

David W Fletcher, April 2006

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OVERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR “INTRODUCTION” TO JOANE NAGLE’S
*AMERICAN INDIAN ETHNIC RENEWAL:
POWER AND THE RESURGENCE OF IDENTITY AND CULTURE*
(NEW YORK, NY: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1996)

Terminology, or the linguistic luau

---How accurate is the label “Indian” or “Native American” in describing the collective feature(s) of hundreds of tribes and subgroups?

---According to Nagel (3), who so designated “the aboriginal inhabitants of North America” and why did they do this?

---Is her view weakened by the need(s) of state and federal authorities to relate in some unified way to the various tribes and subgroups?

---In what way(s) do perceptions and their linguistic formulations (or constructions) promote the notion of “other” or “other than us”?

Population statistics, or “truth” & consequences in numbers

---How does Nagel (4-5) use numbers about Indian populations?

---What correlation, if any, can there be between decreasing or low population and “cultural extinction”?

---Do native cultural traits reside in individual tribes, in individuals within a tribe? [In other words, if there is just one person of a particular tribe alive, can there be cultural extinction?]

---Or, do native cultural traits reside trans-tribally? [In other words, if peculiar cultural traits exist broadly and can be found among other native peoples, can there be cultural extinction?]

---Or, can native cultural traits persist apart from human existence (i.e., in stories or oral traditions, in written documents, etc.).

“Political reorganization, linguistic revitalization, membership growth, and cultural revival,” or things that make sociologists happy

---How would you describe Nagel’s characterization (6-7) of “cultural revival” (i.e., what is it that is being “revived”)?

---In your view, is “cultural revival” even possible? [The answer may depend on your view of culture, whether rigid and static or changing and evolving.]

---And, how much culture, or what specific traits, need to resurface to make “cultural renewal” viable?

From cultural renewal to ethnic pluralism, or the slippery semantic slide

---How does Nagel (7-9) get from “cultural renewal” to “ethnic pluralism”? In your mind, does she explain this shift adequately?

---Does the common assertion–“they seem to know”–help Nagel’s argument? How does she dovetail this assumption into her discussion of ethnicity?

---What arguments against Indian ethnic pluralism does Nagel mention?

From ethnic pluralism to ethnic renewal, or the problem of Indian identity & unity

---How does Nagel (9) define an ethnic group? On this basis, what does she argue?

---What does she say is “her central task” in the book?

---How does she mediate between her claim of “social and cultural continuity in many American Indian communities” and “the fact that Indian ethnic boundaries and identities are continually socially constructed and negotiated” (9), or does she?

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Ethnogenesis, or other fancy sociological terms

---How does Nagel (10) define “ethnic renewal”?

---In what ways does she believe this to be a dynamic process (10-11)?

---What argument does she make from Indian ethnic renewal and from what focal point(s)?