

## *Remarks on Texts by Deloria/Lytle and Cornell on Defining Native American Cultures*

Philipp Kneis · Seminar Handout · Nov 18, 2004

### **Vine Deloria & Clifford M. Lytle. “American Indians in Historical Perspective”.**

*American Indians, American Justice*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

#### *argument of the text:*

- Introduction: History as central to understand American Indian life
- Phase 1: Discovery, Conquest, and Treaty-Making (1532-1828)
- Phase 2: Removal and Relocation (1828-1887)
- Phase 3: Allotment and Assimilation (1887-1928)
- Phase 4: Reorganization and Self-Government (1828-1945)
- Phase 5: Termination (1945-1961)
- Phase 6: Self-Determination (1961-Present)

#### *questions:*

- Is there a difference in the treatment of Native American tribes compared with what happened to other autochthonic cultures in history?
- What is the difference between the Latin American and the North American approaches?
- How does the policy towards Native Americans correspond to American history?

### **George L. Cornell. “Native American Perceptions of the Environment”.**

Lindquist/Zanger (Eds.). *Buried Roots & Indestructible Seeds*. Madison, Wisconsin: U of Wisconsin Press, 1993.

#### *argument of the text:*

- terminology “Native American” vs. plethora of American tribes
- cultural diversity w/in Native tribes, but also recurring motifs
- Earth as human, Sky and Sun as male (cf. Gaia / Uranos / Helios)
- Circular/Cyclical nature of things — “pan-indian mythology”
- Natural Law – environmentalism – conservationism – Chief Seattle — Oglala & Pueblo mythology
- “unrelatedness” of modern American civilization and relation to natural riches
- buffalo — development of conservationist thought between 1870-1900 (Yellowstone NP 1872)
- beavers — difference in intentions when hunting? (cf. disappearance of big game during Native American immigration)
- acculturation both ways

#### *questions:*

- How conclusive is the text?
- How might the difference in conservationist attitudes between American Indians and Europeans have come about?
- Are there comparable notions of sacredness in European/American thought?
- Is the Native American conception of cyclic nature and sacredness of nature exclusive to them?
- What is the relation between the sacred and the ethical?

**General Remarks (both texts):**

- clash between Gatherer/Hunter and Urban/Agrarian societies
- “Modernity” of both civilizational models // mutual exclusivity of their existence in a specific place
- relation between myths/religion and natural/cultural environment

**Further Reading:**

Jan Assmann. *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München, C.H. Beck, 2002.

Jared Diamond. *Guns, Germs and Steel. A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years*. London: Vintage, 1997.

Uwe Wesel. *Frühformen des Rechts in vorstaatlichen Gesellschaften*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985.