

## Reflections on the Meaning of "Discovery" and Colonization: Testimonials from *Tribal Legacy*

### 1) Calvin Pekas (Nakota & Dakota)

"We Have Survived"

TOMV 2004

<https://www.lc-triballegacy.org/video.php?vid=1208&query=genocide>

"Ignorance – ignorance of a culture that's beautiful, ignorance of a culture that was here thousands of years before this man landed and said, 'Hey, I just 'discovered' this country' – while there's people looking at him, coming and...coming to the shore... they're looking at him and sitting there looking at him, and he sees all these natives looking at him. But when he gets on there, he goes, 'I 'discovered' this country! I... hey, this is England's, this is France's, this is Spain, this is the... now this belongs to us.' And all these natives are sitting there looking at him, you know. What's he talking about, you know? What's he doing, you know? What's that he got in the hand? Boom! Oh, jeez, we jumped back, 'What's that, a fire stick, right?'"

But we...[Speaker laughs] anyway, they 'discovered' this country. But anyway, we retained our culture. We must be very, very, very fortunate because – I've had some elders tell me, and I've heard this spoken many times – many times, many times, our people should have been annihilated, or we should have been done away with long time ago. Our culture, and, uh, our prayers, our sacred songs of a hundred... hundreds and hundreds years old, they should have all been dead and buried because, I tell you what, this government tried to do it to us. And, uh, they didn't accomplish it. So that must mean that it's meant to be. It must be meant...meant to be that we are still here, and we're getting stronger. The circles are getting bigger."

### 2) Elizabeth Cook Lynn (Nakota & Dakota)

"What Are We Going to Tell Future Generations?"

TOMV 2004

<https://www.lc-triballegacy.org/video.php?vid=1180&query=genocide>

"What are we going to tell the future generations about this story? Are we going to continue in this mode of, uh, historical, uh, blindness? Or are we going to finally say something real about this history? Uh, I don't know what we're going to do. But the historical trauma that has been confronted by Indians is real – it's a real thing. It can't be dismissed. It can't just be shoved under the table.

Uh, one of the things I think we have to do is we have to, uh, argue for tribal nationalization. And we are doing that, we are attempting that. We've made a lot of progress. We have reservation-based community colleges that are doing good work. We have Indian Studies at every state university. We have tribal leaders who know, uh, what the score is. And, so

instead of looking at all of this as a period of inevitable romance and mutual discovery, we've got to say something real about what's happening to the consciousness in America.

Uh, we...we have been the victims of criminal, colonial behavior – and Lewis and Clark started it all. White supremacy is at the heart of it. Religiosity is at the heart of it. And we must begin to translate colonization as a crime. We must begin to renew our vocabulary. Let's not talk anymore about 'discovery.' I'm tired of 'discovery.' And, uh, we have to – in the new history that we're trying to, uh, promote – uh, have some kind of, uh, critical analysis, uh, and expunge a whole bunch of stuff from this history.

What is... what was the intent of this journey of Lewis and Clark? A hundred years later, we know what the intent of this journey was. It was not a journey of benign 'discoveries.' It was not to write down all sorts of plants and trees, and the names of species – it was not. It was an illegal intrusion into sovereign Indian nation territories, sponsored by the U.S. government – not a whole lot different from what is going on today in the world. And its result was the death to thousands and thousands of Indians, degradation of the environment, genocide, and the theft of land.

There is nothing more fascinating, I think, than trying to deliberate about what it is that you and I are going to do – what is it that Indian scholars and Indian people are going to do in connection with what non-Indian scholars and non-Indian people are going to do. I thank you very much for your attention, and I wish that you would have some, uh, discussion."

### **3) Gerard Baker (Mandan & Hidatsa)**

Positive Legacy of Lewis and Clark

TOMV 2005

<https://www.lc-triballegacy.org/video.php?vid=1046&query=Discovery>

"The positive enough stuff about this, is that in this legacy about Lewis and Clark, is that we are now proud, extremely. . . we always have been, but we never let it out vocally, I don't think – because we couldn't, because we got condemned for being Indian in a lot of cases. We had to fight our way through schools on many occasions because we were Indian. We had to fight our way in the streets because we're Indian. The first time I realized I was, was in a little town around here. And I got worked over when I was about five years of age – by a white grandpa. I didn't know I was Indian. I used to be called...I used to call boys . . . people from around here, outside the reservation, but that's the first time I was ever called names, first time I was ever beat up. My dad was getting a haircut. I never told him. I told him I fell down.

See, you had realizations of that, and...and you could go two ways with that. You can start hating with that. Or as my grandpa, my clan grandfathers and my dad always said, my mom always said, "You shouldn't hate. You should use it to learn to educate them." Yes, get mad, but turn it into a positive sense, and start educating people as to who we are, who we were, and who we are today, and who we will be in the future. To me, that's the leg[acy]...that's the American Indian legacy.

And so the positive things have come out now. For instance, in the 60s when the AIM movement came in, AIM movement was needed. I've been going through that most of my early years, back and forth – AIM is bad, AIM is good, AIM is bad, AIM is good. If you look at it, AIM was needed. It was part of the power...power movements in the 60s, 70s, but it had to happen so people could keep track of us and be aware of us – not keep track, the government did that – keep track of us. And so it had to happen. When kids ask me today, when I talk in front of schools today about Lewis and Clark, and about the Indian legacies, they always ask me, "Do you still believe in AIM? 'Cause I still believe in AIM." My answer is, "Absolutely, yes – but now in a different format."

The American Indian Movement, I really believe, should be a movement that we had before the coming of the white man – and that was a movement of existing with the universe, existing with ourselves, existing among ourselves, with that respect in mind, with that knowledge in mind, with survival in mind. I tell young kids today on reservations, "Hell, yeah, you should be mad. And stay mad. But be positive. You don't have to go fight to be Indian. You don't have to drink 'cause you're Indian, and all that kind of stuff. You survive, and you go to school, and you live in two worlds, and you learn your culture – that is being Indian."

Especially the Three Tribes here, look at me, look how many white folks we have along this river, folks, all the way from the Verendryes[?]. And I'm willing to bet there's people before the Verendryes[?] that came in here. We didn't kick 'em out. No, they got something we want. Come on in. Come on in. I'll be your new red child, huh? And so we had all that.

Well, the 60s started bringing out the awareness. And after the 60s, it was incredible. We had people coming out of the woodwork, man. Hey, most of them were Cherokee, but they were still coming out of the woodwork [audience laughter]. Most of them had grandpas and grandmas, and they called them Cherokee princesses and all that kind of stuff. It was amazing.

And there's also a danger in that, because you also have a group that...that I personally – and it's just me alone, I don't represent Park Service in this statement – but we have a lot of wannabees out there, and they're very dangerous. We have a lot of people that hang all kind of stuff on them and say, "I'm Indian. What can I do?" And he sees you. "Well, give me a hundred bucks." And they walk away. I don't say a hundred bucks, usually a thousand [audience laughs]. But that's a danger, folks, because it's not cool to be Indian. And is that a legacy? Yes, that's a legacy. I can remember going to Mandaree school when I was a little guy. Everybody else in America played cowboys and Indians. Us guys just played Indians, we could never find cowboys. [audience laughs] Never. And so the positive legacies are this, to me. The positive legacies is that we now are renewing ourselves with the understanding of the past."