employees so distant from this judge’s memory?

Cultural Matters

As a result of the unique cultural experiences of American Indians and the surrounding cultural context that is so heavily Eurocentric, students must in effect exist simultaneously in two separate worlds. This reality parallels the notion of “double-consciousness” first pointed out in the work of W. E. B. Du Bois when he discussed the lives of Blacks in the United States: “The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” A student highlighted the sense of “double-consciousness” discussed by Du Bois when he related his experience as an American Indian in a predominantly White university: “I sort of feel like you lead two separate lives. I try to be involved with people who are Native as much as I can and a lot of my socializing goes on with fellow Natives. But at the same time, I have this whole other life that I have to lead within the university. . . . So it is sort of like I have a time when I can attend pow-wows and socialize with Natives and I have a life with Anglos. So it is kind of like leading a double life.”

Often students try to avoid a double life by rejecting their American
Indian identity altogether. Chad Waucaush talked about his experience as a minority aide working in the residence halls. Part of his job involved contacting other American Indian students and helping them to establish social networks within organizations such as NAISO. What upset Waucaush was the number of Native students he met who wanted to have little to do with NAISO and the American Indian community. "In my work as a minority aide I have to go out and talk to other Indian students. I have met a lot of them who didn't want to associate with other Indians, even if they came from an Indian background. I could tell in meeting them that they didn't really want anything to do with me and so I started questioning why did they have this shame? I know a lot of people, depending on how they were raised, are ashamed to be Indian. They want to keep it hidden. 'Don't tell anybody.' So when they get to college they don't want to be recognized as a minority or as an Indian." Thus some American Indian students go off to college and attempt to pass as Anglos and in effect try to suppress whatever sense of consciousness they have as Indians. The experiences of these students are reminiscent of those described by gay students, who often consider staying closeted as a way to avoid persecution as members of a group deemed "contemptuous and pitiful." This attitude conveyed by American Indians angers students such as Waucaush and others in NAISO who work to establish a sense of pride among Indian students: "They pass as Anglos except when it comes to admissions and stuff like that. Except for when it is beneficial. That may be crude to say but that is what I have experienced."

Although cultural differences certainly were prevalent among the students, there were also connective cultural threads running through the lives of the majority of the American Indian students. One recurring theme related to the students' attitudes toward campus demonstrations and the idea of activism. As was mentioned earlier, many of the students had mixed feelings about taking issue with Governor Engler and his position on the tuition waiver. There was a tendency for students to express doubts about any actions that might disrupt social harmony, even if inaction meant suffering on their part. A student offered an explanation for this tendency: "Because they tend to be a quiet people seeking harmony over conflict, Native Americans often suffer because of their inability or desire to raise a public ruckus over mistreatment... For the most part, Natives don't say a lot anyway. They are not as vocal a minority as some other minorities." This student went on to conclude that when Indians do go so far as to protest about an issue, then it must be something that is quite compelling.

Stacey Tadgerson, a specialist at the Native American Institute at MSU and a former recipient of the tuition waiver, also addressed the quiet disposition that characterizes some American Indians and which may contribute to abuses by legislative or governmental actions. Such a disposition makes student involvement in direct action difficult to achieve at times: "I think that for some people it [demonstrating on campus] made them a little bit self-conscious. They weren't sure if they should bring attention to themselves... It was kind of like they were scared of losing it [the tuition waiver] and they thought if they brought a lot of attention to this issue then maybe it would be taken away... Just let things happen as they are going to happen." Tadgerson expressed fear that a snowball effect may already be gaining momentum around the country and that the tuition waiver program was only one more example of conservative policy-making designed to reverse whatever minor gains underrepresented peoples have attained. She felt it was important to challenge American Indian students to hold the governor and other legislators accountable. "They are representing you. It's just getting that message across so that Natives understand their individual rights as well as their tribal rights."

The quiet and respectful quality of many American Indians is played out during NAISO meetings where twenty to thirty students typically gather around a large table but only a few speak. Many sit quietly by and say nothing until someone specifically asks for their opinion or their vote on an important matter that the group must decide. One student explained that he attended meetings for over a year before he ever said a word. But other students are more outspoken and tend to assume leadership roles within NAISO. They have to be careful, though, because NAISO members often look on such behavior with suspicion. The group must come first and leaders have to be watched carefully to make sure they reflect the proper values.

A Story without End

Perhaps it was fortunate for NAISO that a few outspoken students such as Lula Brewer and Hanna Windstorm were around, for they acted as catalysts motivating others to take democracy into the streets and publicly protest the governor's actions. In many ways, the attitude among students who seemed willing to let the chips fall where they may reflected a kind of learned helplessness attributable to years of exploitation. There was much that these students had learned through the history of
North American Indians, and so it is hardly surprising that some might fail to see the point of resisting the action of legislative officials. There were so many examples of pain and suffering to which they could turn, all of which served to deflate one's willingness to fight against a large and powerful system like a state or federal bureaucracy.

When the great Creek leader Red Eagle was forced to surrender to General Andrew Jackson and essentially end Native involvement in the French-American War, the stage was set for the forced removal of Natives from their lands and decades of mistreatment through legislative acts such as that which the students at Michigan State faced. Gloria Jahoda discussed the significance of the 1814 meeting between Red Eagle and Jackson:

With that handshake, the two principal architects of the ultimate fate of the American Indian had sealed a bargain. Red Eagle's leadership in war had angered America. It had also convinced Andrew Jackson that America's frontiers would always be frontiers while there were Indians to annoy the settlers. The Indians must go. They couldn't be exterminated wholesale because of world opinion. But they could be uprooted and packed off to some remote corner of the country where they wouldn't be in the way. The haven would belong to them, they would be told in the traditional language of American Indian treaties, "as long as the green grass grows and the water flows," provided they began hiking en masse with a military escort to get there. At the Horseshoe Bend of the Tallapoosa River in Alabama, Andrew Jackson silently pledged himself to the policy of Indian Removal which in his presidency was to become law. It would be a simple law: any Indian who remained on his ancestral lands affirming his Indian identity would be a criminal. It didn't matter that the Great Plains already had Indian inhabitants who could hardly be expected to welcome red refugees... Oklahoma was Indian destiny before it graced a single map. Not an Indian alive, except those who already inhabited it, considered it Holy Ground. East of the Mississippi, Ecuchate was lost land, a lost dream, and the road that led out of it forever became known as the Trail of Tears. 38

While the Trail of Tears came to symbolize the unwavering force of governmental policies enacted against American Indians, events taking place over a century and a half later at places such as Alcatraz Island, the Cornwall Bridge in northern New York, and Wounded Knee served as catalysts for forging Indian resistance and sealed their historical place within the broadening Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Thirty years later, the embers of the early Indian protest movement of the sixties lived on through the actions of Hanna Windstorm, Lula Brewer, and Chad Waucaush as they fought for their rightful place within a democratic, multicultural society.

In February of 1994, American Indian students at Michigan State University traveled a much shorter route than the Trail of Tears as they made their way from the banks of the Red Cedar River and the rock at the center of campus to the main administration building and then the Student Union, where they listened to the empowering and impassioned words of friends and allies. Chad Waucaush reflected on the culmination of the march that brought tears to his eyes and the eyes of other American Indians present. As Waucaush explained, the highlight was that the students expressed their feelings: We each spoke individually. A lot of students got up there and just kind of poured their hearts out and just talked about how they felt... I started realizing how much of an impact you can have. How much your opinion can mean to other people. I learned that if you step out with your opinion, your view, you just might make someone stop and think... I realized the influence you can have by the way you live your life. Activism is a part of me... Living by example because that is the best way people learn and so you can change a lot." Waucaush had an epiphany as he listened to other students and community members speak about their experiences. He could be an activist and speak out about issues concerning his people. Perhaps he was meant to play a leadership role after all.

Two years later, Waucaush and other Native students wondered whether all the demonstrations, all the marches, all the speeches had done any good. Engler had not won as of yet. But neither had they, for it seemed as though the tuition waiver could vanish any day. What would the next group of American Indian students at MSU have to endure? In any case, Waucaush, Brewer, and Windstorm felt glad that they had invested in the struggle and they could look back fondly and say that at least they tried.

Lula Brewer believed the campus demonstrations had an impact because she heard students around campus talking about the concerns of American Indian students. In her mind, they had succeeded in raising student awareness and understanding of the tuition waiver and its history. Brewer also had good feelings about MSU. Provost Lou Anna Simon had told the students that regardless of whether the state reimburses the university for tuition expenses, the university was committed to creating
opportunities for American Indian students and that it would find a way to provide the financial support. Brewer believed that Provost Simon saw through the governor’s attack on the waiver: “They know that this is a political game that Engler is playing. They know that he is just trying to use us in this little game.”

As for plans for future demonstrations, American Indian students at Michigan State were waiting to figure out what strategy Governor Engler would employ next in his effort to save the $3,000,000 that the program costs annually. Many students believed he would find a way to take the money from gaming revenues. This strategy angers tribal leaders, who counter that they have already paid the state nearly $40,000,000 in casino taxes between March of 1994 and December 31, 1995. Other students wondered if the governor would simply cut individual college and university budgets by the cost of the waiver program, and thus accomplish his goal by circumvention.

Thus, for most Indian students at Michigan State University the issue remained unresolved and they learned to live with the daily threat that their tuition might not be covered and they might have to leave school or amass significant debt. As Paul Dearhouse stated, “You hear all these kinds of things over and over again. Like over the last couple of years. And you just get tired of hearing it. Like ‘Damn man.’ Because it’s like he is doing this on a daily basis. We are still students trying to keep our heads afloat, you know. It’s hard to keep fighting for it. For myself, I just have to get some momentum to do it and so I need to take a break for a while. Like right now I’m just chillin’ out and not involved with a lot of things. . . . It’s a draining process and I just got tired of feeling for it. You know what I mean? It’s like, damn, you get tired of hearing about it.”

Although many students like Dearhouse felt the frustrations of the ongoing struggle to stay in school, others such as Brewer remained in a state of alert awaiting the next battle. “No one feels too relieved because at any point the state could do it again. They could take away the waiver.” Plans for future demonstrations have been put on hold, but when the time comes, Brewer, like the relentless Atlantic tide that carried Europeans to her shore, most assuredly will rise again. With visible emotion in her eyes, Brewer resolutely proclaims, “I’m glad we still have our signs”: “Promises made, promises kept.”

In March of 1993, a group of over a hundred students from Pennsylvania State University traveled to Washington, D.C., to join a march for lesbian, gay, and bisexual equal rights and liberation. They represented only a fraction of what amounted to somewhere in the neighborhood of two hundred thousand demonstrators. For many of the Penn State students, the trip was the culmination of several years of political and cultural work aimed at improving the campus climate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. These were the students who organized campus rallies, coming-out celebrations, teach-ins, and a variety of political and educational activities as part of their contribution to gay liberation. Several of them played major roles in what was perhaps the key struggle for equal rights when they challenged the administration to add a sexual orientation clause to its official statement of nondiscrimination. The effort these students put into creating campus change was draining at times, and a trip to Washington and a chance to participate in a national day of celebration was a much needed reprieve.1

The day was still young as the Penn State delegation relaxed on the mall across from the White House and awaited their turn to join the march. The students reflected on the positive changes they had achieved and the long struggle that lay before them. Timothy Jones,2 a senior, talked about the hard work and energy he had given to winning the approval for the sexual orientation clause. He recalled the many meetings with members of the board of trustees and other key officials. The most draining thing for Jones had been all the time spent educating