A Boiling Pot of Animosity or an Alliance of Kindred Spirits? Exploring Connections Between Native Americans and African Americans

Hilary N. Weaver
State University of New York, Buffalo

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw

Part of the Race and Ethnicity Commons, and the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol35/iss4/7
A Boiling Pot of Animosity or an Alliance of Kindred Spirits? Exploring Connections Between Native Americans and African Americans

HILARY N. WEAVER

State University of New York at Buffalo
School of Social Work

The relationship between indigenous people and people of African heritage in the United States is a long and complex one. An examination of historical and contemporary connections between indigenous persons and African Americans not only clarifies complex and frequently overlooked parts of American history but sets the stage for examining future possibilities. It is useful for helping professionals to understand these relationships since this history may serve as the basis for positive connections or animosities between clients and professionals. This article begins with a discussion of selected historical intersections between these populations that highlight the complex and varied nature of contacts between these groups. Examples of contemporary interactions illustrate the ongoing, multidimensional nature of connections between Native Americans and African Americans. Implications for the helping professions are drawn from the material presented.

Key words: African American, Native American, interracial alliances, interracial divisions

To prevent Africans and Native Americans from uniting, Europeans played skillfully on racial differences and ethnic rivalries. They kept the pot of animosity boiling. Whites turned Indians into slavehunters and
slaveowners, and Africans into "Indian fighters." (Katz, 1986, p. 13)

Recently, I was asked by one of my students what Native Americans think about African Americans. As an African American social worker assigned to work in the Native American community, she was warned by her colleagues to expect bias and resentment. Her anxiety was heightened and she prepared for the worst but when she began the work she was warmly received. In fact, she seemed to be more welcome in the Native American community than some of her White colleagues. She raised the question with me, a Native American, and asked for clarification.

The relationship between indigenous people and people of African heritage in the United States is a long and complex one. While a few authors have examined historical connections (see Abel, 1919; Halliburton, 1977; Littlefield, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980; Purdue, 1979) much of this work is dated, and less has been written about contemporary issues. Indeed, articles are more likely to examine relationships between Whites and African Americans or Whites and Native Americans than connections between African Americans and Native Americans. One of the few recent articles that discusses all three populations describes how sanitized images of savage and servile Native Americans and African Americans were presented in a palatable way for White tourists in the 1950s; both populations presented as "marginalized others" in American society (Magelssen, 2002). An examination of historical and contemporary connections between indigenous and African Americans not only clarifies complex and frequently overlooked parts of American history but sets the stage for examining future possibilities.

The emphasis on cultural competence in the helping professions in recent years has led to numerous articles on various populations. These articles usually examine one particular cultural or ethnic group and make recommendations for helping professionals who are usually presumed to be members of the dominant society. Little attention has been paid to the dynamics between populations of color. It is useful for helping professionals to understand some of the historical relationships
Connections Between African Americans and Native Americans

between indigenous and African Americans since this history may serve as the basis for positive connections or animosities between the client and helping professional. This article begins with a discussion of selected historical intersections between these populations. The historical issues discussed—slavery, buffalo soldiers, and educational institutions—are highlighted to illustrate the complex and varied nature of contacts between these groups. Racial and cultural mixing is discussed as both an historical and a contemporary phenomenon. A few illustrations of contemporary interactions between indigenous people and African Americans highlight the ongoing, multidimensional nature of connections between these populations. Implications for the helping professions are drawn from the material presented.

History

Slavery

The record of indigenous people and African slaves is a mixed one. While some Native people gave sanctuary to Africans and encouraged them to run away from White slaveholders, others made a lucrative business of returning runaway slaves or holding Africans in bondage themselves (Littlefield, 1979). Common distrust of White Americans sometimes unified Africans and indigenous people. These alliances were perceived by White slaveholders as a threat to slavery (Calhoun, 1998; Carew, 1992; Katz, 1986). Some White leaders cultivated antagonism between indigenous people and African Americans to inhibit the possibility of combining their power in a unified cause. Whites created suspicion, hatred, and hostility between these two populations through methods such as employing indigenous people to find escaped slaves and using African Americans in military campaigns against Native people (Forbes, 1993; Littlefield, 1979; Purdue, 1979).

When most Americans think of slavery they think of Africans held in bondage by White Americans. Initially the slave population was Native American, for a time it was both Native and African, and as the 1700s progressed, the slave population was increasingly African (Forbes, 1993; Littlefield, 1979; Saunt, 1998). Large numbers of Native American slaves
were part of the history of the early South, especially in the Carolinas. The Native slave trade in the South reached its peak between 1715 and 1717 then declined steadily until it was formally ended after the Revolutionary war (Purdue, 1979). Both Natives and Africans came from societies where slavery was known as a transitory state with possibilities for social mobility. Although Native groups like the Cherokee had some slaves prior to European contact, these were people taken in warfare and this practice bore little resemblance to the slavery introduced by Europeans. Enslaved prisoners of war were sometimes adopted as full participants in Cherokee society (Purdue, 1979).

Early relations between Africans and Native people were often manipulated by Whites. Many African slaves became bilingual in English and indigenous languages and they were used by Whites to influence Native people, particularly in missionary work and the acculturation process (Littlefield, 1980). New England slaves of African heritage often held a negative view of Native Americans and sided with Whites during times of warfare with indigenous peoples (Katz, 1986). In Florida, however, notable alliances were formed between indigenous people and people of African heritage.

Florida became a haven for various splinter groups of indigenous people (later known as Seminoles), then Africans escaping slavery (known as Black Seminoles) (Katz, 1986; Mulroy, 1993). Since escaped African slaves knew the ways of Whites and would fiercely defend their freedom, they proved important allies for the Seminoles. They also brought agricultural skills and were able to translate between Native groups and White settlers (Mulroy, 1993). Although some Seminoles did keep people of African heritage in bondage, this form of slavery varied considerably from that practiced among the White population. Seminole "slaves" were under no supervision, lived apart from their "masters" and only paid a small annual tribute (Mulroy, 1993).

Although Seminoles provided the most well-known haven for escaped slaves, other Native nations played similar roles. The Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois Confederacy) harbored so many fugitives that in 1726 the governor of New York made the chiefs promise to return all escaped slaves in
their villages. The Hurons made a similar promise in 1764 and the Delawares in 1765. Despite these promises, however, none of these Native nations returned any slaves (Katz, 1986).

In the 1700s, the growing institution of slavery with its rigid hierarchical nature was divisive for Native nations of the Southeast (Saunt, 1998). The U.S. encouraged these Native nations to increase their agricultural production as a means of becoming "civilized," thereby indirectly encouraging the growth of slavery (Halliburton, 1977). Most Cherokee were persuaded that voluntarily acculturating and accepting the trappings of European civilization, including African slavery, was in their best interest (Halliburton, 1977). Eventually all of what the Europeans called the "Five Civilized Tribes" (Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw, and Chickasaw) adopted slavery. As mixed-blood Creeks (people of mixed White-Native heritage) came to dominate tribal politics, slavery took hold (Littlefield, 1979; Saunt, 1998). Likewise, the mixed-blood aristocracy became the primary slaveholders among the Chickasaw (Littlefield, 1980) and Cherokee (Halliburton, 1977). Full-blood Cherokees generally did not hold slaves (Littlefield, 1978).

Although the Choctaw and Chickasaw adopted slave codes similar to those in the U.S., testimony of former slaves and outside observers indicated that slavery among these groups was not as harsh and living conditions were not very different between slaves and masters (Littlefield, 1980). Cherokees, generally mixed-bloods, held more slaves than other Native groups in Indian territory and their slavery was the harshest among Native nations. Slavery among the Cherokee was more closely akin to that found in the White South. The institution of slavery continued among the Five Civilized Tribes after they were forcibly relocated from their traditional homelands to Indian Territory in the 1830s (Halliburton, 1977; Littlefield, 1978).

Defining the legal, political, and social status of African Americans in Indian territory after the Civil War was a complex issue (Littlefield, 1978). Because Native nations retained some sovereignty, former slaves of the Five Civilized Tribes were not covered under U.S. laws and therefore could not be emancipated under the 13th amendment. Further, the African Americans' struggle for rights to citizenship and a share in the tribal lands
and assets undermined indigenous sovereignty by appealing to the U.S. for outside intervention. In an attempt to resolve the ambiguous status of African Americans in Indian Territory, the U.S. negotiated the Treaty of 1866. This treaty, signed by the Five Civilized Tribes, forced the Cherokee to incorporate former slaves as full citizens in the Cherokee nation (Kelton, 1999). Chickasaws emancipated their slaves under the Treaty of 1866 but chose not to adopt them into their nation; thus, they had freedom but no rights since they weren’t Chickasaw or U.S. citizens. Choctaws adopted their former slaves (Littlefield, 1980) as did the Creeks (Littlefield, 1979) and Seminoles (Littlefield, 1977). Ironically, while citizenship meant freedom and rights for African Americans it was a threat to sovereignty for Native Americans (Kelton, 1999). When reservation lands were divided and distributed under the allotment policy of the 1880s-1930s, former African American slaves were entitled to land as Native Americans (Littlefield, 1980). These former slaves benefited from the erosion of sovereignty and loss of an indigenous landbase.

Buffalo Soldiers

African Americans who fought as members of the U.S. military have come to be known as buffalo soldiers. They played significant roles in battles with Native Americans as the U.S expanded Westward into indigenous territories. The origin of the term “buffalo soldiers” is often attributed to Native Americans of the Great Plains region who encountered these African American soldiers (Buffalosoldiers.com, 2007). The origin of the term is also linked to African American military involvement in Mexico and Texas (Mulroy, 1993).

In 1850, an alliance of Seminoles, African Americans, and Kickapoos emigrated to Mexico and settled as three separate groups. By 1861, the Seminoles returned to Indian territory but many of the African Americans remained. Some of these African Americans were persuaded to relocate to Texas in 1870-1875 and recruited as scouts for the U.S. military because of their knowledge of Native behavior. In their first major expedition, the scouts led the attack on their former allies, the Kickapoo who had settled in Mexico (Mulroy, 1993).

The scouts’ second major campaign was against the
Cheyenne, Comanche, and Kiowa who left their reservations in 1874 because of grievances over lost land and decimation of the buffalo (Mulroy, 1993). The Seminole Negro Scouts or "buffalo soldiers," as they became known, played a key role in breaking the resistance of Southern Plains Native nations and forcing them onto reservations (Mulroy, 1993).

After 1870, the Seminole Negro Indian Scouts killed, maimed, imprisoned, and destroyed the property of diverse bands of Kickapoos, Apaches, Cheyennes, Kiowas, and Comanches. In so doing, they played a major role in furthering the policy that had brought them back to the United States by driving these bands onto reservations or deep into the Mexican interior and facilitating White expansion into West Texas. By 1881, the scars ran so deep that reconciliation was virtually impossible. (Mulroy, 1993, p. 131)

During the last years of the frontier era, the buffalo soldiers played a pivotal role. The 10th Cavalry was instrumental in the Geronimo campaign of 1885-86 and the 9th Cavalry and the 25th Infantry joined operations against the Lakota in 1890-91 (Stiles, 1998). Although at times Native Americans and African Americans had been allies, there is no evidence that these African American soldiers disagreed with the U.S. government's genocidal policies (Katz, 1986). Perhaps, in part, the willingness of the buffalo soldiers to take on this role in attacking indigenous people can be explained by the fact that few prestigious jobs were available to African Americans after the Civil War, making military life appealing.

Educational Institutions

For many African Americans, education has been seen as a means to achieve parity with White Americans in terms of jobs and economic standing. Although this promise has not been fulfilled, education is often seen as a positive way to strive for social integration. For indigenous people, however, education is sometimes viewed in a negative light as a means of assimilation and cultural loss. In reality, education has the potential for both positive and negative outcomes for both populations.

Although both African Americans and Native Americans
have pursued higher education through mainstream universities as well as through historically Black and Tribal colleges, less is known about joint educational ventures. Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute was founded in Virginia in 1868 in response to the demand for educational opportunities for newly freed African Americans. Shortly thereafter, federal policy toward Native Americans shifted and a new strategy of assimilation through education, known as the boarding school era, was initiated. In 1878, Hampton began to educate Native Americans who constituted a significant part of its population through 1923 (Hultgren & Molin, 1989).

Hampton appears to have been unique in its mandate to serve both African Americans and Native Americans. Educating African and Native Americans in the same school was considered radical, and Hampton received much criticism. Some feared the African Americans would negatively influence the Native Americans and others feared it would be the other way around. Education was provided in separate, parallel programs emphasizing vocational, Christian-based training.

Although both African Americans and Native Americans lived at Hampton, the boarding school experience probably differed for these groups. While many of the African Americans were from the surrounding areas and thus able to maintain ties with their families, most of the indigenous students at Hampton were from hundreds or sometimes more than a thousand miles away. Native students were deliberately educated far away from their families and communities as a way of lessening cultural ties and encouraging assimilation.

Native boarding schools are known for their strict physical discipline and intolerance of indigenous languages and religions. Hampton, the prototype for Native boarding schools, was not quite as harsh as its successors in this respect and encouraged both African and Native students to maintain some cultural pride while adopting dominant society values. Although this is the case, Hampton still followed the motto of all Native education at the time: "Kill the Indian and save the man" (Hultgren & Molin, 1989).
Racial and Cultural Mixing

Racial mixing has existed throughout the Americas for hundreds of years, resulting in a complex mixture of indigenous and African peoples. The oversimplified classification of mestizo, or mixed-blood, as representing a mixture of White and Native has obscured relationships between indigenous and African groups (Calhoun, 1998).

The ancestry of modern-day Americans, whether of "black" or "Indian" appearance, is often (or usually) quite complex indeed. It is sad that many such persons have been forced by racism into arbitrary categories which tend to render their ethnic heritage simple rather than complex. It is now one of the principle tasks of scholarship to replace the shallow one-dimensional images of non-whites with more accurate multi-dimensional portraits. (Forbes, 1993, p. 271)

The majority of enslaved Africans were men. This population imbalance led some African men to marry or have sexual relationships with indigenous women. An additional motive for African Americans to mix with Natives was that children born to Native women were generally considered tribal members and therefore free from slavery (Forbes, 1993). Whites (especially slave owners) responded with fear to growing mixed-race Native nations such as the Melungeons in Tennessee and North Carolina, Narragansetts in the Northeast, Montauks in New York, and the Mashpee in Massachusetts (Katz, 1986).

The challenge of defining people of African heritage associated with the Seminoles (Black Seminoles) has led historians to question whether they were African Americans or Native Americans with African heritage. The Black Seminoles often lived in their own communities where they maintained features of West and Central African cultures (Mulroy, 1993). Some intermarriage took place between Africans and Seminoles, although given the matrilineal nature of Seminole culture, the offspring of Native men who married African American women remained outside Seminole society (Mulroy, 1993).

A census taken at the time of Creek removal from their traditional homeland to Indian Territory was complicated by racial mixing. Census takers were faced with questions such
as how to count a family that consisted of a Native man living with an African American wife who was his or someone else's slave. Additionally, was a half-Native, half-African American free person who kept a separate household and was married to an African American slave entitled to a reservation? Many African Americans had taken on Creek culture although they were not biologically Native American. Should they be considered Native and therefore entitled to land under federal treaties (Littlefield, 1979)? Racial and cultural mixing continues to raise questions in contemporary times. In addition to legal questions, racial mixing poses questions of cultural identity. Brooks (1998) discusses his interview with a woman in her 90s whose mother was Ute and father was an African American former slave. Although she has Navajo and Latino heritage, these roots receive little attention. Being African American and Ute are the primary factors in her identity and those of her descendants.

The Cherokee Nation continues to wrestle with questions of tribal membership for the descendents of enslaved Africans. Those of mixed African and Cherokee heritage are entitled to full citizenship in the Cherokee Nation. Based on an 1866 treaty between the Cherokee and the U.S. government which called for emancipated slaves to have the rights of Native Cherokee, some descendents of slaves without Native heritage have sued the Cherokee Nation for membership. Since the Cherokee Constitution was not clear on the rights of emancipated slaves and their descendents, a 2006 Tribal Supreme Court ruling effectively granted Cherokee citizenship to approximately 2,800 non-Native Americans. In the wake of this ruling the Cherokee government sought input from all its citizens (including the newly incorporated descendents of slaves), who by a vote of 77% disagreed with the court ruling and amended the Constitution to affirm that citizenship in the Cherokee nation requires descent from a Cherokee ancestor. Some outside observers are painting this as a racial issue. At this time the Cherokee Nation is faced with legislation aimed at cutting off federal funding unless they are willing to accept non-Cherokee descendents as citizens (Williams, 2007).

The former Miss Navajo Nation (1998), Radmilla Cody is
also a person of mixed African American and Native American heritage. She earned her title for her skill in making fry bread, butchering sheep, and knowledge of traditional Navajo stories. While some Navajos considered her a controversial representative because of her phenotypically African features, her strong grounding in Navajo culture led to her selection (Brooks, 1998). Since she completed her reign as Miss Navajo Nation she has gone on to have a successful singing career in Native American music.

Distorting racial history denies people their heritage and hurts children of color (Katz, 1986). Not only are there individuals of mixed heritage, some Native nations have significant African heritage. Only recently have institutions like the Census Bureau allowed people to identify with more than one ethnic or cultural group. Many organizations still use forms that allow people to “check one box only” when answering questions about ethnicity.

While many people are of mixed African American and Native American heritage, it is inappropriate to make assumptions about their cultural identity. Some identify with only one part of their heritage while others identify with two or more aspects. For example, in a 1943 interview, Rosa Fay, a Black Seminole living in Texas, clearly states that while she and her family have some indigenous heritage, they are African American, not Native (Katz, 1986).

Many people believe that people of mixed heritage are caught between two worlds and at home in neither. One of the most prominent arguments against “mixed-marriage” is that the children will suffer from identity crises. This belief is not always empirically supported. Maria Root has done groundbreaking work on people of mixed heritage (see for example Root, 1992; 1996). Researchers at the Tri-Ethnic Center for Prevention Research have developed an orthogonal model of cultural identification that documents it is not only possible for an individual to identify strongly with more than one culture but multiple identification can be positive (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991). This model was applied with Native youth in the Northeast and it was found some children identified with both Native and African American cultures (Weaver, 1996).
The cultural identity of mixed race people, a common subject in Native American literature and a growing topic in human services literature, has often been treated as an individual issue. While the mixed heritage discussed most commonly is White and Native, Michael Dorris' book, *A Yellow Raft on Blue Water* (1987), explores the experiences of a woman whose mother is Native American and father is African American. This novel, along with the work of non-fiction writers like Maria Root, provides important insight, yet does not address the issues of mixed race communities and nations like the Narragansettes, Pequotes, and Shinnecocks. While these communities of mixed-race Native Americans, often termed tri-racial isolates by anthropologists, have been acknowledged, there is little contemporary exploration of issues of mixed heritage on a macro or community level. The contemporary existence of racially and culturally mixed Native nations is a topic that deserves more attention from researchers.

**Contemporary Issues**

Although there have been historical alliances and mixing between Native Americans and African Americans, no one from these groups is immune to racist attitudes. While it would seem logical that members of one oppressed group might develop a particular empathy for others who are oppressed, that is not necessarily the case. Even when members of these groups live in close proximity, they may have little understanding of each other and hold firmly to stereotypes. All too often racism becomes both internalized and institutionalized.

A few examples of contemporary interactions between Native Americans and African Americans are shared to illustrate different perspectives. "In Whose Honor" (1996), a documentary by Jay Rosenstein, depicts Charlene Teters, a Spokane woman at the University of Illinois who confronts the stereotypical images of Native Americans used as mascots. One poignant segment shows her being berated by an African American man with paint on his face and a feathered "warbonnet" who wanted her to stop her peaceful protest of a sporting event. He seemed unable to empathize with the pain she felt as a Native woman and mother trying to instill cultural pride and
Connections Between African Americans and Native Americans

self-esteem in her young children who were faced with such racist and degrading imagery. Likewise, Native Americans may hold stereotypes and prejudices about African Americans. I was saddened to hear a respected Native elder say she knew some of her grandchildren had African heritage but she didn’t ever want to know about them or see them.

On the other hand, I am also familiar with contemporary interactions between Native Americans and African Americans that embody empathy and solidarity. Questions of compensatory justice and reparations have been raised for the wrongs done to both groups over time (Hill, 2002). An African American colleague with strong convictions about supporting Native people uses advocacy skills to support his beliefs with actions. He is fond of pointing out that there are deeds that can no longer be rectified and it is important to lend support to Native causes whenever possible. When a controversy between New York state and the Seneca Nation of Indians over taxation came to a head in 1997, members of the Nation of Islam stood in solidarity with Native people at public demonstrations. This visible sign of solidarity was very moving, particularly at a time when few other groups openly supported the Native American cause.

It is troubling that much of the literature, including that cited at the beginning of this article, seems to treat Native Americans and African Americans as powerless groups who are merely pawns of the dominant White society. Was it really the Whites who “turned Indians into slavehunters and slave-owners, and Africans into ‘Indian fighters’” (Katz, 1986, p. 13)? Did these groups have no choice but to passively accept these roles? In contemporary times are we bound to accept the stereotypes and biases that abound in U.S. society? Much of the limited literature on African American-Native American relations has been written through the cultural lens of the dominant society, which has led to a limited perspective. While indeed, there may be instances where options for both these populations were limited by White interventions, assuming they were both powerless pawns seems overly simplistic. The example of the Seminole alliance with African Americans shows that we can indeed identify common interests and act upon them, but it is troubling to see that such alliances have broken down,
often with dominant society intervention, as noted in the historical section.

Implications for the Helping Professions

In order to effectively work with a client, it is important to understand his or her cultural identity. Assessing cultural identity should be included as a standard part of the helping relationship. Everyone experiences cultural identity differently. For some people this is an integral part of who they are, while for others it may not be as meaningful as factors such as class, gender, or sexual orientation. Helping professionals must also be aware that clients may identify with more than one culture (Oetting & Beauvais, 1991; Root, 1992; 1996; Weaver, 1996). Given the historical interactions between Native and African American groups, identifying with more than one culture may not be unusual.

While there are many calls in the human service literature to recruit more people of color to the helping professions as one way of increasing the cultural competence of the profession as a whole (Allison, Echemendia, Crawford & Robinson, 1992; Bernal & Castro, 1994; Dana, 1992), it is presumptuous to assume that all professionals of color are culturally competent. Indeed, professional socialization may lead to cultural loss and decrease the sensitivity that professionals of color have in their own communities (Ryan, 1992; Voss, Douville, Little Soldier, & Twiss, 1999; Weaver, 2000). In some cases it may be difficult for a Native American helping professional to understand an African American client and vice versa because of learned racism and colonized attitudes.

It is also important to recognize there are differences within, as well as between groups. The term Native American refers to over 500 different indigenous groups that never shared a common language, religion, or social structure. These distinctions are often still clear and many indigenous people identify primarily with their Native nation (e.g., Lakota, Seneca, Yurok) rather than an overarching label such as Native American. While most African Americans do not know their tribal origin, they are still a diverse people and within group differences should not be ignored.
An important distinction exists between African Americans and Native Americans when it comes to provision of social services. As indigenous people, Native Americans have a legal status that makes them distinct from all other groups in the United States (Weaver, 1998). While both African American and Native groups have expressed serious concerns about the number of their children that become lost in the foster care system or lose touch with their heritage through cross-racial adoptions, only Native Americans have been able to gain specific legal protections in this area under the Indian Child Welfare Act (Weaver, 1998; Weaver & White, 1999). Because of the special relationship between the federal government and indigenous people, Native clients have access to a variety of special federal programs not available to other people. Likewise, as members of Native nations, indigenous people may have access to social and health programs provided by those nations.

In the last few years several scholars have proposed Afrocentric models for the helping professions (e.g., Randolph & Banks, 1993; Schiele, 1996). While there is some talk among Native professionals about indigenous models (e.g., Hart, 2006; Voss, Douville, Little Soldier, & Twiss, 1999), such models have not been as fully explicated in the human services literature. It is interesting to note that a number of the concepts in Schiele’s model (e.g., human identity is collective, spiritual and non-material components of human beings are important and valid, and an affective approach to knowledge) may well fit for Native Americans.

Conclusion

This article has discussed various intersections between Native Americans and African Americans, historically and in contemporary times, yet there is no clear answer to the question raised by my student about the relationship between these groups. There are instances where we share a history of being oppressed by others and instances where we have oppressed each other. The relationship between Native and African Americans is far from simple. While many aspects of this relationship have been studied, little of this history is common
knowledge and it is rarely discussed as a contemporary issue.

At least as important as "what has the relationship been?" is the question "what can it be?" The possibility of alliances noted throughout American history still exists, but has rarely been realized to its fullest potential. We share common struggles, including violence in our communities, substance abuse, and greater morbidity and mortality from many diseases than is found in the general population. Both groups have been the subject of medical exploitation, including the notable examples of the Tuskegee syphilis experiment on African American men and the massive sterilization of Native American women by the federal agency, Indian Health Service. We also share common strengths, including the value placed on the group as opposed to the individual, survival of hundreds of years of colonization and oppression, and a strong value of spirituality.

While our populations and cultures are not the same, we do have similarities that can be building blocks for alliances. Through coalitions we can advocate for funding to be allocated to address issues in our communities and for more attention in professional training programs to be focused on the needs of our populations. African Americans and Native Americans are not preordained to a boiling pot of animosity, with or without outside intervention. It is up to us to decide what roles we will play in the future.

References


Homeless clients with severe mental illness can offer considerable insight about their residential care, but there are significant methodological challenges in eliciting their service evaluations: maximizing participation, facilitating self-expression, and preserving clients’ natural meanings. This study addresses those challenges and presents qualitative data residential care staff obtained from 210 clients. While clients prioritized meeting their subsistence needs, they emphasized attaining inner well-being and mutually respectful relationships, and that group services needed to reduce confrontational interactions in order to be helpful. For after-care services, clients sought sustained relationships with staff grounded in client initiative, combining respect for their autonomy with psychosocial support.

Key words: Homeless persons, consumer evaluation, residential care for severely mentally ill clients

Introduction

On a cold winter night in a large Midwestern city, the