



***“To Remain an Indian” Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education*, by K. Tsianina Lomawaima and Teresa L. McCarty. New York, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2006. 213 pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN number 10 0-8077-4716-5**

Ask just about any American the definition of democracy and most may answer something like, “a rule by many.” Most Americans believe in the right of a nation-state to enjoy total sovereignty and self-determination. Lead the conversation to voting and individual freedoms, especially freedom of speech, education, family and civil rights and again, most Americans firmly support these principles. We assume that everyone in America has these rights, but do they? Upon reading *“To Remain an Indian” Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native Education*, an answer to this question may not be so simple.

The authors, Lomawaima and McCarty, provide evidence that American Indian tribes have not enjoyed the fruits of democracy as most European-Americans have been allowed to experience it throughout the 20th and 21st century. Lomawaima and McCarty identify an ideological model they call the “safety zone” which they describe as tracing “...the ‘swings’ of Indian policy—including educational policy—to an ongoing struggle over cultural difference and its perceived threat, or benefit, to a sense of shared American identity” (p. 6). Lomawaima and McCarty substantiate the omnipresence of the “safety zone” in the realm of American Indian Education, tracing its effect from the early 20th century to the present era of No Child Left Behind. The authors assert that the “safety zone” is not just a cultural issue but involves “culture, language, politics, and legal status...” that “are inextricably bound together in the fabric of U.S./Indian relations” (p. 7).

Because the “safety zone” ideology is so firmly embedded in federal-tribal relations, the authors make the point that American Indian tribes do not really enjoy total self-determination or tribal sovereignty. The federal government has played “big brother” from the early 20th century to the present and at first tried to eradicate American Indian culture, language, and political systems through “Americanized” education as it was promulgated in boarding and day schools where Natives attended. Lomawaima and McCarty provide compelling testimony

to this effect in eight chapters of the book. In the first two chapters, the authors explain how American Indian boarding and day schools were designed to serve as a “civilizing” agent of the American government, and how education was intended to be an essential component in the then darkest side of the “safety zone.” There follows an extensive discussion dispelling myths about American Indian learners and provides the reader a more enlightened view about learning style differences and how conventional American schooling methods fail to recognize or accommodate them. Chapters 3-5 discusses key “eras” in American Indian education. The first era, 1900-1928, was a period when the federal government subjectively evaluated and determined what was “safe” and “dangerous” culturally for American Indian tribes. That which was deemed “safe” could be included in the curriculum at boarding and day schools. The second era, 1928-1940, was highlighted by the publication of the Meriam Report, which forced the government to re-evaluate what was “safe and dangerous,” and to make significant changes. During this period, bolstered by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1936, American Indians gained a small footing in schools and reservation politics. The third era, 1936-1954, saw the introduction of bilingual readers in many Native languages into the curriculum in Native schools. Government policy moved away from an emphasis on English language and assimilation toward a greater appreciation of Native language and culture in the curriculum. Chapter 6 describes the advent of Indigenous bilingual/bicultural programs. This movement allowed Native communities to renovate the local educational systems to reflect their values, languages, and culture to a greater extent. In Chapter 7, the authors allude to a “new American revolution,” which now allows American Indians to maintain their own languages as “fundamental expressions of choice and self-determination” (p. xxiv). Chapter 8 involves a conversation about the latest movement toward high stakes testing (No Child Left Behind), which serves to keep the education of Indian children and youth within the “safety zone.”

As an educator, I was deeply impressed by the perspectives provided by the authors with respect to the “safety zone.” Historically, the American government has always reacted to the American Indian population with suspicion and fear. The legacy of establishing schools for the “Americanizing” of Native children may have been perceived as an act of beneficence at the time, but in actuality it actually served to obliterate tribal languages, customs, traditions and the Native children's' sense of Native identity.

I appreciated the way the authors provided definitions and outlined major concepts before they applied these concepts in later chapters. The organization of the “eras” made the chapters easy to read and understand. Their descriptive writing made it easy to visualize how things were and “what was going on” during those time periods. I now have a greater appreciation for bilingual/bicultural education and the daily and ongoing efforts of dedicated American Indian educators to create a Native defined “safety zone” in learning that honors and incorporates the values, traditions, and languages of our Indian communities. Along with the authors of this provocative book, I certainly agree that the “safety

zone” is still largely European-American controlled, remains alive and well in today's society and makes it virtually impossible for American Indians to exercise true sovereignty and self-determination, especially in the arena of education.

The lessons provided in *“To Remain an Indian” Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education* can be used as a text in many different classes related to American Government and American History. High school and college students would be able to read this and evaluate American Indian relations within the context of American government, past, and present. This is definitely a book that should be adapted into the curriculum of a study of American Indian History and Education. As an educator, I feel that students never get the “whole” story when studying American Indians. Lomawaima and McCarty's perspective on the “safety zone” will allow students to gain a deeper understanding of the processes the American government employs, both in the past and in the present day, to try to define the existence, status, and even the identity of American Indians. As this engaging work concludes, the struggle for self-determination and sovereignty is far from over.

Star Nance
Doctoral Student-Social Studies
University of Oklahoma