

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

FINDING HOME, TRANSFORMATION AND HEALING IN CALIFORNIA STATE
PRISONS

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By

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ABSTRACT

FINDING HOME, TRANSFORMATION AND HEALING IN CALIFORNIA STATE PRISONS

By

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Master of Arts in Chicano and Chicana Studies

Because of my personal experience serving 21 years in California State Prisons, I chose to research what impact my increased exposure to Indigenous culture and spirituality had on me which eventually led to my being ruled suitable for release. The purpose of this research is to better inform others how Indigenous cultures and spirituality can be used for positive changes and liberation from the dominant society's discriminatory carceral system. I focused on the role Indigenous Elders and practices had on my transformation and healing in California's State prisons. My youth was marked by a violent life of anger, racial discrimination, and exclusion. This critical autoethnography documents my journey as a bi-racial person of color living in a racialized environment who found my home, my culture, my identity, as a way to heal.

My thesis questions are:

- 1). How did I find transformation and healing in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation?
- 2). What roles did Indigenous Elders and Practices have on my transformation and healing in California's state prison system?

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

LIFE IN PRISON

A Little Bit of Hope

The room only had four cement walls and a door; there were no windows. There was a toilet and a cement bench that extended from one wall to another. The walls were painted a light clayish grey color. It measured approximately eight by ten feet. I sat on the bench listening, and looking under the small crack at the bottom of the door for shadows, any evidence of someone coming to get me. At times, I would get up and pace back and forth the length of the cell. I didn't want to think. Right now, my thoughts would do more harm than good. I was scared to be happy.

Now I heard keys and footsteps. The shadows under the door showed me that someone had finally come for me. As the door opened a smiling corrections officer instructed me to turn around and step backwards toward him. I did so. I knew the routine. From there I was instructed to face the wall while he closed and locked the cell door for the room that I had just left. He smiled, asking me how did it feel. I was scared to talk, but didn't want to be rude. I answered, "I don't know yet." He nodded affirmingly, and we began the walk back to the prison yard. I knew that the other inmates were going to ask me what had happened. What would I tell them? I myself was unsure of what had just occurred.

Most of us are what you call Lifers. When we were sentenced, it was made clear by the judges, lawyers, correction officers, and other inmates, that "lifers" did not go home. How many had I known that had seven to life and had already pulled as many as forty years, while others had died in prison.

When I arrived at the yard, I saw eyes shift, from what people were doing, to searching my expression to answer the question none of them wanted to ask me. Most of the time people returning from Board Hearings did not receive good news, and it was best to leave them alone to deal with what they had just gone through. They would normally go back to the buildings to get a fifteen-minute phone call to call their family, if they still had anyone to tell. If they made it back to the building without telling anyone, it normally meant they had been denied a parole date. As I walked through the gates, one of my good *camaradas*, a person considered of confidence, approached me and asked what had happened. It was a moment as painful as when I was sentenced to 18 years to life. I looked down with so much shame thinking what gave me the right to leave all these guys that I had both fought with and for, for a large portion of my life. I whispered with shame as I told him, “They gave it to me.” He smiled and hugged me. I could barely see through the tears in my eyes that reflected my anger, joy, sadness, and fear. Other inmates walking the yard stopped. The joy of the “camarada” said everything. I could see everyone begin walking again, with smiles on their faces. No matter how few, any “one,” who came back with a release date, gave hope to the others. But that same “one,” with that opportunity, knew that he was not just leaving prison, but also so many people who were either hated or loved, but had shared a “life” with them all. At such a moment, the only thing seen on that yard, no matter how small, was hope. That was the common meaning for all of us.

What is a Life Sentence?

There are three types of life sentences in California. The first is an indeterminant life sentence. This is a sentence that has a stated number of years to be completed in prison, a base term, after of which, the inmate attends hearings to determine if that person is suitable for parole. If not, they will continue their incarceration until deemed suitable, which for most never

happens. The second is a determinant life sentence. This is when the person is sentenced to a life sentence without the possibility of parole. They will never be released. The third kind of life sentence, is when the number of years that a person was sentenced to, goes well beyond the number of years possible for the person to live. An example of this would be a sentence of 750 years in prison.

The sentence I was given was an indeterminate sentence of 18 years to life. Since my base term was 18 years, and at that time in California, inmates were mandated to serve 85% of their sentencing, I was eligible for my parole hearing in 2009. At that point in time, I appeared before the Board of Prison Terms and was denied parole, found unsuitable, and told to come back in five years. My second board hearing was in 2014 at which time I was found suitable, and was later released in 2015.

What Does It Mean to be Suitable?

To be found suitable is the dream of all lifers serving an Indeterminate Sentence. It meant liberation. That the person was going home. The number of years already served at that time did not matter, everything was overshadowed by the fact that the person's life and liberty would be returned to them. They were able to hope, and to dream about what they could do with their future.

The definition of rehabilitation, or suitability, according to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, is based on a Comprehensive Risk Assessment completed by a Forensic Psychologist, which is then sent to the Board of Prison Terms. At that point in time, the inmate attends a hearing with two commissioners who review the Comprehensive Risk Assessment, and interview the inmate to reaffirm that they are comfortable with the inmate being

released into society. If they deny the inmate, there will be no release date. From this point, for those found suitable, the case then goes to the Governor's desk for final approval. Here the Governor has 120 days to deny the inmate parole or the inmate is released.

When there is a ruling of "unsuitable," there must then be a determination of the number of years to be served before the inmate will return. This is based on the amount of time felt necessary for the inmate to be found suitable. The possibilities for number of years are either a three, a five, a seven, a ten year, or fifteen-year denial. The determination of how many years before the persons next hearing is based on an estimate of how much time is necessary for a sincere change in the inmate's behavior.

For those inmates found suitable, the case then goes to the Governor's desk for final approval. Here the governor has 120 days to deny the inmate parole. If the governor does not reject the decision the inmate is released. In making this determination each case is evaluated individually looking at the crime, the way the crime was committed, the reason for the crime, as well as the inmate's personal characteristics, noted by the Psychologist. It is then determined by the board hearing commissioners if the person has been able to address all of these issues deemed responsible for the prisoner's offense.

What is Indigenous?

Multiple spaces for debate about the definition of the word, Indigenous, have arisen. For instance, Sidsel Saugstad (43), gives four criteria for Indigenous, "1) first come, 2) non-dominance, 3) cultural difference, and 4) self-identification." However, author Barnard questions whether one is defined by their lifestyle or race. He also asks about people who are genetically tied to first people but not the land (19). Cunningham and Stanly argue that the word

Indigenous represents “humans having a seamless relationship with nature which includes seas, land, rivers, mountains, flora, and fauna,” (403). This definition however, does not mention if they were first people. Then finally, according to the “United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs of Indigenous Peoples, “Indigenous peoples are Inheritors and practitioners of the unique cultures and ways of relating to people and the environment,” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs of Indigenous Peoples). While it does state “Inheritors,” it does not define who inheritors are. Barnard questions, “What about someone who is genetically pure... but who has never lived as a hunter gatherer...Are they descendants of first people or new occupants,” (19). For the purpose of this research, I use the term Indigenous as according to the author Stanley, “humans having a seamless relationship with nature which includes seas, land, rivers, mountains, flora, and fauna,” (403). Stanley’s definition recognizes the relationship between the previous and present people occupying the lands acknowledged by actions of respect to the environment and themselves as part of that environment. This I believe limits the arrogance of the people as dominant figures in this world and shows the need for all life in any environment to do its part for the “whole.” It is understood that this definition is also problematic in ways that it may actually deny actual people from past blood lines a place or rights of inheritance.

My personal identification as Indigenous began with the way that I as a child was raised living on a farm with plants and animals that I was expected to care for, but also cared for me as a food source. My Indigeneity grew during early teen years by a visit from a distant cousin who showed me pictures of Indigenous people that she explained were my relatives. Also, around this time I remember going on a family trip to New Orleans and driving on a road past a large strip of land and hearing my mother talk about how that land was from my family and that we had a

cousin that lived on it in a trailer. While all of this information was presented to me, there still was a distance between hearing about and partially living an Indigenous life, and actually identifying as Indigenous. For me, a strong aspect of this transformation occurred during my college years. First when I took a class as an elective at California State University of Northridge in the American Indian Studies Department where I learned about the brutality experienced by Indigenous people of the United States. Later, I attended my first “Pow Wow”, a traditional gathering of people native to the United States. However, it was while in prison when I finally fully identified as Indigenous. An incarcerated Indigenous elder taught me a traditional song in an Indigenous language that was sung to the beat of my heart. That experience finally allowed me to feel Indigenous.

Author Leanne Simpson explains the trauma that some Indigenous people felt being separated from their homelands, for which they had deep ties. As well, Andrew Hatala writes about how this trauma manifests in different ways as they are unable to celebrate their cultures and traditions which then takes away from their identities. Here in the now Americas, this is precisely what happened to the people Indigenous to these lands. One form of this trauma occurred through the education system that dealt with the children of this population which was documented by Isabel C. Barrows who took notes from a conference dealing specifically with the children of these people. During the “Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections,” plans were introduced as to how best, for Anglo societies to deal with the “Indians,” here in the Americas. The treatment of Indigenous people has never been a positive one. It has involved genocide, robbery, and the denial of all civil rights. During the “Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections,” the idea of “kill the Indian save the man” became affirmed (46). This did not mean the introduction of a new system, but rather

reaffirmed a process already active. This was a process of cultural erasure by the removal of children from their parents and sending them to boarding schools to strip them of their culture, ways of life, and forms of thinking. This was done while at the same time, instilling a colonized mentality (46). These educational systems that deny many youths full understandings of their true histories and identities still continue today, which are evident by the numbers of people locked within California's carceral system.

So Why Are We Reading This?

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how "Indigenous" inmates in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, are able to heal using Indigenous cultural and spiritual information to contribute to their healing from experiences that led to their incarceration. This research also focuses on how learning about Indigenous cultural and spiritual practices may enable them to create strong healthy futures. As well, it will look at their ability to access materials necessary for this transformation. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is responsible for providing inmates access to programs focused on, 1) Academic Education, 2) Career Technical Education, 3) Cognitive behavior therapy, 4) Employment Preparation, 5) Substance Use Disorder Treatment, 6) Art and Corrections, and 7) Innovative Programming Grants, (Taylor 4-5). Mac Taylor, Legislative Analyst for the CDCR, admits that although prisons accept these programs are necessary for rehabilitation, they are inadequately provided. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation has failed to provide what it has deemed necessary for rehabilitation to its inmates. This not only leaves the burden of rehabilitation, or attempts to heal, on the inmates themselves, but also draws attention to accessibility to religious or spiritual things that impact programming or cause a lack of programming that may affect outcomes of inmate rehabilitation.

For the inmates, proving rehabilitation means attending and receiving certificates from regular weekly Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous meetings organized and held in the Chapel. During these meetings, outside visitors from local communities may attend and speak to the inmates about personal experiences, challenges, and successes. Certificates may also be attained through inmate correspondence courses. Inmates become aware of such courses from other inmates as they are circulated among inmates. Inmates also find out about other ways of achieving certificates through family members or close acquaintances who research available programs. "Clean time," is also a way for inmates to prove Rehabilitation. This is the ability to spend years within the prison system without rule infractions. While helpful, these programs often fall short of providing inmates a way to heal.

CHAPTER 2 METHODS

The purpose of this research is to document how indigenous culture and spirituality can be used for positive changes for those who have been affected by the discriminatory carceral system. My research focused on the role incarcerated Indigenous Elders and practices had on my transformation and healing in California's State prisons.

Critical Autoethnography and Autoethnography

I chose critical autoethnography to present my experiences and examine the healing process that occurred and how I overcame negative behavior. Critical autoethnography is an ethnographic method and is compatible with "storytelling." Critical Race Theories guided an analysis of the environments that I lived in and reacted to that led to my incarceration. Sandra Grande's method, "Red Pedagogy, the Un-Pedagogy," helps to explain my world views as a person of Indigenous ancestry and complements the critical autoethnographic method. Legal documents by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation will be used to confirm, trace, and document my actions while incarcerated. These documents monitored aspects of my behavior, either positive or negative, and are used to support or argue against my claims of suitability.

For the presentation of my research, I felt it would be important to use a methodology that could fully express my experiences as an inmate serving a life sentence with the possibility of parole. The methodology would also facilitate the exploration of cultural dynamics, past experiences and environments, and how those experiences or relationships related to other environments. To do so, it was necessary to decide how to convey, in any manner, what it is to serve a life sentence with the possibility of parole, in the State of California. This made it

necessary for the use of a method that could allow me to depict the changes that I experienced during this time. Based on these factors, I felt the best way to present this research was in the form of Critical Autoethnography, a storytelling methodology.

Madison discusses the fundamental models of ethnography. She also explained the ways in which this methodology matured through the years to provide more accurate ways for presenting people's lived experiences. She explains ethnography as the author in a role as an observer documenting the perceptions of acts done by another or other people. Here the author is accompanying the person being studied, which allows the author to both see, and to some level, experience the acts of that person. This allows the author, to have some sense of the feelings and emotions of the authentic experience. There are both visual, and emotional recollections, allowing for a better interpretation by the author.

Ellis, comments on autoethnography,

I don't use grounded theory much anymore, "I say,". Most of what I do is autoethnography. Autoethnography? What's that? She asks, writing the word on her note pad as she looks at me. Well, I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use what I call systematical introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life, (671).

I chose Critical Autoethnography as my methodology because I am using my life story for social and political change, for the betterment of my community. It is a life story that deals with actual situations and decisions that I made at turning points in my life. I also present the emotions I felt

at those moments. I am using Critical Autoethnography to invite the reader into my past and present life, hoping that if people are made aware of the struggles and suffering that some people are forced to endure, that those people will strive for changes toward more humane resolutions.

Jim Thomas first explains how ethnography is able to advance the study of people's lives and experiences in an effort to create better communities and living environments. He uses ethnography as a proactive tool in society to not only realize people's lived experiences, but also to document and study these experiences for positive change. By doing this, it is Critical Ethnography. Critical ethnographers, on behalf of the people, "accept an added research task of raising their voice to speak to an audience on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them, by giving more authority to the subjects voices," (4). This allows critical ethnography, to create social change, "Critical ethnography proceeds from an explicit framework that, by modifying consciousness or invoking a call to action, attempts to use knowledge for social change" (4). This research method steps away from studies of subjects and moves more toward the acknowledging of people's situations and environments that empower the individual and communities.

Madison views critical ethnography as a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action, and feels that it expands our horizons for choices and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that common sense assumptions be questioned (8).

This is one of the fundamental purposes of my thesis, it attempts to provide information and feelings, so that the reader is able to develop, not only an understanding of the topic, but also a relationship with the process, and the people that are engulfed in these situations. It is not enough that the facts are presented; the understanding of the impact that these facts bear on the people of these communities is also needed to humanize these people in difficult situations that challenge the quality of their lives. Through critical ethnography, the focus is to draw attention to challenging situations in the hopes of creating better solutions to people's problems. Auto Ethnography allowed me to tell my story keeping the intentions described by Thomas: to document people's lived experiences with positive change in mind (4).

Critical Race Theories

Critical Race Theory helps to place the Critical Autoethnography in context of racism. An explanation of the Critical Race theory could start with two statements. First that, "Critical race theory begins with the notion that racism is normal in the American society," and second, "Despite the scientific refutation of race as a legitimate biological concept, and attempts to marginalize race in much of the public (political) discourse, race continues to be powerful social construct and signifier" (Ladson-Billings 8).

In basic terms, Critical Race Theory is the acknowledgement that in the United States racism is an internal construct for purposes of creating beneficial attitudes as well as justification for and treatment of certain categories of people in certain ways, for needs determined by the people in power. These needs are structured by mental constructions of divisions between people for the purpose of creating a privileged class status and values, that justify stereo types, and in many cases, the unjust treatment or discrimination of others. Also, according to Ladson-Billings,

these systems are then validated socially through, conceptual categories like ‘school achievement’, ‘middle classness,’ ‘maleness,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘intelligence,’ and ‘science,’ become normative categories of whiteness, while categories like ‘gangs,’ ‘welfare recipients,’ ‘basketball players,’ and ‘the underclass,’ ‘become the marginalized and de-legitimated categories of blackness,’ (9).

Ladson-Billings then gives a personal example of these preconceived notions created to justify these treatments and status boundaries. The author, a black woman, described an experience she had in a V.I.P. lounge, in an upper-class hotel.

“Shortly after I sat down comfortably with my newspaper, a white man peaked his head into the lounge, looked at me sitting there in my best (and conservative) ‘dress for success’ outfit-high heels and all-and said with a pronounced southern accent, ‘what time are y'all going to be serving?’ (8).

Without knowing or asking, the man assumed by what he saw and how he interpreted it, that the author was a server. I use “Critical Race Theory” to explain how I experienced racism and how I responded to it. My world view is reflective of being biracial, which does not mean being one race or the other. Neither did it mean being two races. It meant being neither. Blacks did not accept me because of my lighter skin and not being raised where they were. Also, I was unaware of my Indigenous heritage, or of any Indigenous people growing up around me. It was not until I was incarcerated that I came to terms with my Indigenous identity.

Red Pedagogy & Story Telling

Grande’s “Red Pedagogy the Un-Methodology,” reflects and validates the experiences of those of Indigenous ancestry who were and have been separated from many of their cultures and

histories but still face the repercussions of who they are in a racialized society. The importance of these histories and experiences are important because Grande acknowledges that through her experiences, and how she sees the world as an Indigenous person, is valid in and of its self, as a scholar. I believe this is extremely significant due to the history of Indigenous people in this country, and the diversity of attempts of their erasure and separation from their home lands. In this way, Red Pedagogy is an Indigenous Pedagogy.

Because of this, I will be using Red Pedagogy which I feel acknowledges individual interpretations within a communal experience of a people, within a hostile environment. It is from these other Indigenous people who have also developed ways of finding, and reaffirming identities, knowledge, wisdom and ceremonies which we have developed within our environments, that I am allowed to celebrate and participate in Indigenous life's ceremonies. The sharing of knowledge from all Indigenous people reflects both endurance and an ability to recover lost information. By doing so, it is then able to promote and development new ways that allow for more than just the survival of, but also the promotion of Indigenous pedagogy. A pedagogy that is able to continue to move forward and acknowledge the value and proper treatment of all that comes from the land.

Grande's methodology dealing with Red Pedagogy is described as a "space of engagement" (234). For her, research means living ideas that come alive within and through people(s), "communities, events, texts, practices, policies, institutions, aesthetic expression, ceremonies, and rituals" (233). She understands "Indigenous pedagogy" as the perspective of the scholar, which is dealing with her own pedagogy by looking to herself, who she sees as her "ancestors, her people and her personally" (234). With each of these relationships that Grande

describes, she connects each to herself. I use this methodology, because this is the obligation I have with my research, to my communities, my ancestors and also, to myself.

My research examines how I was able to find transformation and healing in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and the role Indigenous Elders and practices had in that transformation and healing. I chose to use critical autoethnography a form of storytelling, and Red Pedagogy (Grande), to express my world view and document my experiences. My hope is that it may effectively bring about an awareness of how I grew up and what factors from that environment led to my incarceration. Critical Race theories are used to take closer looks at the environments and social systems that played a role in particular outcomes, both positive and negative. I also used newspaper articles, prison documents as well as other official documents to construct the context of my incarceration.

I chose critical autoethnography to present my experiences and examine the healing process that occurred and how I overcame negative behavior. Critical autoethnography is an ethnographic method and is compatible with “storytelling.” Critical Race Theories guided an analysis of the environments that I lived in and reacted to that led to my incarceration. Sandra Grande’s, “Red Pedagogy, the Un-Pedagogy,” helps explain my world views as a person of Indigenous ancestry and complements critical autoethnographic methods. Legal documents by the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation were also used to confirm, trace, and document my actions while incarcerated. These documents monitored aspects of my behavior, either positive or negative, and are used to support or argue against my claims of suitability.

CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing about Indigeneity and the use of spirituality, for healing is a very complicated task. The literature indicates there are a vast number of definitions and understandings of the term “spirituality.” While it is not the intent of this thesis to review all of the definitions, there are both common and diverse characteristics regarding spirituality that emerge in the research on college students, as well as with the large diverse population of Indigenous people. In addition, research on Indigenous identity and spirituality in the work by Anderson; Ramirez and Hammack; Wexler et al.; Cisneros; Hatala et al.; Collins; Marcos; Iseke; Waldram; and Simpson all tend to focus on the need and use of spirituality to promote health among people.

What is Spirituality?

An examination of the existing research suggests that for Indigenous populations the most common benefit of spirituality is its use in building resilience against diverse forms of colonization and its negative impacts on Indigenous communities. Anderson contends that Aboriginal youth that are involved in Indigenous spiritual and cultural traditions are more likely to be more resilient than youth not engaged in these practices. He argues that cultural practices dealing with spirituality create buffering experiences allowing Indigenous youth to build resilience, the ability to resist negative behavior within challenging environments.

Authors Waldram; Iseke; and Ramirez and Hammack write about how Elders transfer spiritual and cultural traditions orally to younger generations to build resilience. Waldram’s writings focusing on Saskatoon and Saskatchewan people of Canada dealt with an imprisoned youth who was constantly isolated from the general prison population because of his violent behavior. However, through working with an Elder who exposed him to the use of oral teachings

and spiritual ceremonies, the youth was able to build resilience and make positive changes in his behavior. Iseke's research, while focusing on two Elders, deals with various forms of maintaining health by practicing spirituality through maintaining traditional languages, cultural ways, and spiritual ceremonies. Ramirez and Hammack's study dealt with two elders, grandmothers from California's Indigenous populations, who aided in maintaining spirituality and future generations' tribal identities through narratives presented in a form called "survivance," the telling of histories in ways that reflect the resilience of the people.

Three articles, by Collins; Cisneros; and Simpson all deal with spiritual relationships centered on the land, and how it manifests into resilience. Cisneros argues that resilience for Indigenous groups in Canada and the United States increases when they have control over their lands and are self-governed. This control and relationship with the land allows for spiritual practices to occur. Collins writings about the Mapuche also focused on land issues and against its exploitation. It also addressed the importance of their relationships with that land. For them, the land speaks collectively through their voice as part of a spiritual act, using the Mapu, the voice of the Earth. By doing so they speak against the forms of colonization that for them, has manifested in "destruction on their territories" (24).

Simpson focuses on Canada's Indigenous population and explains the importance of all aspects of life and its source. "Our knowledge comes from the land, and the destruction of the land, and the destruction of the environment is a colonial manifestation and direct attack on Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous nationhood" (377).

Hatala et al. and Wexler et al. recognize the role of resilience and communal identities to battle social classifications of Indigenous people into oppressed groups. Here, Hatala et al. writes about the Saskatchewan people of Alaska and their relationships to the land and sacred places

that their people use, both to celebrate and to form their identities. These identities then allow for the development of resilience within a larger group (1332). Wexler et al.'s writings about Alaskan Indigenous people, builds on an understanding of identity. Here the authors look at "how a politicized sense of identity can provide young people with ways to understand personal experiences of trauma as part of a broader struggle" (566).

Author Sylvia Marcos, who focuses on Indigenous peoples of the Americas, and Nancy Stevens's writings on the Aboriginal people of Canada, refer to Indigenous people's spirituality as the source of resilience against people from other lands. She addresses issues with Christianity as a whole, but the Catholic Church in particular, not as a source of resilience, but rather as a source of what is hindering the Indigenous people's ability to realize a focused or "pure" understanding of Indigenous Spirituality. Nancy Stevens recognizes that healing cannot be complete if spirituality is ignored as she writes about the importance of spirituality in the process of healing. This use of spirituality she believes is a growing trend. "It is encouraging to me that more clients and helpers are recognizing the need to look inward, to recognize the strength of their spirit and role spirituality plays in fostering resiliency" (182).

This literature on these different groups of Indigenous people and spirituality address the need and ability for these people to heal in proper ways from the effects of colonization and trauma. These articles dealing with Indigenous people also reflect a need to return to their ceremonies, traditions and spiritual ways of life that allow for them to be healthy. The fact that the words "trauma," and "resilience," were used a number of times by authors writing about different Indigenous populations, but not by authors' writing about students in academia, reflects the differences in these two worldviews and environments, that each group faces.

Other differences are noticeable with authors who dealt with topics such as “self” or world “advancement.” These authors focused on students. This shows a desire, focus, or search for a place to fit in, a purpose, or building an identity as someone creating a better environment or future. This was clearly evident in the article by Alexander W. Astin “Why Spirituality Deserves a Central Place in Liberal Education.” Astin’s concept of spirituality dealt with existing within our “interiors” and a need for us to cultivate this which he considers, a “spiritual domain” (34). He describes the spiritual experience as private, a subjective awareness of self and believes that this is accessible to the person and can be developed through education. The theme of Astin’s writing revolved around this idea and its ability to create better learning environments as well as increase productivity in learning institutions. While this focus is on creating connections and motivating student’s academic achievement, it differs from the Indigenous perspective that focuses on what connects them to the natural environment. Gehrke’s article supports Astin’s understanding, but differs in its attempts to apply it to management for product productivity.

Sean Gehrke connects the concept of spirituality with students and the work place. Here he promotes students’ expressions of spirituality. However, his focus is on preparing students to be new leaders able to use spirituality as a motivational tool in their work environments. This would mean creating an internal connection, “spiritual”, between the workers and management. By doing so, a better working environment could then increase productivity. Here the leadership’s role would be to connect with workers in ways that create a greater sense of gratification through productivity (351). This view looks at using spirituality as a way to increase profits. This form of Spirituality is also different from that of the Indigenous people discussed in this research.

Patrick Love and Donna Talbot add to Alexander Astin's concept of a need to create a connection between spirituality and a person's ability to feel meaning or a life's purpose for education. Their article focuses on people involved in student affairs whose use of spirituality as common practice in their role using spirituality in student affairs, "The purpose of this article is to provide information about the intentional inclusion of spirituality and spiritual development in the discourse of the student affairs field and the area of student development" (362). Love and Talbot's purpose for incorporating spirituality in human development is much like that of Gehrke. It deals with a focus on empowering and motivating students by encouraging spirituality, or a sense of purpose that goes beyond the traditional work day. To do so, they hope to stimulate internal processes that require "authenticity, genuineness and wholeness as an aspect of identity development" (364). Other desirable outcomes would be, "continually transcending," and a "connectedness to self and others through relationships and unions with community" (365). In perspective, like the authors dealing with Indigeneity that look to develop cultures and traditions to create ties and bonds that give values to their lives, their article is similar but also differs in motives which is productivity. Capeheart-Meningall's article does much of the same, however, it takes steps closer to the articles dealing with Indigenous concepts.

Capeheart-Meningall's article acknowledges the need for spirituality for students in higher education, as a motive to move students beyond monetary purposes. However, her article also addresses beliefs that spirituality will allow students to learn about who they are, and how they feel personally about the world as a whole (32). This article also addresses a focus on creating a value for life and its purpose. By connecting these two aspects to learning, she believes students will be able to "integrate knowledge, skills, and experiences to make meaning throughout their lives" (32). This she feels will allow for holistic learning. "Spirituality can direct

daily living that consistently exemplifies self-integration, which is holistic, involving physical, psychological, and social aspects of the individual, bringing all aspects of life together in relation to others in his or her world” (32). These ideas also share a common thread with A. Astin’s writings which also favor an increased presence of spirituality within the educational environment, but goes further to incorporate a more holistic view.

Alexander Astin, similar to Love and Talbot; Gehrke; and Capeheart-Meningall all characterize spirituality as looking inward. He points out the lack of attention given to focuses on “empathy” and “cooperation” or being a “sentient being” (36). However, he does clearly point out later in the article, when he addresses challenges to our outside environment without changing what is on the inside, “Our research on institutional change and transformation suggests strongly that any effort to change structures has little chance of success if it ignores our collective interiors or culture” (37). A major aspect of this statement is that it draws on an understanding that our inner beliefs can change our external environments. This reveals another contrast between these authors and those writing about Indigenous people who believe people are supposed to act in accordance and learn from our natural, or exterior environments, the land. In dealing with the way the author characterizes higher education with other articles and authors dealing with the same topic and larger societies, there is no significant division (37). In all, the article was a call for a look to another side of life that allows for exposure of an inner understanding that sees beyond the patterns of social structures that guide us through daily lives that are presently constructed by patterns of both our behavior and thinking.

Alexander Astin’s writings address the lack of ability for people to feel involved in their lives which reflects on the environments and systems that continue to manifest with the same disconnection that he feels exists.

In 2003 a research project “Higher Education Research Institute,” by Astin, Helen et al. published its findings presenting its definitions and aspects associated with both spirituality and religious skepticism. According to that report, spirituality was described in the following manner; “Spirituality includes believing in sacredness of life, seeking out opportunities to grow spiritually, and believing we are all spiritual beings” Connected to Spirituality was “Spiritual Quest” which focused on life and its purpose. It:

reflects interest in the meaning/ purpose of life, finding answers to the mysteries of life, and developing a meaningful philosophy of life. Under Religious Skepticism, was the description, that it ‘includes beliefs such as ‘the universe arose by chance’ and ‘in the future, science will be able to explain everything,’ and disbelief in the notion of life after death (8).

This article represents two sides of the belief system with “Spirituality,” on one side and “Religious Skepticism” on the other. Religion as “Religious Skepticism” was represented as a “Religious Struggle” that “indicates feeling unsettled about religious matters, feeling distant from God, and questioning religious beliefs,” (Astin, Helen et al. 8).

Here the differences between the two were also defined. Spirituality was characterized by words such as: equanimity, commitment, engagement, and social conservation, while the words used for religious, were struggle, charitable involvement, compassionate self-concept, ethic of caring and ecumenical world view. Based on this definition and description, the conclusion of their report described students as hoping and believing that they can succeed in the occupations they choose. These students also contemplated the purpose of their existence while focusing on being caring and giving people (Astin, Helen et al.). While this report was very formal and to a

point, impersonal, it gave a humanistic outlook of youths entering higher education, describing them as caring for others while in a world with multiple views and challenges.

Common aspects of student-based articles show a focus on students' attempts to move beyond the manufacture of knowledge and passing it on to new generations. The articles critique pattern-based behavioral systems, and recognize a deterioration of, not only the quality of life, but also of its creativity, and motivation. For these reasons, the authors took a closer look when examining educational environment's possible motivating factors to determine how to improve the meaning making processes, and how to increase the quality of education and improve the learning experiences for students.

While students are looking for positive motivation, it appears the educational system is looking to increase the productivity of the students through spirituality, having them look within themselves for motives to better produce the products schools or businesses are manufacturing. This was very evident in the articles by A. Astin; Helen Astin et, al.; and Gehrke, whose writings discussed individual's interiors, changing the exteriors, or environments. Capeheart-Meningall believes that:

spirituality can direct daily living that consistently exemplifies self-integration, which is holistic, involving physical, psychological, and social aspects of the individual, and bringing them all together in relation to others in his or her world" (32).

These ideologies are positive in that they are goal centered on changing the external world or environment in ways they believe are beneficial. However, they are in direct contradiction to the views described by Simpson, who writes about the Indigenous people of Canada. Their intentions are not to benefit from, but to exist with, care for, and be cared for by

the environment. This is where there is a conflict between the Indigenous views represented in this research, and that of the colonizers, which reflects a need for the world to serve them.

Spirituality and Indigenous Views

Authors addressing spirituality among Indigenous people differed from authors dealing with Spirituality and students in higher education. From the Indigenous view, Deloria Jr. writes a critical analysis that discusses the significance of spiritual relationships between various American Indigenous people, the environment, and other forms of life; plants, animals, and land. Land is included in his description because for these people, the land is the source of life, it is alive. The importance of this is that it not only recognizes that there is a relationship between the land and people, but that it also explains the importance of balance within this relationship that is fundamental and necessary. All participants are needed. Deloria Jr.'s writings challenge many aspects of Western logic while comparing them to various Indigenous people's knowledge.

Author Natalie Avalos Cisneros, who writes of Indigenous peoples of the Americas, describe the sacred as an interdependent relationship with the land, spirit world, and one another, as a fundamental part of their worldviews (3). In respect to aspects of power differences in respect to authors writing in academia, she explains; "power in an Indigenous context is negotiated from the bottom up as opposed to being from the top to down," (4). Sandra Collins gives an example of these relationships as she writes about spirituality with the Mapuche, an Indigenous people from Chile and Argentina. The Mapuche, as a way of life, look towards their engagement with their "Feyuntun" an inner connection with spirituality that manifests at critical times in the form of speaking out in a manner described as both loud and profound. "Rather than 'speaking' through the Mapurbe, Mapu (the Earth) shouts menaces," (25). This act is rarely understood by others of the so-called modern world. However, as a part of that culture, it is a

voice that originates from within them challenging the encroachments on their lands, and cultures as acts that reflect the genocide that has been experienced by these people.

Like Sandra Collins, who writes about the Mapuche and their struggle against colonization and the negative effects of Christianity on these people, Sylvia Marcos addresses Christianity's harmful impacts on Indigenous nations in Mexico. Marcos also rejects current understandings of spirituality within her own people. She feels Christianity has infected the foundation of their struggle against colonization, both within their communities and the external communities. Because of this, she believes a new understanding of spirituality must be developed to counter much of the harm done to Indigenous communities by Christianity. For this, Marcos uses feminist perspectives, and foundations used in movements that deal with women's struggles and their future wellbeing for the survival of their culture; "Catholicism-as a colonizing enterprise-has deeply permeated the Indigenous traditions of the Americas, making it almost impossible to separate 'pure' Indigenous religious traditions from Catholic images, rites, and symbols" (25-26).

For some Indigenous people, culture is the physical expression of their relationship with the land, while spirituality is the understanding that everything that exists is connected and therefore interdependent on the other. Njoki N. Wane expresses this relationship in a similar way, as he explains that, "Spirituality is therefore our way of being connected with the land, the universe, and creation" (25).

While these teachings and understandings are fundamental to the lives of the Indigenous people represented in this research, equally as important is how the transference of this knowledge and spiritual understandings are done. It is necessary for these ways of life and spirituality to be expressed and interpreted in a context that represents its value. For this reason,

there is also a great deal of attention given to how the information and wisdom is transferred. For this, Elders, play an intricate role in passing on these valuable teachings.

The topic of Elders, and transferring this knowledge and wisdom, is addressed in Waldram's writings, "Aboriginal Spirituality in Corrections: A Canadian Study in Religion and Therapy." Waldram's writing explains spirituality through a case study based on the work and time that an Elder spent with a youth in a Canadian Prison. Waldram's research presented the Elder as the source or holder of wisdom to be transferred to the youth in the forms of ceremony, oral teachings, traditions, and insight. He provides an example of positive outcomes which are also included in my research as well. Because of this, I was personally able to relate to the ideas in this article. Here, the youth explained how he was able to work with the Elder, because of the Elder being "Native". The youth saw that the Elder had also felt systematic discrimination, but was also aware of their culture. Therefore, was able to relate to what daily life growing up entailed, "He understood what went on in my community, what happened to me," (200). Knowing these things, the Elder didn't blame the youth for the way he was, nor did he demand a change. Rather, the Elder saw this was affecting the youth and was able to address it, and give the youth traditional ways and ceremonies to help the youth deal with these challenges. "It brings up my spirit, especially when I come out of a sweat, eh. When you come out of that sweat, there's nothing that can disturb you," (200).

Dreams were also mentioned in Waldram's article. He described the purpose for them, how they were received, and the Elders ability to aid in their interpretations. These were described;

messages encoded in dreams are purposefully sent to the person. These messages can be disturbing and require interpretation. Elders are particularly valuable in offering the culturally appropriate interpretations” (201).

After some time spent with the Elder, the youth reported the improvements that he felt, “I never feel like taking hostages no more. I want to be out with the Elder and learn about my people and learn about me” (Waldram 204). I also related to these topics. In particular to the dreams, because of my personal experiences. Through my dreams I was able to learn about myself, and my environments. I was taught these things by an Elder who showed me how much we are able to learn from them. This literature not only explained the spiritual aspects and reason for dreams but also how these forms of understanding are passed on. This is another topic Leanne Simpson address with her writings.

Leanne Simpson’s literature deals with Indigenous people from the Canadian area. She explains how Indigenous understandings that deal with knowledge and spirituality are connected to the land. She centers most of her literature around the importance of understanding the need for a beneficial relationship between the people and the land. While most of the articles written about Indigenous people mention land and that a relationship with it is important, Simpson’s writings focus on this point. Her writings explain why these relationships are so important,

These relationships are coded in the structure of Indigenous languages and in Indigenous political and spiritual systems. They are practiced in traditional forms of governance and are lived in the hearts and minds of Indigenous peoples. Without intact ecosystems, Indigenous People cannot nurture these relationships” (378).

As the environments are more exploited and the people living in relationship to them are being pushed further away, neither is able to heal or be replenished. The land withers and the people search for other ways for basic essentials for their bodies and spirituality. The inability to provide for these needs affect the people negatively emotionally, spiritually and physically and logically, as Simpson's writings demonstrate.

Simpson also addresses the growing loss of opportunities that Indigenous people have to spend with the land and learn from it and the many different ways that it is able support life. This learning is done through observations, from watching nature and natural forms of living. However, with the encroachment on many of these lands, and the displacement of much of the life, many of these opportunities to learn through observation both have and are diminishing, "Animals, the clans that inform traditional governance and provide personal direction, lose places to live and food to eat" (379). This is also a loss in the forms of relationships, which is both physical and spiritual, and ties all things together with all things being dependent on each other. As monetary based actions cause an encroachment on natural lands, "Spiritual places are destroyed and with them opportunities to maintain alliances with essential forces of nature, the very alliances that are responsible for the transmission of Indigenous Knowledge" (379).

Simpson also recognized the decaying of relationships that have traditionally allowed for these relationships to continue. This is due to a growing distance between youths and elders, a major cause of the severance of this natural relationship. "It is void of the spatial relationships created between elder and youth. It becomes generalized and depersonalized" (380). Again, the importance of Elders is mentioned as a source of transmission of knowledge to future generations.

Because of the growing distance between the generations of Indigenous peoples, spiritual values in today's societies are far outweighed by the dollar value of both land and natural resources. Many of the homes and lands occupied by Indigenous nations are sought by colonizers for their source of wealth. Northern Anishinaabe communities, for example, are situated in some of the most lucrative forests in Canada, and as a result of clear-cut logging, (the stripping of trees from the land in a uniform manner) by large multinational corporations, the abuse of much of this land is intensive and the loss that the Northern Anishinaabe feel is intense:

All of the traplines are located off-reserve within their traditional territories, and communities have little influence over land-use decisions made in these territories. Although they receive no financial compensation for the destruction of their lands, when a trapline is clear-cut, a trapper loses much more than his or her livelihood. The community loses food, medicines, and places to hunt, fish, and gather. Families lose opportunities to travel on the land and to be together. Spiritual places are destroyed and with them, opportunities to maintain alliances with the essential forces of nature, the very alliances that are responsible for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge (Simpson 379).

The Northern Anishinaabe serve as an example of the magnitude of harm Indigenous people are subject to by the separation from their home lands, their spirituality, and health. For Simpson, Indigenous people "must" be reconnected with their lands and their rights to "self-determination". Realizing that spirituality is connected with many of these aspects of life, including their ability to endure the harsh relationships that exist with the colonizers, makes these factors become an issue of health and resilience, for the Northern Anishinaabe people.

Author Nancy Stevens also makes the connection between spirituality, health and resilience. These connections are necessary for Indigenous people to survive in these hostile environments. Stevens explains in her article, “From the Inside Out: Spirituality as the Heart of Aboriginal Helping in [spite of?] Western Systems” how “healing takes its firmest roots when the spiritual aspects of the individual’s life are attended to” (182). She looks at Indigenous healing’s internally as a source of strength and guidance (182). This aspect of her writing reflects that of authors dealing with students and spirituality. Stevens applies this understanding to both those trying to heal as well as those “working as a helper, particularly within western systems, the challenges can be daunting and frustrating” (182). Here however, Stevens points out the environment of her work as being within the western systems, those that “originated in Europe” (182).

Spirituality for Indigenous People and Students in Higher Education

Aside from Steven’s article, articles about the students in higher education and Indigenous people dealing with spirituality, all show two major divides and movements in different directions. Articles dealing with the students, and educators, focus on looking inward. They look to make connections with characteristics that represent ethics, morals, and values, which include personal or interior understandings of who they are, what they want to be, or what they believe to be right. The second major focus for those within education or academia, was how they looked to the future in dealing with their search for personal direction.

In contrast, the articles dealing with Indigenous people, Anderson; Collins; Deloria Jr; Hatala et. al; Iseke; Ramirez and Hammack; Stevens; Simpson; Stevens; Waldram; Wexler; and Zeller rather than look internally, like those of education, these articles looked to their exteriors, to their environments as ways of learning and healing. The articles focused on the things that

support them, and the things they support, relationships with the lands, waters, plants, and animals.

The articles about Indigenous people also differed from articles about students. The articles about students focused on looking toward the future; the articles on Indigenous people linked the past to the present and well-being. They looked at the relationships they had with their elders who maintained balance with things they felt connected to, and tried to maintain those relationships through culture and traditions. They saw these past relationships as things that maintained their health and well-being, as well as that of the environment and their future. If these relations were to be broken, all would be lost. The difference between authors writing about students, spirituality and education is in direct contrast to what Simpson writes about, that “Indigenous Knowledge comes from the land through the relationships Indigenous Peoples develop and foster with the essential forces of nature” (Simpson 378). Devine Jr. also wrote in regards to Indigenous People, “The chance that lands would be lost meant that religious communities would be destroyed and individual identities forsaken” (Deloria Jr. 142).

These authors world views, in many ways were different on the location or possession of power as well. Within the academic view, the students are looking to maintain the ability to have control and power, while the Indigenous perspectives reflect sharing and the maintenance of relationships so all may have a future.

Spirituality vs Religion

The Indigenous writer, Sylvia Marcos addressed the topic of indigeneity and spirituality. She explained that many of the spiritual concepts that exist today, need to be readdressed because of the heavy influence of colonialism and patriarchy that have been imbedded into

Indigenous traditions (25-26). Marcos focused on communal healing through traditional spirituality which is different from the literature on spirituality in relation to the students that looked within themselves or toward the future, for either their place or role in that future.

Along with this difference, there is also the divide between what is considered a religion, and spirituality; religion a structured form of behavior based on a belief system, and spirituality, which deals with a connection between an energy from a person's exterior and the interior. This was something that was addressed in "The Autobiography of Malcom X as Told by Alex Haley" written by Alex Haley. When Malcolm X traveled to Mecca during the 1960 for his pilgrimage, he was not faced with the racism he had grown up with here in America. During that time, the 1960's, "The Nation of Islam Muslim," was a religion that expressed political views of a group of African Americans. However, leaving the United States, Malcolm X encountered Muslims of all colors eating, praying, and sleeping together on the same mats as one people, "I learned that pilgrims from every land, every color, and class, and rank; high officials and the beggar alike- all snored in the same language" (350). This represented the difference between a religion in the United States, and spirituality, as he experienced it, on his pilgrimage.

In the articles dealing with students and spirituality, Higher Education Research Institute; Capeheart-Meningall; and Love and Talbot, the students appeared to be moving in the forward direction, looking for a way to make a positive difference. The articles with an Indigenous focus referred to the past and focused more on traditions, natural ways of healing, or maintaining the connections that gave them their identities. The transference of knowledge was done orally, and centered around the people, the land, and communal living according to articles by Iseke; Stevens; Collins; Hatala et al.; Marcos; Simpson; Ramirez and Hammack; Waldram; Wexler et al.; Anderson. To lose these things would be to lose themselves. Judy Iseke's article

also draws on this same understanding. She explains that spirituality is not an individual concept, it is a “communal” aspect connecting “people and land” (Iseke 36). This, within Indigenous communities, is done by the elder’s ceremonial healing practices, which are embedded with forms of spirituality that are now becoming penetrated by colonization (36).

Spirituality, Trauma, and Resilience

The main focus of my autoethnography deals with trauma, resilience against trauma, and healing from trauma. Given this focus, trauma must be both identified, as well as how the Indigenous people experienced it in its original form and how it is manifested in today’s Indigenous societies. Author David Stannard gives a brief look at some of the ways this initial trauma was first presented.

Following Columbus each time the Spanish encountered a native in the course of their travels, whether they were individuals or in a group, they were ordered to read to the Indians a statement informing them of the “truth” of Christianity and that they needed to swear immediate allegiance to the Pope and the Spanish crown. ‘I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the church and their Highnesses. We shall make slaves of them, and shall take your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can... (qtd. from Stannard 65).

While Stannard documents the physical aspects of colonization in a blunt but accurate description, Karanga, Maulana, an African American professor from the Black Studies

Department at the University of California Riverside, explained the mental or psychological impact of colonization as it exists;

The Westernization, or more precisely the Europeanization of human consciousness, I mean the systematic invasion and effective transformation of the cultural consciousness of the various peoples of the world by Europeans through technology, education, and the media so that at least three things occur: (1) the progressive loss of historical memories of these people; (2) the progressive depreciation of themselves and their culture; and (3) the progressive adoption of a Eurocentric mode of assessment of self, society, and the world that induces cognitive distortion and deprivation, and the destruction of human richness in diversity (407).

Both authors Karenga, and Stannard, addressed the underlying colonizing factors imbedded in third world people's societies. Stannard documents the physical brutality that the Indigenous people encountered with the arrival of the Europeans, and Karanga addressed the psychological impact.

This can now be connected to the writings of Sylvia Marcos who recognizes the spiritually debilitating effects of Catholicism on Indigenous communities. She writes about the embedding of Catholicism,

“Catholicism-as a colonizing enterprise-has deeply permeated the indigenous traditions of the Americas, making it almost impossible to separate ‘pure’ Indigenous traditions from Catholic images, rites, and symbols” (26).

She also goes further expressing what she considers a way to deal with this problem.

Marcos believes that a rediscovery of Indigenous traditions and spirituality is necessary. “The Indigenous women’s movement has started to propose its own ‘Indigenous spirituality’” (26). This is seen as an attempt to counter the effects of Christianity, which she feels are deeply imbedded in Indigenous communities. For this, a new idea of spirituality must be developed that is able to exclude many of those influences.

This argument is supported by Lara Medina’s book, *Las Hermanas Chicana/Latina Religious-Political Activism in the U.S. Catholic Church*, where Medina discusses the 1960’s experiences by nuns within the Catholic Church dealing with sexism, and their attempts to expand their roles within the church. This is made clear by a comment written about by Medina;

Sister Zarate experienced more than anyone else the greater brunt of the rejection on the part of the church. We learned that the Church can never, as an institutionalized entity, really embrace the [people’s] movements because it is too much of the problem (116).

Their ability to organize and support the women and community constantly faced opposition by the Church.

Also experiencing problems with the church, Sylvia Marcos believes that influences from the church disrupt current understanding of spirituality and traditions within Indigenous communities. The Catholic Church’s influences on traditional practices are seen as impeding Indigenous expressions of spirituality in their lives. Author Leanne Simpson also agreed about the negative aspects of the Catholic Church. However, rather than looking to recreate spirituality, Simpson takes a different approach and expresses a need to reflect on traditional ways to recuperate knowledge, wisdom and spirituality derived from the land and the language. With the letters IK representing Indigenous Knowledge, she writes;

The answers to how and why our knowledge have become threatened lie embedded in the crux of the colonial infrastructure, and unless properly dismantled and accounted for, this infrastructure will only continue to undermine efforts to strengthen IK systems and to harm the agenda of decolonization and self-determination (375).

Simpson also addressed the passing of Indigenous teachings of spirituality from elders to youths, in their languages. She believes this knowledge comes from the land through a relationship that is established by the people, but it is the essence of this very relationship that is threatened. Simpson states,

“The political and legal system of the settlers removed Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction over the land; Indigenous people lost the ability to protect Indigenous knowledge from desecration” (378).

Hatala et al. also writes about the difference in perceptions of time that for many Indigenous people, is viewed as circular “the seasons constantly return, especially with hunting gathering societies, “time is ‘circular,’ involving concentric ‘time circles’” (1331). This perspective, however can also have a negative consequence for Indigenous people. “This occurs when “events more important to a person or community are experienced as ‘closer in time’ although they may chronically occur further away from a linear time perspective” (1331).

Deloria Jr’s “God is Red” complements Hatala et al.’s writings; he brought out differences in “world views” that are relevant and play major roles in mental health, perceptions of the world, and hope. Accepting mental constructs that do not make sense in one’s environment or community disrupts a person’s ability to use common sense or rational for decisions. Deloria Jr. points out differences in the logic of the European mentality and that of the

Indigenous hunters and gatherers of the now called Americas that lead to major issues in finding a balance between the people and their environment here. One aspect of these different world views is the European understanding of time as linear and moving forward. It begins with the creation of the world and ends with its destruction. This leaves a person with an inevitable doom always lingering over them. For people of Indigenous ancestry, the seasons continually return with a rebirth within the cycle. This shows the differences between these two world views.

Deloria Jr. writes about the inevitable end of both the environment and the life that lives within it. According to Christians, history which began with the story of creation and ends with the apocalypse. “In the Christian religion both are doomed from shortly after the creation event until the end of the world” (81). Deloria Jr here explains how for Indigenous people, this was living a life with an impeding shadow hanging over them. “With the fall of Adam, the rest of nature also falls out of grace with God, Adam being a surrogate for the whole of creation” (79). However, for Indigenous people, this was interpreted differently. They viewed time in a circular manner where life’s patterns repeated themselves. “The beginning and end of time are of no apparent concern for many tribal religions” (77). These two concepts represent a few of many differences in mentality and world views that separated these two worlds

The contradictions between the two cultures and world views continue, but affecting the Indigenous people with far greater negative impact. Deloria Jr. also contrasts the differences between Christianity and the Indigenous people’s sense of logic. He writes:

its interpretation of history-the temporal dimension-and the American Indian tribal religions-basically spatially located-is clearly illustrated when we understand the nature of sacred mountains, sacred hills, sacred rivers, and other geographical features sacred to Indian tribes. The Navajo for example, have sacred mountains where they believe they

rose from the underworld. There is no doubt in any Navajo's mind that these particular mountains are the exact mountains where it took place. Indian tribes combine history and geography so that they have a "sacred geography," that is to say; every location within their original homeland has a multitude of stories that recount the migrations, revelations, and particular historical incidents that cumulatively produced the tribe in its current condition... (120-121).

With histories of people there are physical acts and places that leave physical evidence of their occurrences, Deloria Jr, logically challenges histories by reason that there should also be some form of physical proof that places exist where acts occurred. "The test of the extent to which a religion has a claim to historical validity, therefore, should at least partially involve its identification of specific locations and lands where the religious event that created the community took place" (120-121). From here, Hatala et al. adds to confusions that disrupt Indigenous people's ability to accept particular colonizers logic and the way these thoughts and feelings are dealt with.

Hatala et al. explains how life's complications can become compounded for youths dealing with their contemporary issues, complications such as, "being solely responsible for younger siblings from an early age, or involuntarily dealing with other life responsibilities beyond their childhood capacities. These situations can impact not just youths present situations, but may also be felt within a broader range of time. "These things can foster feelings of confusion and frustration as their childhoods are in a sense, 'taken' from them" (1335). Hatala et al. sees the results of such difficult and conflicting emotions as motivators that lead to negative outcomes.

Differences between feelings, cultures, and the communities where youths live may also lead to contradictions in behaviors and turmoil. Some youth are even subjected to separation from their family which can lead to despair. These very issues, are presented in the writings by Tonya Talaga who writes about large numbers of suicides among Indigenous youths who occupy the lands north of the United States in Canada. Here Talaga explains some of the manifestations of trauma, “Groups of three to five kids living in the same community would take their own lives within weeks or months of each other. Pik has lost at least 100 of its 2,100 members over a twenty-year period” (135). The despair created for youths leaves them susceptible to desperate acts. These mass numbers of suicides show beyond any doubt the seriousness and magnitude of these problems and a realization that there is a grave need for a solution.

Leanne R. Simpson’s writings here again connect the issue of Indigenous people with the land. Through her explanation of how Indigenous people are tied to the land, she shows how they are also subject to what happens to the land. “The land is humiliated, and since Indigenous Peoples and our knowledge is part of the land, we all suffer. Communities become more reliant on Western economic systems, become less self-sufficient, and are propelled further down the path toward total cultural assimilation” (379). Simpson also writes about how the land being commodified, with much of its value and treatment is focused on it’s being exploited as a product, and that newer generations being exposed to these views of seeing the land as distant from the teaching of Elders, and are not able to fully understand the importance of these relationships. She describes the land as “stripped of its dynamism and its fluidity and confined to a singular context. It is void of the spatial relationships created between Elder and youth. It becomes generalized and depersonalized” (380).

Authors Wexler et. al., also explain the outcomes of these traumas on the population of Indigenous people they classify as American Indian and Alaskan Natives whose hardships that are described in the following manner; “‘Risk’ factors are experiences of acute hardship, (e.g. victimization) or forms of sustained stress (e.g. poverty, historical traumas, discrimination) that have been associated with ‘poor’ behavior or health outcomes” (566). This trauma manifests itself in multiple forms, one of which is in the number of youths that take their own lives. For instance, according to the California Department of Disease Control and Prevention, the number of suicides among Native Americans and non-white Hispanics was greater per 100,000, population during the time period of 1997 to 2007. However, Whites, non-Hispanics did surpass the numbers of Native Americans and non-white Hispanics for people over the age of fifty-four.

Hatala’s writings also address other behavioral problems that manifest within Indigenous youths as a result of colonization. These deal with how youths may see many of these negative histories as existing relatively closer in time then they may actually be. “Prominently among these distressing environments which youth spoke about were the historical and contemporary forces” (1334). Hatala writes about how these traumas, manifest, “youth narratives often depicted the ‘lasting’ impact of these historical events as ‘closer in time,’ intrinsically linked to their contemporary experiences, and not something necessarily locked away in some ‘distant’ past” (1334). These aggressions are historical forms of traumas, or historical traumas.

“‘historical traumas,’ that manifest themselves within inner-city environments through increased rates of poverty, daily and persistent microaggressions, marginalization from mainstream society, subtle and overt forms of racism, family violence, sexual abuse and assault, social and cultural dislocation, substance abuse, self-harm, and heightened rates of suicide” (1334).

The following example was given by a youth, describing these feelings,

“Like when you are in a world of violence and anger, what’s the idea of the future there? Nothing! Not for me, I felt that that was my life, and I was going to live, eat, breath, and sleep that shit. I thought that was the end for me-just live and die being a gang member,” (1336).

These same types of negative thinking influences patterns and behaviors portrayed by many youths in prison. Prison statistics are also substantiating these beliefs when dealing with causes of these behaviors and mentality of Indigenous youths in these environments. The Data Analysis Unit that documents the statistics dealing with “California Prisoners and Paroles 2010,” California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, 2010, reported the number of Hispanic inmates in California topped that of all other ethnicities, “Incarceration rates for the year of 2010. The statistics showed the number of Hispanics was 64,733, 39.8%. The number of Blacks was 47,135, 28.9%. The Number of Others (other than Black, White, or Hispanic), which incorporates Native Americans, and Asians, showed numbers of incarcerated at 9,965 6.5% and the number of Whites incarcerated were 40,988, 25%” (21). These numbers are given in accordance to the total population of all inmates.

Further data from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s head Mac Taylor, who works as the Legislative Analysis for the Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections, confirmed that inmates were not receiving proper treatment that would allow for rehabilitation., the “Prison Rehabilitation Programs, have several shortcomings” (1). This in essence, is then placing inmates in a system of a revolving door in and out of prisons. Taylor’s admission of these problems shows a need to analyze and search for ways of dealing with trauma for this population.

Many people of Indigenous Ancestry within colonized environments are still dealing with present acts of colonization and searching for ways to develop resilience. Wexler et.al. addresses this issue. They draw on the understanding that there is a connection between health and its link to culture and traditions. They also believe that there is a need to maintain a traditional connection between community, history and mythology that allows for a foundation that may empower or allow youths to be resilient to forms of racism and marginalization. Wexler et. al., also acknowledges how these cultural ties will benefit these youths by stating, “A strong cultural identity distinguishes a Native young person from the dominant society and offers him or her a way to positively understand the difference” (568).

Authors Anderson; Hatala et al.; Iseke; Ramirez and Hammack; Stevens; Simpson; and Wexler et al. have written about the importance of culture and its relationship with the environment, as resilience, and its ability to aid in fighting off negative aspects of colonization and marginality. These authors explain the role resilience plays with these youths in negative cultural environments. Hatala et. al. explains what resilience is and the effects of it for this population of youth in the following manner which points out its importance. “Resilience is often understood as a pattern of positive adaption in the midst of or following significant stress, adversity, or risk. This adaption occurs through the dynamic interactions of protective factors in social or cultural environments, psychological and emotional skills” (1331-1332). This draws a direct link with the research of this thesis, that deals with transformation and healing through the learning and practice of cultural traditions and spirituality. Here it is presented as building and reinforcing identities that strengthens a person’s ability to feel as well as defend a sense of value as far as who and what they are.

Horner and Martinez, explain resilience in the context of families of American Migrant Farmworkers living in boxcars in the Michigan area who at times endure freezing temperatures;

A fundamental feature of human experience that is crucial for positive adaption by individuals and families, to severe adversity and hardship. Rather than conceptualizing resilience as personal traits, the potential for resilience is embedded within the frameworks of meaning used by individuals and, in our case, families, which give them hope that things will get better (537).

This article not only explains what resilience is but also acknowledges its existence as a communal aspect. This example of resilience also shows that it has been practiced by people of Indigenous ancestry to both endure as well as to heal from colonization and its forms of suppression experienced in various communities and places. It presents various times and places where and when It has served as a foundation to build communities.

Neil Anderson's writings support and reaffirm these ideas by recognizing the statistics. He notes, "that 72% of Aboriginal youth smoke cigarettes and (yet again) that those who smoke are more likely to drink" (1). Anderson however goes on, to acknowledge that those communities who do not smoke, have a greater chance of participating in "traditional activities" (1). He shows the need to not just focus on the negative data, but also the importance of the positive, seen as resilient.

Both Anderson 2008 and Hatala et al. 2017, acknowledge particular aspects of Indigenous life that are connected to resilience. Anderson's literature, looks at the aspects of Indigenous people's lives that strengthen them and allow them to more firmly deal with colonization. This is the "collective" aspect of life that provides resilience and leads to healing,

and the ability to move forward and reject the negative aspects of many of our environments. This is explained by Ramirez and Hammack, as the ability to “negotiate the cultural and psychological legacy of colonialism as they construct coherent, purposive individual and communal narratives” (112). These authors provide examples of how Indigenous people are able to not just survive, but to heal. They represent resilience through their abilities to maintain their different world views that allow them to resolve or endure problems within the marginalized communities people of Indigenous ancestry live in or the forms of marginalization they face.

Waldram’s article, a Canadian case study focused on a youth in prison who was able to change his life, aided by the intervention of an elder. As the Elder worked with the youth, he was able to participate in “Sweats,” (cleansing ceremonies), and realize aspects of spirituality that allowed him to understand and grow past much of the trauma he felt exposed to racism. The Elder worked with the youth, allowing him to become aware of who he was as an Indigenous person, what he was going through, and why. Through this journey, he was able to realize what he had been experiencing and how to deal with it. This resulted in him later being offered a chance to move on from that prison and program for a chance at a lower security facility. However, the youth opted to remain, realizing that he still had more healing to do. A reason given for why he was able to work with the Elder, was because “he was native... He understood what went on in my community, what happened to me” (20). It was also due to a bridging, or connecting between the acts of learning and doing. The things mentioned were not presented as theory, they were in practice. This is what the writings by Stevens described as attending to the spiritual aspects of life (198).

According to the literature reviewed, there is no one aspect of so many people that can define the total of what those people are. However, in viewing the situations of these different

people, there is a common understandings and fundamental way that these groups are tied. Simpson draws attention to the one common fundamental understanding among many Indigenous people. This is the environment and the particular relationship that exists with the people that live within it. It is from this understanding, that Simpson explains that as people have fewer reasons to go out on the land, there are fewer occasions for the children to observe, experience, and learn from the natural world.

For Simpson, healing originates with the land. This has been the relationship that has existed with the Indigenous people and the land for thousands of years. Now, Indigenous people are being compromised in numerous ways and the land is being exploited. As this system has progressed and Indigenous people have been encroached upon and pushed from their lands to the cities in efforts to assimilate them, the lands are being occupied in foreign ways and exploited. Simpson's explanation, about how the land has been compromised rings true. In California specifically, this form of suffering has manifested within the carceral system with thousands of people of Indigenous ancestry being pushed into it.

CHAPTER 4 CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Racism

I am a light skinned man of Black and Native American ethnicity. I grew up in Reseda, a community in the San Fernando Valley. There, during the 70's and early 80's, Blacks stood out, first because there were none, and second because it was racialized. Racism was practiced against any non-whites. While some acts were subtle, others were blatant and revealing of what racism really looked like. I remember sometimes waiting to be seated at "Bob's Big Boy" for exaggerated periods of time, while Whites, who had arrived later, were seated first. Also having access to the swimming pool at Reseda park was difficult. I only remember ever going there once, and that It took some arguing before I could finally go in.

There were also forms of racism that were more extreme. During the late 70's walking to "Cantara Elementary School," I remember I had to pass one particular house where the owner would wait for us to pass by to release his Doberman Pincher. One day, a new girl who was Black, was also walking with me. As we approached that particular house where the dog lived, I told her that when we get to that house, "just run, don't stop." When we got to the house and the dog was released, the girl panicked and tried to climb on top of a car. I watched as the dog bit her and dragged her to the ground. The owner did nothing to stop the attack. After the police were called and they talked to the man, we were told to leave the man's dog alone and sent on our way to make it to school. When we arrived at the school, the girl was not allowed to enter because of her injuries. The school did not want responsibility for the situation, but they did call an ambulance. I never saw the girl again.

Because of this, my parents were constantly looking for better schools to put me in. This was for both safety reasons as well as for a better education. Sometimes these schools were either in black neighborhoods in L.A., or close to Reseda where we lived, a predominantly white area. In the late 70's at one of the schools I attended with a large black population in L.A., I remember a black student telling me, "You ain't no nigga," this was due to my light skin complexion. During those younger years, I remember I always felt some sense of distance between myself and other black students. In reality, I didn't really feel I fit in anywhere.

This past of never feeling that I fit in, was what it meant for me to be mixed race. The way that both society as well as myself, was taught to never see how I was part of the two races I was connected to, but the way I was taught that I was not complete in either. It is reflective of multiple aspects of racism. In one manner, it shows racism expressed in society on personal levels, where acts by individuals belittle, degrade, or harm other individuals. This was evident with the older white man who would constantly release his dog on us. His actions were to degrade us, and show that he didn't care if we got hurt. This displayed the lack of value of life that we had. In another way, the police refusal to hold the man responsible for the attack, revealed racism at a systematic level. We were denied our protection by the government. It reinforced the lack of value placed on our lives.

The Barrio

Along with the predominantly white community in Reseda where I grew up, there was also a small community of Chicana/os that I did fit in with. We all felt racism. Sometimes we felt it as that uncomfortable feeling that a person gets in the stomach, like, "Damn!" this is wrong" and makes you feel a little sick. Other times, it was the kind of racism that we as kids, had to physically fight, and I became part of the Barrio.

The “Barrio” was my community that I was raised in. It literally translates to a neighborhood or city, but in Spanish, the word also has a feeling of home. For myself, it connected me to those I grew up with, and our families, it meant home. Families knew each other. Parents knew other parent’s kids, and we as kids, we fought for ourselves, and against anyone who challenged us. This was who we were, and this was our barrio, where we were raised.

While I had my identity with the barrio, looking back now, I really had no identity. Wherever I was, I knew I had a right to be there, but at the same time, there was a reason I shouldn’t be there. I felt the constant need to prove myself, to show that I deserved to be where I was. It was these feelings that numbed my desire to live a long life. I would have rather, “die a good death” doing something really crazy to show everyone that I really was a tough guy who feared nothing. In many ways, by living the way I was, I was trying to die. No matter what race I was, I was only half of it. For me, that is what it is mentally, to be someone who is mixed. Our focus is always on what we don’t have in common, not on what we do. I’m not saying that my buddies treated me bad because they were always good to me. It is just an insecurity that I as an individual needed to find a way to rise above. It is a mentality that is a biproduct of racism, like if I didn’t get a job that I knew I could do, I started wondering to myself, “Is it me?”

As I grew up, these insecurities and the need to always prove myself to the people around me increased. By the mid 80’s, the later years of high school, I dressed in Khaki pants, long sleeved Pendleton Shirts, polished Imperial shoes, and dark squared shades. This was the normal dress style for people from the barrio back then. We were called “Cholos”.

A few weeks before my graduation from Sherman Oakes Center for Enriched Studies, a high school I attended, my best friend died. That was really hard for me to deal with at that time.

We were really close and I still miss him now, but he wasn't the only one who died. I lost a few of my friends. Most in different ways, but it just seemed like people were dying.

After high school in 1986, my mother forced me to go to college, California State University at Northridge in 1986. I remember she had threatened to throw me out if I didn't go, so I left home, but after a couple days, I agreed. The racism there was blatant. At first, I tried to dress white and be social, but that didn't work at all. I couldn't get into study groups, and trips to the professor's office during office hours were always the same. The Professors would tell me to take notes and do the readings. They would say, "everything is there".

Finally, I gave up and I stopped trying to fit in. I stopped trying to dress like a "white boy", or a student. I put back on my bandana, baggy pants, shades, and walked around campus with a "I don't give a fuck attitude." It felt good that all those people realized I wasn't some nice kid on campus. Even though I still wasn't doing well, at least I felt better.

Learning in School about Indigenous Ancestry

Later that semester, I remember that I had followed two girls, the first Chicanas I had ever seen on campus. They led me across a large grass area to a building I had never been in, it was called the Chicana/o Studies Department. I couldn't believe that there were actually Chicana/o students here. I heard the sounds of Mariachi's coming from some of the classrooms and saw murals on the walls. Another thing that startled me was that these classes were being taught by Chicana/o professors. I never knew that this was in college, or at least not in the way I thought college was, in my reality. From my perspective, the way I lived, and what I was, didn't exist outside of barrios. These weren't "Cholas" or "Cholos," like me, people who were from the neighborhood, or considered gang members, but they were "raza," people of the same race. I saw

the kind of artwork I drew on the walls in the class rooms, and other things from my barrio, like pictures of people with tattoos and dressed the way I dressed. For me, this was incredible, it made me feel like I was real.

After that, I began to take classes in the department and hang out there. I had friends and went to parties. Studying wasn't always easy, but I liked it. I was learning about the way I lived everyday life. I learned more about things I already knew about, and things that I didn't know. These classes taught about style of dress that I wore, and how it came from World War II when Chicana/os were in the military. I learned about Pachucos and Zoot suiters. I had known about them before, but never about a close understanding of why things happened to them and politics behind it. I learned about what somethings really meant, and where they came from as far as historical contexts. The Chicana/o Studies department had given me a sense of pride in myself.

When I was younger, around twelve or thirteen years old, around 1980, a family cousin I had never met, had come to visit. She was sitting at our dining room table looking through a photo album with pictures of people who were African American and Indigenous to the now called Americas. They were dark and some had long hair. I didn't remember much, but I remembered asking my cousin why she had all of those pictures of those people. I also remember very clearly the response she gave me. She looked at me like I was crazy, and then told me that those were my relatives. I also remembered when I had gotten a little older, hearing the names Chickasaw and Choctaw. I didn't pay too much attention to it then, but now, these things had begun to really interest me in a profound way.

This is when I wanted to learn something about northern Indigenous Nations and traditions. To learn about where I was from. I had decided to take a course on Native Americans. My eyes were beginning to be opened about Indigenous cultures and world views. I wanted

more. In a way, these things began to allow me to formulate an Identity, a history, and a sense of who I was and how I was a part of something bigger than myself. The next semester I took a Native American history class. I sat there and listened to the horrific stories about genocide, and the forms of oppression used on my people. I was learning about a lot of things, but most of it wasn't good. There were stories just like in the movies I used to watch as a kid, with all the Indians getting killed, but worse! It bothered me. It hurt. I read about, saw pictures, and listened to stories about the forms of erasure that my ancestors suffered at the hands of people who governed and made decisions about our lives.

After a few weeks, I remember my professor asking me to go to her office. She said that she wanted to talk to me. There, she asked me about the directness of my questions in class. I thought, what about the directness of these actions, but I didn't say anything. I knew she didn't mean it like that. She was also Indigenous. For me, it was just very difficult realizing how I grew up watching movies with John Wayne and the Lone Ranger, as well as all the other "cowboy and Indian" shows. Now I was realizing how these histories glorified the extinction of my people and the destruction of my history, our histories. So instead, I answered her question, "because I'm Indian!" That was the first time I had ever said that. It was also the first time I had ever felt that kind of pain. It wasn't physical, it was just a profoundly sad pain that made me feel something was really wrong. Even my response hurt. Everything hurt. I thought racism as a black person was bad. Here, I sat dealing with racism, as an Indigenous and black person.

After leaving her office I began to think about so many things. In reality, I do not remember ever having any real desire to live to an old age. I would have much rather, "dying a good death," an old Indian saying going into war. On the other hand, the Chicana/o Studies

department, had shown me pride in my indigeneity, and the Native American class really drove it home.

Around this time, from my “neighborhood” (the English word for Barrio, they are interchangeable), I had some friends who had died or been killed. There were also those who had experiences with the carceral system, some who were still in prison. I was just mad, alone, drinking a lot, fighting, and getting into other kinds of trouble around Reseda. In these kinds of environments, it’s hard to see a future. This anger and the insecurities manifested in the form of a stab wound in my neck, fractures in my skull, and two bullet holes in my leg. I was always trying to show that I was invincible and feared nothing. My complexes negated the common sense that tells a person to run, duck, or walk away, from dangerous altercations. I didn’t see a future anywhere. Even though I was still working, I was also drinking as much as I could. It was then that my parents decided to send me somewhere else where I might be able to do better, but I didn’t. I was just more alone, or at least I felt that way. It just made me wonder what was going to happen to me. My parents decided to send me away.

The Politics

I was gone almost two years before I finally returned home. I had flunked out of University of Texas at San Antonio and didn’t really have a place to live. I went back to California. My mentality was a little better, but not much different from when I had left. After I got a job in a warehouse, I started doing a little better. I was able to support myself, but I still wasn’t able to see a future for myself. That year I don’t think I was the only one who didn’t feel hopeful.

In 1992 the verdict was announced that all officers in the Rodney King beating were found innocent. It was all caught on tape: Rodney King was on his hands and knees as four officers continued to beat and taser him. It was incredible watching something like that. Law enforcement that are supposed to protect us, were beating one of us with sticks. It was like they were training in a gym, no emotions or thought of doing something wrong; and they were found not guilty, just like the murder case written about in the book “City of Inmates” by the author Kelly Lytle Hernandez.

Hernandez wrote about the murder of Sam Faulkner by Sheriff M.B. Sheffield, on April 24th of 1927 in Los Angeles. Sometime after the murder Sheriff Sheffield’s partner turned state’s evidence against him;

Randolf took the stand for the prosecution, testifying not only that Sheffield had shot and killed an unarmed Sam Faulkner but that they-Sheffield, Randolph, and numerous other officers of the L.A.P.D. had conspired to place a gun in Sam Faulkner’s dead hand and plant drugs in Clara Harris’s home, (180).

This was almost the same thing. Then, shortly after the verdict, I watched on television as the people from Los Angeles burned the city down and looted most of the buildings and stores. Four people died and people everywhere were mad. There was no hope. Suddenly, it was legal for someone to do whatever they wanted to people of color. I remember around that same time two Samoans were shot in the back by police officers at a park. Then, a young black girl was shot in the head at point blank range in a liquor store by the owner trying to take her back pack. Everything was so blatant, and so acceptable. I don’t know if that is exactly how I saw it then, but I remember that it didn’t shock me. I was just numb. These things and feelings I believe people of color know; it just hurts a little more when people don’t even try to cover it up.

In 93', I decided to return to California State University at Northridge. I was hoping to complete my Bachelor's Degree. I also took an interest in the politics of those times. While I had been a little political during my previous years, this time I took the issues seriously. I realized a college degree would be an important investment in my future. As well, it would allow me to work with youths.

At UCLA there were hunger strikers protesting for a Chicana/o Studies Department and a halt to efforts to minimize the existing program and classes. As the numbers of protesters grew, so did awareness. I was asked to work crowd control. I took advantage of the opportunity to bring some of the youths from my barrio with me. I wanted to expose them to the culture and to let them meet and hear stories from the Danzantes, members of an Indigenous Dance group, who were also supporting the Hunger Strikers. This not only exposed them to their culture, but also allowed them to actually be active participants, trying to change things in our communities. I can remember seeing them, they were so proud.

Also, in 1993, we as CSUN Chicana/o students, supported the United Farmworkers Union, and during the "Commemorating Cesar Chavez March," we marched to Sacramento as part of the 35,000 supporters mourned his passing.

By the summer of 1994, I completed my bachelor's degree and had successfully passed the California Basic Education Test, allowing me emergency teaching credentials. I had first begun to teach at a juvenile placement school. From there, I received an offer to teach for L.A. Unified School District at middle school in the San Fernando Valley in the middle of a small neighborhood of mostly Chicana/os. At the Junior High, my curriculum was centered around current events and trying to create an awareness and an interest in Chicana/os heritage and

history. The students were descendants of great Indigenous people, and I wanted them to know it.

It felt really good. The youths were great, I loved what I was doing, and I was proud of my community. For me, I had made it. I had pulled my life together. Even my students were educating others about the problems with the Three Strike's Law. A law aimed at extended as well as life sentences for previous offenders. "The new law requires a sentence of 25 years to life for any felon who has committed two prior violent or serious felonies--crimes that range from burglary and arson to rape and murder. Those convicted of a second violent or serious felony would receive a sentence twice as long as what is now on the books." (Weintraub) They also fought against Proposition 187, the "Save Our State Initiative," that prohibited the use of non-emergency state services to people categorized as illegal immigrants. Although the bill did pass, it was later overturned. (L.A. Times)

The Crime

I still remember one of my last nights on the street. I was sitting in a car with a girl that had grown up with me. We were in the hills at the end of a road that led to a wooded area. She was also Indigenous. She knew a lot about her culture and traditions. We sat there talking about my students and some of the things going on. Then she looked away, something she saw really bothered her. I remember that she asked me if I had seen it off in the trees before it flew away. But I hadn't, "I had only caught a glimpse of it". She told me what it was and frantically told me she wanted to go home. So, I took her home. I remembered that night and the kind of bird she had seen that scared her.

I remember, the next day was a three-day holiday weekend. I was really proud of a lot of the younger guys around the neighborhood. They had been doing well. Most of them were working, settling down with their girl-friends, and taking on responsibilities. I was also happy. The teaching job was going really well. I had gotten a new apartment and had met someone nice and we had begun to see each other. Everything in my life had changed. I wasn't so mad anymore. I would have never thought that I would be sitting in a cell in a substation with a handful of the guys from around my neighborhood.

I remember, a lot of the youths around my neighborhood were at my apartment. We were staying off the streets. Outside someone driving down the street had crashed into one of the cars that belonged to someone in the apartment. We went downstairs to see what happened and tried to work things out, but the guy the was drunk. Shortly after that the police came and arrested the man. We didn't want that, but we couldn't do anything about it. We all went back upstairs. It couldn't have been much more than two hours later that the person came back. When we all went down stairs to work things out again an altercation occurred and a large fight broke out. A close friend of mine grabbed me and pulled me back. After that, I went upstairs. Later, more people came running into my apartment. When I looked out the door, I noticed the police were there and asked everyone to come down stairs.

It was a long time ago, but I remember being in the police substation with those youths that I had been spending time with from the neighborhood. We were there for about a day. It was then that an officer yelled out to us in the back, "Hey you guys! You aren't being charged with assault anymore, now its murder." The way he made it sound was almost like it was a joke to him, but we knew it wasn't. The whole police station became quiet. I could feel my stomach all twisted up. Even as I am writing and remembering it all now, so much of it seems imposable.

After that, for about a year, maybe more, we were all going back and forth to court. There were postponements, waiving time for lawyers, all legal procedures, and testing blood, DNA, motions to be filed, and other things. Right now, it's hard to remember all the details. I just remember wanting to go to trial.

They tell you in the L.A. County Jail that, "they let you sit in here, just so you'll want to take a deal, just to get to the state," the state meant State Prison. It was true. Before the trial, most of the guys ended up taking deals. The D.A. was talking a "package deal," everyone had to accept the deal or no one would get it. It makes people with more evidence against them pressure people with very little or nothing against them to take the deal. That way they can get all convictions. But closer to the trial date, when people are still holding out, they would rather get the convictions they can then to take everyone to trial, knowing that someone will go home a winner.

I am still amazed at the way the whole system works, dealing with people's lives as if it's a strategy to make people take deals even when they have no proof, and sometimes know the person didn't do it. I heard countless stories of people who talked about taking deals just to get out of the county jail, because things are so much better in the "State," short for "State Prison." With our case, it happened like that too, the county jail drains a person, the stress of wondering what's going to happen, and people coming and going, everything keeps changing.

Before it was over, everyone took a deal except me, and one other guy, out of the seven of us. But then, later, I was the only one who fought the case. Eleven-year sentences were given to five others while one had been released the night of the death.

For a period of four years I fought the case from the county jail. I endured two trials that ended in hung juries, a third trial that began, but ended in a mistrial due to District Attorney misconduct. The fourth trial ended in my conviction. This was due to an added jury instruction during deliberations that my lawyer was denied the ability to address why he felt this instruction didn't pertain to my case. The judge said, "I'm going to read it anyway; this thing has to be over". A guilty verdict was then reached and I was sentenced to 15 years to life for second degree murder, 3 years for an assault with great bodily injury. This meant a total of an eighteen years to life sentence.

Prison

Being found guilty of a murder and sentenced to eighteen years to life in prison, is a crazy moment, especially when the Judge tells you that in the State of California with a life sentence, you will never see the streets again. It's like being placed in a bubble separated from everything. Everything stays still and sounds sort of hollow. In my mind, the one thing that sort of just settled in my head and on my chest, was the thought, that I can never dream again. I can never dream about having children. Never dream about walking on a beach or being with someone intimately again. I just, can never dream. I think I stayed in that state for about a week, and then slowly came out of it. I was just ready to get it all started and I began to interact with others again.

Outside of jail, all of my conversations about Spirituality evolved around Indigenous people, and outside the scope of religion. However, here it was in the county jail, that I got my first true understanding of Spirituality. What was crazy, was that it came from an older white man. He had stopped me and asked, "now that you have a life sentence, what are you going to do with your life?" Then he told me, "You may have a life sentence, but you still have a life" I had

spent enough time in the county to know that some people go into prison not caring, and end up making life harder on themselves. I also met some guys in the L.A. County who had spent years going in and out of the system and were very smart. This was what I had wanted, so I told him, “I want to learn as much as I can.” He then smiled at me and asked, “What do you want to learn, wisdom or knowledge?” That, I didn’t understand, but he explained it to me. He told me that knowledge was mechanical, logical, based on facts, “but wisdom is based on spirituality, and spirituality is based on one thing, is it right, or wrong?” Then he said, “and that answer comes from your heart.” This, was the beginning of my spiritual path.

From the county jail on July 4, 1998 I was sent to North Kern State Prison as a Reception Center, to determine my security level and what prison I would go to. There, the counselor advised me I’d be going to Callipatria State Prison. On August 7, 1998, I arrived. People had told me it was haunted there. I was “celled up” with another Indigenous inmate, but only for a short time as he was leaving. Most of the people I shared a cell with, “cellies” were Chicanos. Chicanos are Indigenous too, but they are categorized differently by the prisons. I was classified with Chicanos because I was from a neighborhood, the barrio.

On my second night in that cell I had a powerful dream. In it, the daughter of my barber whose family was very close to me appeared. She was calling to me, telling me to make her father stop drinking. She kept asking me over and over again, but then she stopped. She looked down sadly. Then looked at me again, and said, “never mind; it’s too late.” The next day, I received a letter from my brother telling me that our friend, the Barber, had died. It caught my attention that I had a dream about this, but where I was, I felt I needed to pay more attention to my surroundings.

From that cell they moved me to another cell with a Chicano. All of my cellies from then on were Chicanos. Outside of my window I noticed two birds, the same kind that I had seen the night I was with the girl in the woods. Soon after that I was involved in two riots on the yard. I was given two disciplinary write ups and sentenced to time in the “hole”, a segregated Standardized Housing Unit. Any fight in prison that involves more than four people fighting will normally be classified as a riot. Because of the riots, I was on lockdown which means limited to our cells. Throughout this entire time, a year, those same birds stayed on the top of the building across from my window. After that I was sent to Centinela State Prison, and then to High Desert State Prison, all were level four prisons, but this one was a higher security level then the last two I was at.

Level four is the highest security prison yards in California. As a person is able to avoid getting disciplinary write ups, their security levels begin to go down. If they receive disciplinary write ups, their security levels go up. For each disciplinary write up a person gets, they get more points which increases their security level, or their points go down and the person has access to yards with more freedom and privileges. Points are also mandated by the crime you have been incarcerated for. Some crimes are considered more serious and people are given more points and sent to higher level yards while other crimes are not considered serious and they do not receive a significant amount of points. In total, there are four levels of yards. The higher security which is a level four, and the lowest level prison, a level one. The two and the three are in the middle as they fit in numerically

By April of 2002, my security level was lowered and I was being transferred again, but I didn't know where or when I was going to be moved. On the level four yards, we are not advised of dates of movement. One night, still at High Desert State Prison, I had a dream. I remember

being on a bus looking out the window. As the bus was driving, we passed a forest area, but all the trees were made of metal. It was weird but I was more focused on where I was going to next. The next day the Correction's Officers woke me up early and put me on a bus. This time I was sent south again to Blythe, California to Iron Wood State prison. My first level three prison. I also thought it was weird that I had a dream about trees made of metal and then they had sent me to a prison named "Iron Wood".

Lower Levels and Elders: A Need to Grow

For me this was a difficult transfer. I was so used to the Level Four prisons and I enjoyed the lockdowns with cell time. I was used to the restrictions, and everyone being careful and very respectful to each other. Now having so much freedom and movement was uncomfortable. I had gotten used to the lockdowns and time in the cells. However, with time I began to adapt, but still making sure to stay the way I was on the level fours. This was the first place I had been that I was able to socialize with a lot with other inmates. It felt strange seeing so many people on the yard, so I still stayed mostly to myself, just not as much as before.

There was a population of Indigenous people who I introduced myself to. The other prisons had them also, but very few, and I kept my distance and respected what they were doing. I did this because of my associations with the Chicano population, although they are Indigenous also, many times they are classified as gang members and are susceptible to many lock downs. I did not want to allow for misunderstandings about who I associated with to affect those classified as others, which means anything other than Mexican, Black, or White. The Native American populations, and all others are classified as "Others." This form of classification happens right after your arrest in the county jails. However, at any time you can clarify any mistakes.

Because I was associated with the Chicano population, I normally would pay my respects to the Indigenous inmates, but at the same time maintain a distance from them so that they would not be affected by anything that might deal with the Chicano population of inmates.

I didn't know much, about indigenous ways, but I would practice the few things I knew by myself. I would go out to the yard and always sit on the grass area, touch the Earth, and talk to her for a while, or just think with her. I would also give her a small offering of tobacco. The Earth is our mother and the offerings were an act of returning something to her that she had given us, maintaining our connection. After that I would socialize for a moment, work out, and walk laps on the track that goes around the grass on the yard. I always did this by myself or with only a few people. However, with time, some of the Indigenous brothers began to approach me, but mostly just formal greetings. After more time, an older Indigenous man, called me over and began to talk to me. He looked at me and asked me what I was. As I began to answer, he politely cut me off telling me that he had to go and that he would talk to me later. I felt this would give me a chance to think about my answer. I wanted to impress him.

Many people may wonder why I would feel a need to impress any one, especially in prison, but it is something very basic. For myself, I had never been raised or accepted among Blacks; I had never really known anything about my Indigenous heritage. I had never had an Identity other than television and the one class I took at California State University Northridge, and a couple of Pow Wow gatherings. I wanted something that was me. I wanted to know me. I wanted a home, that I could feel is my home, not just say it is supposed to be. I wanted to know who I was. I think there are many of us out there, who just blend in with society, but I have never been good at blending in. I always seemed to stick out.

The next day, after the yard opened, I went straight to him and began to talk when he interrupted me and said he was busy and had to go talk to someone else. This continued for a few days until I felt disrespected by him and stopped looking for him. Then a few days later he called me and motioned for me to come over. When I did, he asked me if I was mad at him. I still wanted to give him my answer which I had now been working on for days. So, I said no. I didn't want to sound as anxious as I felt.

I explained to him that I was born of black and Native American Ancestry, but growing up, there weren't many blacks around me. I had problems with some of them because I was mixed so I don't really go with black. Then I began to explain that I was Native American, but there weren't really any Native Americans around where I was raised. But there were Chicanos, who are also Indigenous. So, I was raised like that, I am Chicano. I had days to think of my answer and was sure that he would have nothing to say to me. I had my identity, but the old man looked at me and smiled with this little laugh. Then he responded,

How small you are. Before you opened your mouth, you were are a part of everybody, everything. Then, every time you talked, you chopped off a part of yourself, I'm not this or I'm not that. Now you are so small, how strong can you be, when you are so small, and all alone?

I stood there looking down on him sitting there on the bench. At first, I was so angry, but then I started to think. This man had humbled me in such a way. He made me feel like I wanted to hide. His words were so strong, but his face didn't have any anger. He looked at me like he really felt for me. I walked away thinking about what the white man who asked me what I was going to learn, wisdom or knowledge, and how wisdom was connected to spirituality. I thought

about how he said to ask your heart if its right or wrong. What this man told me felt painfully right.

That night I remember having a dream. I was getting on a bus and had sat down next to a small kid with long hair who looked fragile. He looked, Indigenous and I remembered asking him who he was. He looked up at me smiling and asked if I knew him. I looked at him again, but this time I saw something that shocked me, and I asked him, “are you me”? He looked at me and asked, “not what you expected?” But he wasn’t me. I thought, I was strong, and secure, but this kid was small and fragile, like worried or scared. I didn’t want to be him.

After that day, I made it a point to go and see that Elder. We talked a little, but didn’t really spend much time together after that. I guess he felt that he had done what he felt he needed to do.

Aside from the time I spent with just a few of the Chicanos, I was mostly by myself. From that experience, I began to realize that I had been trying so hard to define myself that I was pushing people away, except for those I wanted to be connected to, and that was limiting me.

Learning and Growing: Spirituality

A few weeks afterward, another Indigenous brother had approached me and began talking to me on a regular basis. He was the same age as me, and had also spent time in the San Fernando Valley. One day as I was giving tobacco to the land, he stopped, sat down, and began talking to me. I really liked him. He would tell me things about how he grew up. He had experienced a lot of racism also. He talked about being pulled out of public schools and put in a school where they made him cut his hair, and beat him up a few times. He said that finally an older family member had come and took him up in the hills and taught him things about native

ways and spirituality. He also talked about how he tried to sneak around to get out of having to learn, but it never worked. He said something would always happen to mess up his plans. I liked him a lot.

He taught me Indigenous songs, as well as how to sing them. At first, I would just sing, but then he stopped me. He would say, "Stop, listen to your heart." Then he put his hand on my chest and beat on it, like my heart beating. Then he began using words in his tribal language, but he kept on beating on my chest, like my heart, emphasizing it's beat and the words that went with it. I listened and I sang according to how he beat on my chest. He had taught me a song, in an Indigenous language, and to the beat of my heart. This was so powerful to me. I thought of how I had found out that I was Indigenous, but what did that really mean? Now, here I was singing a song to my heart beat, and I knew what I was singing, he had taught me. I felt like I really was Indigenous, not just by the word, but by what I was learning, and doing. It was real to me, even though it wasn't my nation it was Indigenous. My people before John Wayne or Bob Hope the "Indian Killer" existed.

Soon after that, the same brother came to me and told me to sit facing the East. He told me he was going to explain to me the Medicine Wheel and how to pray. I listened to him as he talked. He began to explain the four parts of people that allow them to exist as a whole. The first part is East, yellow, emotions. He said it is like a newborn child coming into the world; it is scared and excited. It feels all these emotions. Then, he said look to the second direction, it is south, the color white. Here it is the body that is next to begin to develop. It grows strong, able to move things. The mind is the west. It is red, it starts to develop and think, to figure things out. After the mind, the spirit, grows to its potential. Here it begins to see into the spirit realm, much as with the Elders, who are closer to it and the person begins to see into the spirit realm. Still,

always, at all times, look for balance between them to have a balance in life. Hyemeyohsts Storm, author of “Seven Arrows,” explains the importance of this balance and the use of this ceremony. “Grow and become a full person only by doing all of these things, which would give him an understanding of his own nature...In this way he would become able to make his decisions within the balance of the four Directions” (8).

He told me to always use them all in balance. That If I didn't, I would get sick and begin to rot with things such as greed, regret, selfishness, and other things that harm ourselves and others. I listened as he talked. Everything he said made sense. This wasn't like in school where teachers dictate facts, whether they make sense or not. Here everything in my body felt the words he used and agreed with him.

Also, during this conversation, there were two words that he used that caught my attention. He mentioned, introspection and retrospection. Introspection, as part of the medicine wheel dealt with emotions, looking into myself to find how I truly felt about things. He tied this with retrospection, looking into my past to see why I felt the ways I do and how my past either positive or negative, has affected those feelings. By learning to do this, and learning about myself with my past and day to day life, I also began to look at others. I would look at the things they did, especially when it really bothered me, and wonder about why or how that person began to have that behavior. In wondering about the possible answers, it would allow me to not blame them for actions they developed because of things that happened to them. Sometimes, I didn't even have to go that in-depth with the whole process, and I would just realize that something had happened for him to adapt that behavior, and I would lose my anger. This concept helped me greatly with the anger I had been carrying for so long to heal myself and not have so much anger.

In particular, this lesson became a reality in a very profound way for me. There was someone on the same yard with me who I really did not like. He had taken advantage of others and put them in bad situations. Watching him get away with a number of things really bothered me. One day he didn't get away with something and he had gotten into a fight and beaten up. He had gotten two black eyes. The next day I was using the phone next to him. I wasn't trying to listen, but I could hear how he was trying to explain to his daughter why she couldn't come to visit him. I could hear how he kept trying to tell her it wasn't that he didn't want to see her, or that she did something wrong. I knew he didn't want her to see him beat up. I saw how what had happened not only affected him, but his daughter also. At that moment I truly began to understand how we are not individuals. We are all connected. The way he was to his daughter, and how I was connected to them both of them at that moment. I felt bad for wishing bad on him. Things do not just happen to one person. They really do affect us all, just as this had affected me. This then also made me realize how my actions had affected my family, my brothers and sisters. I also realized that things had also happened to me to make me feel the ways I did, to do the things I had done.

All Our Relations

This elder, even though he was the same age as me, also told me about spirit guides. He told me to be attentive of what my spirit guide is, so that I can be vigilant and understand the warnings it gives, or things to look out for. He then told me that I will know my spirit-guide as it will always show up before events happen in my life happen. This took me back to the night before my arrest when the girl I was with drew attention to the bird that had flown in the direction of my left. I also noted that it was the same birds that sat outside my window in Callipatria State Prison, during the riots and the lockdowns when I was there. But he told me, do

not betray its confidence by telling someone what it is, that if I did, it would abandon me. I have never given its identity, and it has remained faithful to me. Or that if someone knows and wishes to do me harm, they may try to do so by hurting my spirit guide.

This is also discussed by Gloria Anzaldúa's book, "Light in the Dark, Luz En Lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality," when she states, "When I encounter 'la vibora,' my guardian spirit, a stillness comes over me...All my life I've encountered serpents..." (27). She also wrote about the role of the spirit guide, "These spirits who advise and empower maybe animal spirits; the spirits of place; the elemental spirits of the air, water, fire, and Earth; or ancestral," (33). This I connect to my element as well, and its power to calm me and make me feel at peace in its presence for hours at a time.

In another conversation he connected me to people's closest relatives. I remember once in a conversation, he asked me what our closest relatives on the Earth are. Of course, I said apes, or monkeys, but he laughed at me. He said, "everyone says that". Then he told me, that they were the "plant people." As he explained, I thought "we breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon, plants, breathe in carbon, and exhale oxygen". Then he said, that they also have cures for all the diseases people have. I thought about it. He was right, everything we need comes from plants, they are our healers.

It was at about this time that my father passed away. Before I had received the news, I remember, I had a dream about him. It was a long dream and had a lot of things going on in it. The next day when I talked to a "brother," a term used to signify how Indigenous people are all related, without telling him what my dream was, only that I had one he suggested that I do a sweat.

Inipi: The Purification Ceremony

What he was referring to was a ceremony of suffering, to alter the consciousness of the mind, so that the person may be open to thoughts and feelings from the Earth, the rocks to ourselves that we suppress, or ignore because we have been socialized to this physical world.

At Iron Wood State Prison, there was a section of the prison set aside for a Sweat Lodge used for this Purification Ceremony. Out of respect I approached the other Indigenous brothers on the yard asking if they would mind if I participated in a sweat with them. I explained my situation to them. There had been many times before that they had offered and even encouraged me to go with them, but I had always chosen not to. I was happy that the brothers were happy and welcomed me.

They respected the fact that as soon as I had arrived on the yard, I had acknowledged who and what I was and always showed them respect. By both my actions and words they saw that I was always honest and my intentions were good ones. They also expressed to me that they were happy to be able to be there for me, during this time, in a good way. In a good way means in a true way, sincere and honest. This was my first “Sweat,” and I have always been very thankful to those brothers for their humility in welcoming me. One of the brothers explained the process to me.

Then the elder that had been teaching me things pulled me aside and I sat with him and listened. He explained to me how everyone that was there inside and outside of the lodge was an important part of what was happening.

He started with the “Fire Tender,” who stayed outside of the Sweat lodge or the Inipi. The Inipi is the purification lodge for the ceremony. They are one. The Stones are the “Stone

People,” or our “Grandfathers.” The brother that stays outside at the fire pit, uniting the Stone people with the fire that they may speak to us during the ceremony, is the Fire Tender. He is the one to hear the Rock people speak as they show him when they are ready to enter the lodge. This is when they have spent enough time with the fire. Everything is a relationship, a ceremony. This job is extremely important and the tender pays close attention to the Rock People.

We also had to spend time preparing to go in. We needed to humble ourselves and clear our minds looking into ourselves to show our respect for the Stone People, the Earth, and all that we are related to. We were going to have to be able to focus on why we were going to the Elders, the Rock People. We had to focus on what wisdom were we praying to understand? `At the same time we needed to be open to what the Elders would show us.

When we were in the Inipi, we sat in a circle and the Rock people were brought in and placed in the pit. Here the “Water Pourer” would pour water on the Elders. The steam from the Rock People would go to the top of the Inipi and slowly work its way down. The heat would also touch us. It is natural that heat rises. By pouring more water, the steam from the Rock People and the water would fill the top and go lower and lower, getting hotter and pushing us downward to the Earth, so that we may hear it speak. This is done to humble us, allowing us to let go of our arrogance as people so we can begin to hear what these Elders had to tell us about what we were praying for. Through the process, we abandon, what we call our rational thinking that is based on this world, and begin to hear the messages from the spirit world that we also have inside of us. With our minds weakened by the heat, the spirit voices are able to be heard. Right now, I also write this as a ceremony, remembering my father, the Rock people, those brothers, and all my relations in a good and respectful way. The right way.

On that yard, for us as Indigenous inmates we looked to each other for wisdom and support when it came to our traditions and spirituality. One day out of the week we were allowed time in the Chapel to do bead work or to watch videos donated to the prison that we were allowed to order from Native catalogs. Our spirituality revolved around what we the inmates knew, or what we felt was right.

It was also here that I spent time with another Indigenous person. I considered him an elder and I respected him. He was from the Yaqui nation. His focus was on dreams. Deloria Jr. explains how there have always been tools in societies for seeing things to come. Dreams have always been involved in these processes. “Of reasonable importance in each tradition are the procedures and devices for predicting the future,” (153). Deloria Jr. also acknowledged Indigenous people such as the Iroquois and Cherokee as developing special methods for understanding dreams;

Iroquois and the Cherokee, for example, had sophisticated systems for dream interpretation that were part of their religious beliefs. A great majority of the tribes recognized the religious aspect of dreams and made some provision for understanding them. Western psychoanalysis has only recently come to understand the reality of dreams in spite of the appearance of dreams in both Old and New Testaments (196).

Another Elder I respected used to read books written by Carlos Castaneda. An inmate I spent time with referred me to this elder. That inmate was involved in other things that kept his attention distracted and he was unable to fully immerse himself into what they were doing. While I did remember some of my dreams, he explained that a dream catcher can make a large difference in helping me remember more of them. He explained to me that dreams are not from this world, they are not physical or logical. When we awake, our minds begin to think about the

plans we have for the day or what had happened the day before and our dreams begin to slip back into the other realm, the spirit realm where they come from. He explained that if we have a dream catcher and hang it where we look when we wake up, as soon as we wake up and see it, it will remind us right away to think about what we had dreamed about. Then, we should say my dream out loud. By doing this, we will be able to physically hear it, placing the dream in this realm, the physical. Since we will physically hear the dream it will physically be placed in my memory where we can remember it. Then we can meditate and go through the dream for what the dream had to say or show us.

He also explained to me that dreams are also not based on linear time. In our dreams we can see things from the present past and future. This made me think about the dream about the metal trees, before I left High Desert State Prison and was sent to Iron Wood State Prison. The dream with metal trees represented Iron Wood. I also remembered the dream I had about my close friend the barber, when his daughter asked me to help her father, but then, that it was too late, and I later received a letter telling me her dad, had died. I also thought about my father and my dream before I was informed that he had passed. These things were all significant in many ways. But the underlining lesson by this Elder, as well as all of my other teachers, was to pay attention to life. It has much to show and teach us, as long as we open our minds and hearts and pay attention.

By now years had gone by. With all that I had been learning I began to see changes in the way I spoke and acted. I was much more relaxed as well as attentive of my surroundings. I began to see people differently, and I had begun to understand myself.

It was then that another dream came to me. In this one I was in a dirty place. It looked like an oil field that had exploded and people were dismembered and suffering. The strange part

was that all the people were happy to see me. They kept saying that I was there to kill him, the bad one. I remember passing an old big barbecue pit with the top opened. Inside the pit was a deformed person. There were hot coals in the pit that were still lit. The person held a big gun that was burning red hot, the coals were heating it. The deformed man kept trying to give it to me. He was saying that I was going to kill someone. Everyone was happy saying I was there to kill the bad person. I didn't know who they were talking about. All I knew was that for me to kill the person with that burning hot gun would hurt me. After I had woke up, I spent a long time just thinking. Then I realized, all those deformed people covered in dirt and oil, were all the people I had hurt throughout my life, with my anger, with my selfishness, and with my pain. The person they were talking about, that everyone wanted me to kill, was the old me. The angry person who I had been for my whole life. But I also knew that for me to kill the old me would hurt. It would burn me. Because the old angry me was who protected me. He guarded my feelings and allowed me to do things that I wouldn't have been able to do without that anger. That was why the gun was so scolding hot. It would hurt me to kill what I was before, even though, I had grown strong enough now to be able to care, for myself and others, the right way.

After that day, I realized how much I had changed. I also realized that I had opened my heart to many things and allowed those things to become a part of me. I began to see purposes in things I really hadn't cared about. When I looked at people, I began to really see them. To pay attention to them. I became humbled, realizing how small I was as an individual, but how big I was as a people. Also, for the first time I was somebody that I didn't have to prove I was. I had an identity that not only identified me, but did not separate me from others. Rather, it connected me to others. Between those two elders, through dreams and Indigenous understandings, I had found a relationship with myself.

By now it was the end of October 2006. My security level had been lowered again and I was transferred to Chuckwalla State Prison, a level II prison also in Blythe. I was moved across the street. It was my experience that each time the security level was lowered, inmates were given more privileges like more time on the yard. Also, both inmates as well as officers were less serious, they played around a lot more. I wasn't used to all the freedom and being relaxed. Because of this, I began requesting transfers to other level two prisons, hoping they would be more serious. However, other level twos were the same in this aspect. Some prisons were even worse.

In 2007 I was transferred to California Correctional Institute in Tehachapi or Tehachapi State Prison. Shortly after that, in 2008, I was again transferred to Avenal State Prison, and then in 2009, back to Chuckwalla Valley State Prison. All of these transfers were per my requests because I had trouble adapting to all the freedom, and more people around me.

The level two prisons in Tehachapi, Avenal, and Chuckwalla all allowed the same amount of access to spiritual and traditional practices as the Indigenous population in Ironwood. They had a "Sweat lodge" or "Inipi" and allotted time in the chapel to meet once a week. Only Tehachapi did not have designated time in the Chapel. Also, with the exception of Ironwood, there was no Elder or advisor from outside who came in to talk and discuss traditions, culture and spirituality with inmates, or even to speak with us as far as world views, or things going on in our lives. We did these things among ourselves as best we could.

Board of Parole Hearings

In 2009 in Chuckwalla I attended my first "Parole Consideration hearing" or "Board Hearing." We always referred to it simply as the "board." Before my first hearing, I spent more

time with one Elder on the yard who I had met my first time there. He was also serving a life sentence and discussed the process with me. He had been in prison a lot longer than I had, twenty-five years. He helped me out as far as legal advice, but he had no faith in being found suitable. There had been some mention of people being released after being found suitable, but he didn't know of anyone being found suitable at that time.

I had hope, but most people I had met going to their first hearing were hopeful. A main problem with the hearing in my case was that my case was still under appeal. There were some important issues about decisions the judge made that my attorney felt were obvious violations of my rights during the trial. Because of that, I decided not to discuss my case at my suitability hearing, or at any of the evaluations before it. I was given a five-year denial.

Learning to Share

After the hearing I still spent time with the same Elder. Also, at this time there were two youths who had become interested in my morning practices of spending time with the land. One in particular was interested in the beaded necklace that I wore around my neck with a stone on it. He wanted one. He constantly bothered me about it as well as asked all kinds of questions about the things I did and why. I refused to tell him anything because he was always running around getting in trouble. I did not like him. He talked about starting a gang and had ambitions of making it one of the biggest gangs in California.

In one of my conversations with the Elder, I mentioned it to him. The elder looked at me surprised. He asked why I would deny someone something that is part of them. He reminded me that I also asked a lot of questions. At first, I wanted to respond to that statement, but then I thought about it. The Elder was correct. I had learned from one of the Elders in Ironwood State

Prison that things I know, are not my possessions. Wisdom and knowledge belong to the Universe. They are the things that are used to create balance and understanding.

After that day, I began to answer the youth's questions. As I did, I noticed how he had begun to slow down. He began to spend more time on his bunk watching things going on around him. He would then come back to me and tell me about the things that he had begun to notice. Then he would go back to his bunk and lay there just watching and paying attention. He no longer ran around, but he was still very much interested in my necklace. Shortly after that, The Elder had asked me how it was going with the youngster. I responded, "not what I had thought." For some reason, he was not surprised, but I was.

One day while I was working-out on the yard, my necklace broke. When that happened, I became worried. I was wondering if this was showing me that it is time for me to let the Elder, "the rock" go. It had also been taught to me that as people change, grow, they need different medicine, or the medicine that they had, is no longer what they needed. This was something that I was taught the first time that I made a necklace.

Later, that same day, that same youth came to me with a dream. He was wondering what it meant. He sat across from me and told me how he used to run around at a church on the streets breaking and vandalizing it. He said that was what he was doing in his dream. But in his dream, he saw a particular animal sitting on a fence. When he saw this animal, he stopped running around and sat there quietly listening to it. The thing that really caught my attention was that when he told me what kind of animal he had saw, it was what my spirit guide is.

I sat there listening to him tell the story that I had watched happening with him, right before my eyes. How he used to run around, and then how he had slowed down and would come

and sit there watching me. Later that day I went and talked to the Elder again. I asked him what he thought. The Elder told me, there are no such things as coincidences. That day I asked the youth to bring me a rock that he felt called him from the yard. After I finished beading my new necklace, he came to me with a rock. I thanked him for the rock, and then gave him the necklace I had finished beading with the rock I had on it. It was no coincident that my necklace had broken and that my spirit guide had appeared to him. This was what I had felt, so it was what I needed to do. He was meant to have that necklace.

The second youth would come to me just to talk. He wanted to know about the things I learned in school and about things going on in his life. Sometimes he would ask me about dreams he had. I wouldn't tell him anything, I would just ask him questions about what was going on in his life and how he was feeling. This was the way most of the Elders I talked to would talk to me. They always said that I already knew these things. Sometimes it just has to be brought out of the person.

When I would do this with the second youth, he would always smile at me, "Oh Yeah." Then he would look at me with a surprise look on his face like a light went on in his head and he would understand the meaning of what he saw. I would tell him I didn't know; he knew. I just asked the questions that he needed to be asked, and he would put everything together. I learned from him too. I learned how to ask myself questions that I didn't want to answer to better understand myself and my dreams.

Still, just as I had learned from the Elder from Ironwood, all dreams aren't the same or have the same purpose. Dreams come from different places inside us, from others, from the past, and sometimes from the future. I learned that from the youth that was a troublemaker. A short time later, both of the youths were paroled from prison and went home.

A Second Hearing

Two years later in 2014, my final appeal was denied. To prepare for my next board hearing, just as before, I needed to go to the Psychological Evaluation. This time it was different than the first. This time I argued with the Psychologist. She was trying to persuade me to contact my Indigenous nation to get financial support. I argued that I had gotten myself into this situation and that I needed to get myself out of it. Actually, the real reason I didn't want to, is that so many people recognize their Indigenous histories, only when it is beneficial for them, to try to get some easy money. I didn't want to do that. Later I thought, "what was I thinking arguing with the Psychologist," but it was done.

While all of this was extremely important, the main worry I had was that at the time of the crime, when the police arrived at scene, I was seen coming out of an upstairs apartment across the street. I was not at the scene where the crime occurred. This was also one of the reasons for my having four trials that lasted throughout a four-year period. My conviction was based on a jury instruction that labeled me as responsible for the crime, not necessarily for doing the crime. If I had tried to bring up the point during the hearing now, it would look as if I am proclaiming innocence. My only option was to accept responsibility as the oldest one among those drinking at my apartment. Otherwise, the commissioners could see me as just saying what I knew they wanted to hear.

In 2015 at my Board of Prison terms hearing I had no idea of what I would say. So, I just let go. I felt the importance of that life loss as a whole, to not only individuals, but also to my community. I let go and opened up to the children who lost their father that night, and to a wife that lost her husband. I looked into all of the things I learned from all of the Elders that helped me heal and allowed me to see so many things that were wrong with me. I answered the

questions by thinking of the others that were with me that night that had gone to prison for the same incident and all that they had now gone through. The words empathy, remorse, and insight took meanings that went past the justice system and went to the people, to the community, and to the ability to care for each other. I understood all of the teachings that the Stone People in the “Inipi” had whispered to us as we could hear the sizzling of the water turning to steam and rise off the Stones. I heard their voices and those of the other Elders that opened up to me. This allowed me to connect with the hearing commissioners and be able to feel them. As the questions started, I just went through the routine of giving the answers I was supposed to give. Then, the other commissioner who was Anglo asked me, what was my problem growing up. Then he said “you had low self-esteem.” That was the normal answer that we were programmed to say when practicing for the board hearings. But when he said that to me, with the look he had, I felt like he thought this was a game. I became angry and hurt all at the same time. He was like one of the white guys I had to fight in school when I was young. I remember looking at him, and I remembered that feeling, and I said, “No! I felt like I was a mistake!”. That was when I saw the other commissioner who appeared to be Middle Eastern look at me. I knew that look! I knew it! and then I felt that feeling again, of being a mistake, and I felt it too, but for him. I thought “oh my god!” He knew, he knew what it felt like. He knew what it felt like, all the racism, all the hurt that the anger was used to cover up. He knew. Then I felt bad for him. He had felt all that racism, all the anger and that sadness.

After that, the entire hearing changed. Everything in the room changed. He became, assertive and took more control of the hearing. I don’t remember much about what happened. I just sort of shifted and stopped thinking. I just reacted, I just answered what I was asked. I don’t think I thought about my answers; they just came out. Then I remember the head commissioner

looking at the Anglo man saying, “that’s enough,” or “we’re done”. He then looked at me and said “thank you”. The Hearing was over. As a result, these second board members found me suitable for parole. Six months later I walked out of Chuckwalla Valley State Prison.

Callings from the Past

Shortly after my release from prison I began working a number of jobs and enrolled in classes at Pierce College. After a year of classes, I was then accepted at California State University at Northridge into the Master’s Program. During my second semester of the Master’s Program, I received an email from a professor at CSUN. It was from a professor who was in contact with someone looking for me from the past. He was asking for my phone number and if it was okay for him to give it to him.

Not knowing who, I agreed. About a week later I received a phone call. At first, I listened close to the person’s voice, not sure of who it could be. As the voice describe his life as a youth, small pieces began to come together. I continued to listen to the man describe his life as a troubled youth ending up in prison. He then began to talk about an older man who talked to him about life and Spirituality, even about dreams. Then I became sure of the person and confirmed with him that it was the then youth from Chuckwalla Valley State Prison who constantly bothered me about his dreams and questions about spirituality and life.

My next question was how he knew someone at the college where I was. It was then he told me because he was in touch with some professors from CSUN. I listened as he went on. He explained that when he paroled, he remembered the stories I used to tell about CSUN, so he decided to go to the Jr. College where he lived. He said after he finished his first two years, he decided to go on and get his bachelor’s degree in Biology. He went on from there thinking why

he should stop, and that he had received a scholarship from a top-ranking University in the United States. From there he explained that after his master's degree, he was able to get a grant for the research he was working on that developed into the research that he is now doing for his dissertation.

He explained that he had checked on me and was told by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation I was no longer in their custody. So, he used some friends to check at the school I had talked about to him while in prison, and there he found me. He was not only working on his dissertation but had a family as well. He wanted to invite me to his graduation, and that he was going to fly me out. He told me thank you for the things I taught him, about spirituality and the California State University at Northridge's Chicana/o Studies Department.

I told him don't blame me for who and what you are. There comes a time in everyone's life when they need to accept responsibility for everything they do.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

Overview of the Board Hearings

This research focused on my experience as an inmate of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and analyzes the impact Indigenous cultures and spiritual practices had on my ability to heal from the trauma of incarceration and colonization. The information gathered from this research and my autoethnography demonstrate that exposure and practicing Indigenous beliefs can assist in healing and rehabilitation from trauma which can benefit Indigenous populations of people who are incarcerated.

Reflections

Growing up I experienced an array of incidences that greatly influenced my sense of self and my understanding of what it means to be African American and Indigenous. Interactions with people in my community and my family led to these negative feelings and ideas. In addition, my educational experiences heightened my awareness of racism and movies further exacerbated these ideas with their negative portrayal of people of color. These experiences influenced my need to prove my worth physically and verbally, that led to violent encounters with others. Ultimately, these violent interactions led me to the carceral system where I began the process of healing.

Healing

One element that contributed to my healing was the opportunity to learn about the healing properties of the earth. The elders I interacted with in prison taught me that everything comes from the earth and if you focus on what is in nature, many lessons can be learned. The review of the literature suggests a direct connection between spiritual bonds connecting Indigenous people to the land, and the people's health or ability to heal from this trauma. Separating the people from the land destroys their systems of spirituality. This is one of the main points addressed by Hatala et al. "The history that's so commonly accepted is just one side of the story. No one wants to acknowledge all the historical trauma that we face today by losing the land... It needs to be acknowledged if we are to heal" (Hatala et al. 1334). Thus, Indigenous spirituality is manifested and dependent on the particular community's relationship to their environment, the land, Simpson; Hatala et al.; Iseke; Collins; Cisneros; Ramirez & Hammack. The literature by Hatala et al also addresses the microaggressions that manifest from these historical traumas, "historical traumas' also manifest themselves within inner-city environments through increased rates of poverty, daily and persistent microaggressions, marginalization from mainstream society, subtle overt forms of racism..." (1334). These persistent microaggressions described by Hatala et al. corresponds directly to racism, and the multiple forms of trauma I encountered.

Elders

Elders played a critical role in my healing process while I was in prison. I had two elders that came forward and began conversations with me. The first elder taught me about the Medicine Wheel, songs about the four directions, and so many other aspects of my Indigeneity. He did more than just teach me those particular things, he also educated me on Indigenous history which challenged the negative self-perceptions I had internalized from televisions and books. He gave me a way to practice things that represented my history, my present, and my future. This awakened me in so many ways; It allowed me to acquire a powerful view of my ancestors and a better understanding of who I am.

The second Elder opened my eyes in the form of being able to realize how wide and vast the spiritual world was through my dreams and the ability to look beyond the visual aspects, to the emotional realities that lay beneath the images I saw. Through this I was able to form an identity that countered the colonial one I had carried for so long and the anger I felt because of the little value I felt as a person with a marginalized racial identity. It was these elders that both held and gave me the Indigenous understandings that allowed me to heal while in the Carceral System.

Storytelling for Transmission

Several authors, Ramirez and Hammack; Iseke; and Waldram; from the literature reviewed for this thesis deal specifically with the role of Elders and how that role was able to create positive outcomes in negative situations. Iseke's article focused on storytelling, "oral traditions," as a form of transmitting knowledge by Elders. Elders from Iseke's work also saw it as a form of decolonization for youths. Authors Ramirez and Hammack's research focused on grandmothers who served as Elders in the lives of their grandsons. In particular, grandmothers used storytelling to maintain their grandsons' cultural identity and history. Storytelling allowed their grandsons to experience survivance by building their resilience and allowing them to heal from their trauma. Lastly, Waldram's work focused on a correction's facility and the relationship between a youth that was incarcerated and the facility's spiritual advisor, an Elder. The Elder shared an Indigenous identity with the youth and practiced ceremonies with him. The personal cultural relationship connected them and allowed for the youth to move past many of his personal problems. Elders' roles are one of personally teaching younger generations the relationships they have as a people that has been established by those before them, to maintain their connections to all that give them their lives and sense of well-being. This in the times of colonization, means healing.

The Political Impacts: 1990-2011

A review of the political environment of that time and the role it played, is also necessary for a complete understanding of all the motivating factors of this research. In doing so I look at the public issues of the early 1990's to set the scene, show how those issues were presented to the public, and the impact that they had on not just myself but others from my community.

At this time, politicians focused on crime as a political platform to both win elections as well as push for party agendas while the public pushed for right to life issues. On March 7th, 1991, reporter Seth Mydans wrote for the New York Times, "Tape of Beating by Police Revives Charges of Racism". Here the article described the brutal beating of Rodney King by four Los Angeles police officers.

After they shocked me the first time, they paused a minute, then they struck me across the face with a Billy club and then shocked me again on the other side of my shoulder...after that they continued to pound me all over my body (A18).

This showed not only the brutality of the police officers in L.A. at that time, but the lack of value that they placed on black lives.

By April of 1992, Mark Lacey and Shawn Hubler wrote, "Rioters Set Fires, Loot Stores; 4 Reported Dead: Rampage: 106 are wounded or injured and more than 150 blazes are ignited:

Bradley considers a curfew,” (1). This was the beginning of the violence that resulted after all officers involved in the Rodney King police abuse trial were found innocent. It was now the people who would show their outrage against a racist system. With this outbreak it would now be the politicians that moved to not only show their strength but to also an example of who was in control.

One year later, in 1993, the “Three Strikes” law giving life sentences to “the habitual offender,” triumphed at the voting poles (Weintraub 1). However, the predictions of exactly what this law would do were questionable with estimates of cost and numbers of prisoners increasing at large rates:

The Corrections Department reports that the new law will lead to a massive prison building boom—20 more penitentiaries by the end of the decade—and eventually increase operating costs by more than \$2 billion a year. The state spends about \$3 billion annually to run 28 prisons that house 120,000 inmates (8).

It then became obvious that the state’s agenda now focused on using the carceral system as a way to lockdown a large portion of the state’s population focusing on people with previous contact with the police, a majority of whom were people of color.

Pushing the color marker further, California attacked the immigration issue, with another ballot measure, “Proposition 187, the 1994 ballot initiative intended to deny education,

nonemergency health care and other public services to illegal immigrants,” was the title of the editorial of the Los Angeles Times (B8).

Then, with the back drop of the Rodney King beating, the L.A. Riots, the Three Strikes Law, and proposition 187, also in November of 1994, I, Denneth Jackson, a middle school teacher, was arrested and detained for murder, attempted murder and assault. “Denneth Thaddeus Jackson, 26, a social studies teacher in North Hollywood since September, was being held in lieu of \$1million bail and will be arraigned on murder charges today police say” (Williams).

I was tried two times with each ending in a hung jury and a third that ended in a mistrial due to District Attorney misconduct. With a new District Attorney appointed, a third trial had jurors deliberating and returning without a verdict. The judge refused to declare another mistrial. Instead, he read an additional jury instruction to the jurors with the hopes of ending the stalemate. It did, and jurors returned with a guilty verdict. “Twice, juries could not agree on murder charges against North Hollywood schoolteacher Denneth Jackson in the fatal gang beating of a neighbor” (Larubia). However, after another trial, headlines read, “On Monday, a third jury reached a unanimous verdict after four days of deliberation, finding Jackson guilty of the 1994 slaying of Julio Aguilar and the beating of the victim's brother, Jose Aguilar.” (Larubia). In 1998, I was sentenced to 18 years to life in prison.

By 2005, with Schwarzenegger as Governor, the California prison industry began to expand. Schwarzenegger switched the name of the California Department of Corrections to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation allowing for the creation of industries within the correctional system as well as the ability to compete with outside industries as a program of Rehabilitation for the Correction's Department. The change is stated as such:

Commencing July 1, 2005, there is hereby continued in existence within the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation the Prison Industry Authority. As used in this article, "authority" means the Prison Industry Authority. Commencing July 1, 2005, any reference to the Department of Corrections shall refer to the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (Amended by Stats. 2006, Ch. 538, Sec. 510. Effective January 1, 2007).

2801. The purposes of the authority are:

(a) To develop and operate industrial, agricultural, and service enterprises employing prisoners in institutions under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections, which enterprises may be located either within those institutions or elsewhere, all as may be determined by the authority.

(b) To create and maintain working conditions within the enterprises as much like those which prevail in private industry as possible, to assure prisoners employed therein the

opportunity to work productively, to earn funds, and to acquire or improve effective work habits and occupational skills.

(c) To operate a work program for prisoners which will ultimately be self-supporting by generating sufficient funds from the sale of products and services to pay all the expenses of the program, and one which will provide goods and services which are or will be used by the Department of Corrections, thereby reducing the cost of its operation, (2016 California Code).

This amendment to the prison bill allowed prisons to create financial gains on the States behalf, by profiting off the increasing prison population. However, in California under the new three strikes law, the increasing number of inmates entering the carceral system became greater than the numbers leaving, creating problems for the State as far as being able to not only house, but to also provide medical and psychiatric care for those inmates. Inmates were dying. These problems generated lawsuits against the State.

By 2009, the base term of my prison sentence was served and my first board hearing was due. As stated earlier in the auto-ethnography Previous to the Board hearing, inmates are mandated to go to a psychological evaluation. This is to determine by the State's Forensic Evaluator what level of risk a person poses to the community of reoffending. My results for that assessment dealing with my evaluation are as follows. In 2009 According to my "Comprehensive

Risk Assessment for the Board of Parole Hearings Forensic Assessment Division Chuckwalla State Prison,” Adam Cash a Forensic Psychologist for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation described my reasoning abilities in the following way;

“My reasoning abilities appeared to be intact and my judgement was assessed to be adequate, and judgement as “reasonable,” (7). When I was asked if I was a gang member, I refused to answer, however, “the Probation Officer’s Report indicated that he had been identified as a gang member by the Los Angeles Police Department, but no specific affiliation was identified,” (7). Also noted in the report were my three CDCR 115’s, which are department violations. Two of these three violations I had were violent offences, with the last one nonviolent for refusing a direct order. It was then noted that this was actually a good record, “Mr. Jackson has a total of three CDCR 115’s over an 11-year incarceration history. Such a minimal history stands out against most inmates’ histories,” (8).

Adam Cash’s Comprehensive Risk Assessment continued with the results of the Psychopathy Check List (PCL-R) which stated, “Mr. Jackson obtained a score on the PCL-R which places him in the Low range of the clinical construct of psychopathy when compared to other offenders... To his credit, he has improved his behavior in a controlled environment” (9).

Further results showed that according to the Historical-Clinical-Risk Management, the HCR-20; “Mr. Jackson’s overall score as measured by the HCR-20 was in the Low range of violent recidivism” (10).

Also noted in Cash’s Comprehensive Risk Assessment, was that even though all results pointed to “low”, there was a concern dealing with the Historical-Clinical-Risk that was “expressed” by the HCR-20, but was not stated, it simply recognized that something did exist. The report concluded that my risk of violent recidivism was low, “After weighing all the data from the available records, the clinical interview, and risk assessment data, it is opined that Mr. Jackson presents relatively Low risk for violence in the free community,” (10).

The Board of Prison Terms uses both the results of the Comprehensive Risk Assessment, and the “Board” hearing, where the inmate is present and questioned, to determine if he is suitable for parole. Based on these sources, the commissioners of that hearing determine one of five rulings at the hearing. If the inmate is not found suitable, the slots for times of denial are: one year, three years, five years, seven years, ten years, and fifteen years. I was given a five-year denial.

According to the “State of California Board of Parole Hearing Statistical Data,” in 2009, out of 7,121 inmates that went to a Board of Parole Hearing, only 7.6 %, 542 inmates were granted a parole date. The panel felt that based on the fact that my lawyers were still appealing

the conviction, a right that I have according to law, and because of my refusal to discuss my case because it was still pending legal actions, I showed a lack of remorse.

By the year 2011, the situation and number of deaths in the California carceral system reached a point where the courts were compelled to order the State to lower the population of inmates. “Conditions in California’s overcrowded prisons are so bad that they violate the Eighth Amendment’s ban on cruel and unusual punishment, the Supreme Court ruled on Monday, ordering the state to reduce its prison population by more than 30,000 inmates” (Liptak A1). While this ruling would be appealed, dragging out the process, the State did begin releasing lifers who were suitable, as they went to their hearings.

This change in policy is reflected in the statistics by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations Board of Parole Hearings. During the year of 1994, at the time of my arrest, there were 1,970 Suitability Hearings, of which 12 inmates were granted parole, 0.6%. By 2011, at the time of the judge’s ruling about inhumane treatment of prisoners due to health conditions caused by over-crowding, the state conducted 6,633 hearings with 670 inmates found suitable for release, 10.1% as noted by the, “Lifer Schedule and Tracking System,” (California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations Board of Parole Hearings).

During my second evaluation which occurred in 2014 by a Dr. Robinson, like my previous evaluation, I was again diagnosed at a level below having an antisocial personality,

“one standard deviation below the mean of United States’ male inmates, and below the cutoff or threshold commonly used to identify dissocial or psychologic personality,”(14). Robinson also reported that I was mentally stable, “there were no current mental health concerns” with no incidents of violent behavior for the fourteen years previous to the evaluation (11). Aside from the period of time when I received violent disciplinary actions, I had also been free of nonviolent disciplinary actions for a period of ten years (11).

Robinson also commented positively about my sense of remorse and empathy, and acknowledged that I had an ability for retrospection (18). Not only did she feel I had introspection but also that I had also addressed and recognized other issues during the evaluation (19). Just as in the evaluation before, I received a score of “low” for risk of violent recidivism (20).

Also, at this time of my second hearing in 2014, 4,705 inmates had attended suitability hearings and 902 inmates were found suitable. This represents 19.1% percent of lifers attending Board hearings being released. The difference between the number of lifers at the time of my second and first board hearings, as well as at the time of my arrest and the passing of the “Three Strikes” bill in 1994, was drastic. This research shows that this flux in numbers reflects more of a difference in a political context from 1990 to 2015 that affected my arrest, sentencing, length of

incarceration, and my release in 2015, rather than my behavior or ability to show rehabilitation, as shown by the psychological evaluations and the political contexts of those times.

Conclusion

On these lands that have been renamed the Americas, there existed many forms of life, each in a manner that was supported by that environment and system that allowed that life to continue. That was evident by the mere fact of their existence at the time. Since the arrival of foreigners to this soil, these systems have been either destroyed or disrupted and the Indigenous people of these lands have suffered, through genocide and mental and physical illness. Today many descendants of these Indigenous people, find themselves locked within various systems of incarceration, and distanced from their land, either physically, spirituality, or by history.

This research is a call to look to take a second look at those of Indigenous ancestry who are incarcerated. Through the colonization of these lands so much has been lost by the people of these lands. This loss is not a simple aspect of a person's life nor is it something that people will "get over." The lives, identities as well as possibilities of their future all bear heavily on the ability to not only know who they are, but also all that they are connected to. To know one self is only a part of a chain that connects each Indigenous person to multiple links to the world around them.

Now I Have Stories

Indigenous Spirituality and teachings were the major part of my rehabilitation while in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and Indigenous Elders played the major role in assuring that I received that wisdom in a proper way. This was done so that these teachings could be felt, rather than just understood. I remember how the Chumash Elder had told me:

Imagine the pinky, looking at the thumb thinking how different it was then than the pinky. Then one day the pinky opened its eyes bigger and was able to see the whole hand, and that he was connected to all of the fingers, so it had to care for them all. The next day, the pinky looked at the arm, and thought of how different it was to the arm, but then it opened its eyes bigger again, and saw that it was connected to the arm too, and had to care for it as well. The next day the pinky then looked at the chest, and again he thought he was different, until it opened its eyes even bigger. This happened till finally the pinky had realized that it was a part of the whole body, and therefore, for it to be safe and healthy, it needed to care for it all.

In closing, I drove past the old house and farm where I was raised. I stopped and picked a small branch from the tree that stood between the front yard and the street. Later, I wrapped it with a piece of sinew, a type of wrap used in making traditional jewelry, and placed it around my

neck. This is an act of respect; Just as that tree carries a part of me (the life I shared with my family on that land), I will carry a part of that tree. We are connected.

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