Yakama Rising

Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing

MICHÉLLE M. JACOB

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CHAPTER FOUR

Take Care of Your Past

Building a Theory of Yakama Decolonizing Praxis

Whip Man: An Ethnographic Introduction to Intergenerational Cultural Teachings

The children stand still and quiet; they halt their usual squirming and chatter, demonstrating their focused discipline of stillness, attentiveness, and patience. They know what is expected of them, a result of the many hours of instruction they have received from elders and adults. The children's faces become serious as they wait to hear the elder's voice. After a long pause, a flute plays, loudly, beautifully; it is a suspenseful kind of noise. The children, dressed in their traditional regalia, remain still and focused, almost like statues. Then, after another pause, the elder's voice booms throughout the room. He is the Whip Man, a traditional figure in Yakama villages, who is responsible for disciplining the children.

The Whip Man's voice becomes the center of everyone's attention. He instructs the people about the importance of discipline, respect, culture, and community. The children, in unison, begin their sign language performance that honors the Whip Man's sacred teachings. The Whip Man is a special teacher who instills a strong sense of purpose and communal pride into the children. He knows that if the children learn these important lessons, then they will be strong individuals who ensure a strong community well into the future. He also knows that the children, often so present—and future-moment oriented, must be taught to respect the past, to learn from it, and to care for their ancestor's most sacred teachings. He repeats his strongest message several times, loudly, in his booming voice:

Take care of your past,
Take care,
You, you, you,
Take care of your past.

The instruction is firm, disciplined, but caring. One can hear the intensity in the elder's voice. The children embody his teachings as they point to their audience while the Whip Man states, "You, you, you. Take care of your past." In this way, the children are learning to be culture bearers. Through their performance they become teachers and messengers of Whip Man's traditional teachings.

Embodying Whip Man's Teachings and The Emergence of a Yakama Decolonizing Praxis

Children who performed the Whip Man routine with the Wapato Indian Club remember the basic teachings of responsibility and discipline that the elder's voice instructs. The poem, originally written by Phil George, was gifted to the Wapato Indian Club in 1989. The poem celebrates traditional figures (Whip Man and Whip Woman), who are responsible for disciplining children. Yakama elders Pauline Miller and Frank Gopher were so moved by the poem's message that they gifted background music and a vocal audio recording to the club, to be used in sign language performances (Wapato Indian Club 1994). The poem contains a powerful message that reminds young people to engage in an indigenous cultural practice of "heeding the voices of our ancestors" (Alfred 1995). In his interview, Haver Jim (whom readers met in chapter 1) talked about his memories as a participant in the Wapato Indian Club, and about needing to uphold the expectations of discipline and respect for the group. I asked if Sue's teachings about discipline had anything to do with his actions. He confirmed that it did. He agreed that club members needed to show discipline:
You had to. It is kind of a, living up to her expectations! You know she had a certain [way of expecting us to be], you had to have good grades, you had to show up to school every day. You had to behave yourself on the bus.

I asked Haver to say more about Sue's way of teaching discipline to the children. In his response, Haver reflects on why Sue was able to be strict yet still garner so much popularity and affection from the children. He points to her ability to communicate and positively reinforce the many good things children do, and an overall gentler style of discipline than what Haver had previously experienced:

I think it had a lot to do with her ability to communicate. Because of her training as a counselor, I know she did a lot of positive reinforcement. She was strict, but in a more modern way.

During his interview, Haver acknowledged that, as a child, he had a track record of discipline problems within the schools. Several teachers had written him off as perhaps a “lost cause,” or at least a “troublemaker,” who should be sent to the office and receive physical punishment, such as being hacked (a form of corporal punishment in which a student is hit with a stick) at school, for discipline problems. Despite this troubled record, Sue saw something more in Haver. She reached out to him and welcomed his participation and leadership in the Wapato Indian Club. She knew he had the potential to be a strong leader for our people. As Haver reflected on his experience in the public school system, and the importance of Sue's caring work with the children, he summed up his comments with perhaps the simplest statement that eloquently articulates the secret of working with middle-school children: “Sue treated me nice, so I behaved.”

Haver’s comments reveal the effectiveness of Sue’s ability to teach discipline to children. Sue’s work with the children demonstrates an approach to indigenous social change that I call Yakama decolonizing praxis. Sue draws from traditional teachings, such as Whip Man and Whip Woman, and uses new methodologies to share these traditions with the younger generations, such as helping children learn a sign language routine they can perform as part of the club’s dance troupe. In this process, Sue teaches children they are precious to our people and have a responsibility to respect the past and build a positive future. My study of indigenous grassroots activism and the resulting theory of Yakama decolonizing praxis is a scholarly project centrally concerned with healing social change.

Defining Yakama Decolonizing Praxis

Throughout this book, I analyze examples of activism in order to articulate a theory of Yakama decolonizing praxis that advances our understanding of social change efforts concerned with “making power” to reclaim indigenous traditions, bodies, languages, and homelands. Through analyzing important case studies of “on-the-ground” activism, my study articulates the importance of drawing from traditional teachings and utilizing new methodologies, as activists work toward a vision of Yakama decolonizing praxis that: 1) understands indigenous bodies as sites of critical pedagogy, 2) centers social justice praxis to build a moral community, and 3) utilizes grassroots indigenous resistance as a mechanism to dismantle colonial logics.

Chapter 4 articulates how Yakama decolonizing praxis contributes to the growing body of work on theories of indigenous social change. The main theoretical camps I discuss are Native feminisms and radical indig enism/indigenous resurgence. These theoretical approaches share the goal of empowering Native communities and restoring Native cultural traditions. Despite these similarities, participants in theoretical work in these areas tend to lack detailed conversation with each other, which undercuts the ability of indigenous theories to make a greater impact in academic, policy, and grassroots arenas. This chapter emphasizes the importance of Yakama decolonizing praxis in order to weave a discussion across theoretical camps; by doing so, perhaps we can work toward more comprehensive, higher impact interdisciplinary indigenous theories of social change.

Native Feminisms

Yakama decolonizing praxis, which highlights the important place of women in cultural revitalization movements, builds upon Native feminist scholarship. Special issues of peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Goeman and Denetdale 2009; Smith and Kauanui 2008) have created valuable collections of essays on Native feminisms, and numerous scholars have contributed in this area (Maracle 1996; Ramirez 2008; Smith 2005b; Morgensen 2011; Miheesua 2000; Suzack et al. 2010). The common theme across them, and what makes them inherently important as Native feminist texts, is the fact that each text centers Native women’s experiences, utilizing gender inequality as a starting point for the analysis, and works toward envisioning a society in which our traditional cultural norms, which respect and honor women’s contributions, are upheld.
Previous chapters in this book have detailed how the development of Yakama decolonizing praxis builds upon important contributions by Andrea Smith, Winona LaDuke, and Dian Million. Other scholars also help advance our understanding of the stakes of Native feminism. For example, Shari Huhnordt and Cheryl Suzack note in their essay about indigenous feminism, it “remains an important site of gender struggle that engages the crucial issues of cultural identity, nationalism, and decolonization particular to Indigenous contexts” (Huhnordt and Suzack 2010, 1-2). Huhnordt and Suzack articulate the need for critical indigenous feminist scholarship, noting our “common colonial history . . . transformed Indigenous societies by diminishing Indigenous women’s power, status, and material circumstances” (3). In discussing the power dynamics involved in political projects, such as indigenous feminism, Huhnordt and Suzack note, “although Indigenous women must shape Indigenous feminism. Indigenous feminism—as a political strategy and project—also requires the alliances that are built through the engagement, contributions, and support of Indigenous men and non-Indigenous men and women” (4).

A central tenet of Yakama decolonizing praxis is that women are important as culture bearers and teachers. Women’s leadership served as the “backbone” of cultural revitalization movements detailed in this book. The importance of women-centered movements is described by Rebecca Tsosie, who articulates women’s leadership in Native communities as “an ethics of survival, of connection to the past generations, of responsiveness to needs of this and future generations . . . That spirit is what sustains Native peoples, what inspires us and gives us hope for the future” (Tsosie 2010, 29). Tsosie articulates Native women’s leadership in terms of responsibility: “[I]n many traditions we are taught an ethic of responsibility in connection with our life’s work. We are taught that the cycle of rebirth and regeneration that we all are part of places a great responsibility on us, to be appreciative, to remember what is important, and to serve our families and communities” (31). Tsosie further describes commonalities across Native cultures in her description of how Native women view themselves as connected to place and community: “Native women understood their existence as holistic— involving biological, social, and spiritual dimensions—and related through time and tradition to their lands, cultures, families, and communities” (31). Through her study of Native women’s leadership, Tsosie articulates the following common patterns across Native cultures: “In most tribes, gender roles were perceived as complementary and not dichotomous” (32).

Across the case studies covered in earlier chapters, major lessons of Yakama decolonizing praxis are: the importance of Native women elders as culture bearers, the need to reshape educational institutions to serve our people, and the promise of grassroots activism for bringing about important forms of social change. Similar to the indigenous activists that Winona LaDuke (LaDuke 2005b; LaDuke and Alexander n.d.) and Andrea Smith (Smith 2005a) detail in their books, the activists I interviewed were motivated to engage in grassroots efforts in order to bring about social change that would benefit the younger generations. Thus, Yakama decolonizing praxis is centrally concerned with thinking intergenerationally. Activists were guided by the teachings and instructions of elders, and dedicated their lives to carrying out work that would benefit the future generations. Women are strong leaders in these efforts, providing evidence for both the need and the effectiveness of dismantling a heteropatriarchal colonial logic that relegates women generally, and women elders in particular, as marginal. These on-the-ground examples of Yakama decolonizing praxis make a contribution to existing theories that highlight the importance of gendered activism within indigenous communities. For example, Patsy (whom readers met in chapter 2), articulates an important aspect of Yakama decolonizing praxis, one which views women and men as equally important. I asked Patsy what motivated her to keep going in her work toward cultural revitalization. I noted her busy schedule working with the Northwest Indian Language Institute and other partners, as well as being active in national educational reform in her role as President Obama’s appointee to the National Advisory Council on Indian Education (Ferolito 2010). She responded:

I think what keeps me going, is the children but also the young adults that I work with . . . I always say to our children to be happy and to laugh, have a wonderful laugh whenever you can, because that is really healthy to have humor in our life. I just shared the other day with families that came together . . . and just to encourage our boys, in particular, to take the necessary steps for ensuring their own health at a very early age and not waiting until you get older. And this was all young men . . . often times with young men they feel like they need to be a macho person . . . and so one lesson is to take care of your health. Especially for the young men to take care of their health, too.

A main principle of Yakama decolonizing praxis is that our people are strongest when women and men work together to bring about healing for our people. While women I interviewed often acknowledged the special
dedication and talent that women had for working collectively and taking care of day-to-day activities that kept grassroots movements going, they also acknowledged that this work would be incomplete without the support and involvement of men. For the men engaging in grassroots activism, they acknowledged the centrality of women, and women elders in particular, for providing them with necessary guidance and support, as they learned to embrace their leadership roles within community-based cultural revitalization activities. For example, Ryan (chapter 1) credited Sue with guiding him to embrace his culture and to see his potential as a performing artist. These are teachings he continues to draw on as a DJ for the tribal radio station and as a rap artist. In chapter 2, Roger discussed how his work to learn the language from Virginia taught him to be a better person, by internalizing teachings embedded within the language. He now shares these lessons with his own students. In chapter 3, Greg stated Binah and Janet McCloud helped him embrace the importance of cultural teachings at a time when he “had no clue” about what he would do with his life. Now in his work as a co-founder of Xwayamami Ishich, he helps organize traditional foods workshops that honor women elders as teachers.

Across the examples of Yakama decolonizing praxis is an understanding that our people are healthy when we build movements with a gendered balance. This lesson is deeply rooted in traditional Yakama spirituality. The traditional longhouse teachings provide strict instruction in this regard, with women and men serving in particular roles, in particular spaces within the longhouse. Within the longhouse, there is a woman’s side and a man’s side, and each side is respected as a sacred place. Lillian Ackerman has studied this gendered phenomenon among Plateau Indians, noting how traditional cultural practices are structured to provide a complementary gender balance of power and organization among our people (Ackerman 1996). Traditionally, everyday culture also holds a gendered division of labor among Yakama peoples. While men often fulfill the public leadership roles, they are only respected as leaders if they demonstrate an excellent ability to listen and provide for the people, with women serving as strong advisors. Leadership and generosity are expected of Yakama women and men alike. As Hunn notes in his study of Plateau Indian society, “generous men and women were often rewarded by recognition of their leadership potential” (Hunn, and Selam and Family 1990, 219). While Yakama decolonizing praxis will have the greatest potential when movements have a complementary gender balance, activists acknowledged our people are still working toward this ideal.

In examining the data from the three case studies, interviewees had strong opinions on the gendered dynamics of cultural revitalization movements. For example, Virginia questioned the economic and gender norms breaking down among Yakama people, and viewed this anomic as a threat to our cultural survival:

I’m afraid the language is dying. And the culture is dying with it. What I see, I see people walking on the road and men just laying around out there in the shade in town and not working. Not doing anything! They’re not all that old, you know. They are middle age, maybe even younger . . . And I don’t know of what the future of this tribe will be. We need to put some self-esteem into our male people you know, that they need to look at what’s happening to our tribe. Be more aware of it. It isn’t all just per capita you know, there’s a lot more involved to this tribe than just per capita. And I see all these addictions; that isn’t part of our culture. I know that I’m not perfect, I can’t, you know, point and say you know this is all wrong, but I’m just thinking I guess because I was raised the old way, that I faced a lot of hardships with my tribe, with my family, where I know that there are times when we didn’t have enough money to do certain things, but you know we always had our cultural ways.

As an elder, Virginia remembers a time before settler colonialism had imposed such sweeping social change among Yakama people. For example, she recalls when families still relied upon gathering traditional foods as a main component of our economic order. These traditional ways featured a gendered social order where women and men assumed roles of importance. Now, with the imposed wage economy and restricted access to traditional foods and economic patterns, Virginia notes that men are often the people on the reservation who struggle to access and keep jobs. Her disappointment refers to the drug and alcoholism problems on the reservation, when she notes men “walking on the road” and “laying around in town.” Virginia’s critique of disrupted gender norms is confirmed by US census data, with single-woman–headed households overrepresented among American Indian families (21 percent) compared to the general population (12.6 percent), and the white population (9.6 percent) (US Census Bureau 2010). While these statistics can be interpreted in multiple ways, including pointing out the resilience of Native women to lead their households and raise families without the constant presence of a male, the statistics also provide a backdrop for elders’ critiques, such
just to have her there at our school as a counselor made it so I wanted to get good grades. I didn't want to get in fights, or be doing stupid stuff, so, it was the Indian Club. Sue was the one that made Indian Club what it was, so, just having her there made it to where you wanted to do your best in school, to go on trips and to not disappoint her. So it impacted my education then. And then as I got older, the discipline that I learned from Indian Club carried over into high school to where I was trying so hard in middle school anyway and I had somebody that actually cared who was at the school in the middle school, I carried that over into the classes I had there.

Ryan's narrative helps us understand the implications of Sue's Yakama decolonizing praxis. Ryan states Sue's caring nature and high expectations helped him to become a better student and leader than he would have been if he had only interacted with school officials who assumed Ryan was a "wannabe gangster." Sue's message to Indian Club students such as Ryan was that the students were important and had great potential to contribute to our people's future. Yakama decolonizing praxis shares an empowering message that dreams of a better future for our people.

Patricia Penn Hilden and Leece M. Lee write about the importance of developing an indigenous feminist theory and articulate that theorists are dreamers, and indigenous feminist theorists are dreaming of a better future for our people (Hilden and Lee 2010). Yakama decolonizing praxis contains within it an activist call. Theory-building is useful only as it helps indigenous peoples to envision and work toward a stronger future. Sue's message to Ryan, and all the children who participate in the Wapato Indian Club, is that they are an important part of our dream for a better future for our people. This message is especially important for Indian boys, who are so often expected to die young, with lives full of violence, alcohol, and drugs. These stereotypes, rooted in tragic statistics that affirm the substance abuse problems and social ills within our community, are a legacy that grassroots cultural revitalization activists are working to undo. For every young person who escapes an early death, our people can mark another notable event in our collective history.

**Time Ball, History, and Social Change**

Yakama decolonizing praxis draws from the place-based teachings of Yakama cultural practices. Across the case studies, activists emphasized...
the importance of place and history. Our people have a strong tradition of being historians. According to our people’s traditions, women are central in documenting important events, happenings, and memories for our people. This tradition is evident in the phenomenon of the time ball. The Yakama Indian Nation Cultural Center describes the time ball in the following way: “Time is a relationship between events, Kept fresh in memory by selected objects on knotted hemp. Connection is as vital as Separation. The strand is begun by a woman at her marriage. By the time she is a grandmother, The unity of life is wrapped and remembered in a Time Ball” (Uebelacker 1984, 10).

This book has been an effort to help mark and record this historical moment of important activism and grassroots organizing taking place on and around the Yakama Reservation. Like all efforts to create a time ball, this book cannot tell all stories for all times. But it does provide an important “partial perspective” of the work that is being done to reclaim our traditions, empower our people, and articulate a Yakama decolonizing praxis that will benefit the future generations. In that vein, this book represents both Native feminist as well as radical indigenous work. In the next section, I turn to a discussion of radical indigenism and indigenous resurgence, analyze the central tenets of this area of indigenous studies, and offer thoughts on how Yakama decolonizing praxis contributes to that broader discussion.

Radical Indigenism and Indigenous Resurgence

Yakama decolonizing praxis is rooted in a political commitment to social change that draws upon indigenous culture and identity, and thus builds upon theories of radical indigenism and indigenous resurgence. Broadly speaking, the theorists in these areas work in the social sciences, including sociology and political science. Of special note is Eva Garrouette’s (2003) theory of radical indigenism, and Taiaiake Alfred’s (2005) theory of indigenous resurgence. What these theorists share in common is that they articulate an activist call based on the belief that tribal peoples are best situated to reclaim our traditions, identify our most pressing needs and problems, and build solutions to our own problems, based on traditional teachings.

At the heart of these theories is a dedication to reclaiming one’s indigenous traditions. Strong individual tribal people are collectivist-oriented, yet feel an individual sense of responsibility to work toward the collective good. As such, these theories are inherently concerned with applied examples and scholarship. Theoretical work is important only to the extent that it makes sense, and matters, on the ground—the grassroots level on which indigenous peoples are working.

Eva Garrouette’s theory of Radical Indigenism, for example, which is primarily concerned with American Indian identity, resists what many indigenous peoples view as the pitfall to Western scholars’ theoretical work on identity, the so-called navel gazing that asks abstract questions about identity that are not rooted in a critical historical understanding nor connected to contemporary tribal needs. Garrouette engages complex and emotionally charged issues in a way that simultaneously educates and advocates for American Indian community empowerment. For example, Garrouette draws from multiple forms of data in order to analyze the many complications surrounding American Indian identity. Ranging from racial and biological notions of blood quantum, to the meaning of indigenous language use and loss, to stereotypes that are deeply embedded in US popular culture and the media, Garrouette’s analyses help us understand the many ways in which American Indians must negotiate seemingly endless complications surrounding our identities. Garrouette reveals the link between identity and epistemologies and calls for a distinctively American Indian scholarship that makes the academy a “safe place for indigenous knowledge.” Her major contribution, then, is the development of the theory of Radical Indigenism, which argues for the “reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles” (Garrouette 2003, 101). Garrouette explains that a new, American Indian scholarship must be spiritual at its core. In her words, “Radical Indigenism suggests resistance to the pressure upon indigenous scholars to participate in academic discourses that strip Native intellectual traditions of their spiritual and sacred elements” (103–104). This theoretical approach has methodological implications, and the “twin requirements of Radical Indigenism” are 1) researchers must enter tribal philosophies, and 2) researchers must enter tribal relations (110). This ensures that Native spiritualities, philosophies, and community empowerment are at the heart of scholarly endeavors. Thus, Garrouette’s vision of a Radical Indigenist scholarly project is one that subverts the old colonial power relations that dispossess Native peoples of our lands, cultures, identities, and humanity. It is a vision that reclaims the centrality of our spiritual and cultural traditions and relations of kinship.

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1See the following link to view a photo of a Plateau Indian holding a time ball, from the Yakima Valley Regional Library Relander Collection: http://www.yakimamemory.org/relander/image/1319.jpg.
My work in articulating a Yakama decolonizing praxis builds upon Garroutte’s theory of radical indigenism. Across the case studies that we have examined in this book, activists engaged in a diverse array of work. Yet, common across the cases is a commitment to doing work that revitalizes traditional Yakama culture. Activists think creatively and work both within, and without, mainstream institutional support. Accordingly, they vary activities and strategies, but constant within their work is a dedication to carry out their elders’ instructions to help the people. They view their work in spiritual terms, and they credit their work with helping them to become better people, evidence that their cultural revitalization work nourishes their spirits. Staunchly committed to an intergenerational approach to teaching and learning, activists are quick to acknowledge that their elders are the wisdom keepers, and that it is the duty of the younger generations to learn and share the Yakama place-based teachings that will empower our people, protect us from social ills, and build community.

**Theorizing the Politics of Yakama Decolonizing Praxis**

Most interviewees were hesitant to embrace the labels “feminist” or “activist.” They also resisted framing their work in explicitly political terms, although they were aware of the implicit political complications of doing cultural revitalization work. For example, Wapato Indian Club founder, Sue Rigdon, noted in her interview that some community members critiqued the young dancers for “not doing the dances right.” Sue rarely challenged such criticisms publicly, but in private she would remind youth that there was more than one way of doing the Welcome Dance hand gestures, for example, and that depending on where an elder was from, they might have a slightly different way of rotating their wrist and moving their hands. But, Wapato Indian Club dancers were doing the version of the Welcome Dance “correctly” in accordance with the teachings that Sue and other elders had gifted to the youth.

Additionally, adults and youth who attended the Xwayamamí Ishích salmon drying workshop shared that they had elders or adults in their lives who doubted their abilities to learn the food traditions successfully. For example, Ramona recalled that, during her childhood, some adults sternly refused to let children touch salmon, telling the children that they would “ruin” the fish with sloppy cleaning or fillet techniques. Ramona reflected on this experience and understood the adults’ perspective, because of the high value of the salmon. However, she also knew that today’s youth oftentimes are simply less likely to be around fish, as their families usually depend on a Western, assimilated diet. Children are unlikely to learn how to cut fish if they have never even touched a raw fish, as was the case with nearly all of the children attending the Xwayamamí Ishích workshop that Ramona taught. At the workshop, when children mistakenly cut off salmon tails, Ramona had a choice to scold the child for doing the task incorrectly, or she could gently redirect the children, patiently showing them by example and using repetition to teach the necessary skills. Ramona chose to do the latter, reminding children “This is the way I was taught. If you have an elder who prefers to fillet a different way, then listen to them, but today this is how we should try to do it.” With such a gentle teaching approach, Ramona redefined the role of children in learning traditional food practices. Rather than sternly telling them “they didn’t know how to do things,” Ramona felt it was appropriate to teach the children with patience, repetition, and with a humble attitude that her way was not necessarily the only correct way to handle fish.

This example illustrates the political battles over who knows the “real” cultural traditions and the contentious ground upon which indigenous activists and our allies must walk. Taiaiake Alfred writes about these issues in his book, *Waśsw̱e*, noting that indigenous peoples can sometimes lose sight of our ultimate goals, and in doing so, derail our own efforts to build a social movement that protects our people and cultures (Alfred 2005). For example, in urging that indigenous peoples keep in mind the need to work toward “spiritual-cultural resurgences,” Alfred also recognizes that not all indigenous peoples are uniformly concerned with taking action to resist colonialism, stating, “Many people are paralyzed by fear or idled by complacency and will sit passively and watch destruction consume our people. But the words in this book are for those of us who prefer a dangerous dignity to safe self-preservation” (24). Thus, Alfred acknowledges that there are a diversity of perspectives and political attitudes within Indian Country. Not all people will be interested in indigenous resurgence movements, nor will they be supportive at all times. Sue’s comments about children being critiqued in their attempts to learn traditional dances is an example of this. Some children are rebuked so heavily that it seems as if some adults would prefer the children to assimilate, forgetting or ignoring their connections to tribal cultural traditions. But in continuing to work against such negativity, Sue helped to build a positive opportunity for children to learn or relearn some of their tribal traditions. In this way, the Wapato Indian Club provides an example of dangerous dignity within the community.
My articulation of Yakama decolonizing praxis helps extend the work of indigenous resurgence scholarship by providing details of place-based teachings and grassroots movement activities, challenges, and motivation. By studying the work taking place in the Wapato Indian Club, the partnership with the Northwest Indian Language Institute, and Xwayamami Ishich, we learn how everyday people are seeking to transform our institutions to better serve our people. At the heart of all of the activist work that I examined in the case studies, there is a recognition of the timeliness of this work—as our people realize how precious and limited our time is with our tribal elders, who hold the traditional teachings and histories of our people. It is up to the younger generations to reach out and learn the teachings, to create educational environments and alternative structures in which we can pass the teachings down through the generations, and to build a broader social movement in which all peoples are empowered to reclaim our culture, education, and health as individuals and a stronger collective. In this way, Yakama decolonizing praxis supports and extends the important theoretical work being done in the area of indigenous resurgence.

**Yakama Decolonizing Praxis and Human Rights**

To conclude this chapter, I situate Yakama decolonizing praxis in the broader discussion of indigenous peoples’ rights and social change. Indigenous communities face numerous social problems, rooted in the legacy of colonialism and manifested as contemporary soul wounds. The case studies within this book, which inform the articulation of Yakama decolonizing praxis, demonstrate the importance of grassroots cultural revitalization efforts taking place on and around the Yakama Reservation. The lessons learned from the case studies contribute to the growing body of work on indigenous social change. Two ways that existing literatures can be brought together are through a focus on future generations and the protection of indigenous human rights. Activists can heed the voices of their ancestors and protect our peoples’ rights to culture and health through various ways, including: teaching youth traditional dances, reinforcing the message that educational persistence matters, learning to speak and understand their indigenous language, and teaching youth how to engage in traditional food ways. The models provided at the end of each case study (chapters 1, 2, and 3) can inform other communities as they begin or persist in their own place-based decolonizing praxis.

Important international documents, such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, articulate that indigenous peoples have the right to learn and use their languages as a basic human right. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Robert Dunbar (2010), scholars of indigenous human rights, argue that resisting “subtractive” forms of education (such as English-only policies) benefits all peoples. In their work, Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar draw from global examples of indigenous community members and grassroots organizing to establish the importance of cultural and linguistic rights. For example, within their work, they cite Ofelia Zepeda, a Tohono O’odham linguist, who explains “language is the gift from the Creator” and refer to the Resolution No. 970 Protection of First Nations’ Languages, from the Special Chiefs Assembly in Canada, which states, “First Nations languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a people . . . our culture cannot survive without our languages” (Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar 2010, 37). Such examples clarify that indigenous peoples view language survival as directly related to the cultural and spiritual health of our people.

In the Northwest Indian Language Institute case study in this book (see chapter 2), Yakama Reservation community members articulate language loss as one of the highest priority needs within our community. In the words of our elder, Virginia Beavert, “I don’t want the language to die!” Yakama decolonizing praxis teaches us we are at a critical point in time in our people’s history, but our people have the capacity and the determination to resist neocolonial patterns of subjugation. A culturally relevant image that we can return to, then, is the time ball. Collectively, we can begin making a knot in our people’s time ball, to mark this important point in history, when we bravely stand and look at the proud past of our people, and the ways in which we can work together to bring about a healthy, vibrant future for our people. I contend that as we continue to work, and develop our theory and praxis, we will indeed bring about a great healing among our people. In chapter 5, I draw from Yakama decolonizing praxis to articulate a set of recommendations that can serve as a next step toward healing social change.