

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Kinship and Identity: Mixed Bloods in Urban Indian Communities

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0jp1k0t3>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 23(2)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Krouse, Susan Applegate

**Publication Date**

1999-03-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

# Kinship and Identity: Mixed Bloods in Urban Indian Communities

**SUSAN APPLGATE KROUSE**

---

---

## INTRODUCTION

American Indians have become an increasingly urban population in the twentieth century, moving away from their rural home communities and reservations in search of jobs or schooling. This movement to cities has resulted in higher rates of intermarriage with non-Indians for urban Indians than for rural Indians and consequently higher numbers of mixed bloods in urban areas than on reservations.<sup>1</sup> Today, many of those urban mixed bloods are interested in claiming their Indian identity and learning more about their culture, but they often lack both physical characteristics and cultural knowledge that would allow them readily to assert their Indianness. Consequently, they turn to kinship—an important component of American Indian communities, whether urban, rural, or reservation<sup>2</sup>—to provide an entry into the urban Indian community. By aligning themselves with a larger structure of family and relations, mixed bloods fit into an existing framework and community. This paper examines the effectiveness and the limitations of kinship-based identity for mixed bloods in urban Indian communities.

The population under study here is mixed bloods who, because of their parents' or grandparents' move to the city and subsequent marriage to non-Indians, have lost ties to their tribal communities. They may be a single generation removed from their tribes or many generations, but they are defined for purposes of this study as a population with mixed ancestry, urban for one or more generations, without clear ties to a reservation or tribal community. This study examines those people who are hoping to establish or reestablish ties to their Indian identity, and one strategy for doing so—through kinship—and excludes mixed bloods who have maintained community ties as well as full bloods who have lost ties to their tribal communities through relocation or adoption. This paper is concerned specifically with the problems of mixed

---

Susan Applegate Krouse (Oklahoma Cherokee) is assistant professor of anthropology at Michigan State University and assistant curator at the Michigan State University Museum. Her current research focuses on urban American Indian communities in the United States.

bloods in urban areas, whose biological and cultural heritage is mixed, but who are choosing to identify with their Indian heritage.

Identity, as I use it in this study, refers both to who you are as an individual and the community to which you belong. Being able to call yourself Indian and to participate in the activities of an Indian community are the goals of the mixed bloods in this study. Eugene A. Wiggins, a mixed-blood member of the Cowlitz tribe, writes that his "quest for self-identification" as an Indian involved "a changed personal identity with the interweaving of different cultural elements . . . evidenced by newly formulated personal relationships, career pursuits, tribal and intertribal involvement, acquisition of cultural items, study and research, ceremony participation, speaking engagements, and volunteer efforts."<sup>3</sup> Not every mixed blood will pursue this level of interaction, but both individual recognition and community participation constitute identity.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I draw on different sources. One is my own fieldwork in urban Indian communities during the past decade, including Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1986–1990); Flint, Michigan (1990–1991); and Rochester, New York (1991–1997). These cities have been my home as well as the loci of my research on urban Indian issues. I have utilized both formal and informal interviews with urban mixed bloods, along with participant observation in activities in urban Indian communities. I am a mixed-blood Cherokee myself, and include my own experience and my voice as part of my research. A second source is the research of anthropologists in urban Indian communities. The work of Joan Weibel-Orlando in Los Angeles and Jennie R. Joe and Dorothy Lonewolf Miller in Tucson, for example, provide comparative information from other cities.<sup>5</sup> A third source is the increasing number of publications by mixed bloods about their own lives and families, including autobiography, memoir, poetry, and autobiographical fiction. Titles of some of their recent works indicate the prominence of kinship-based identity for these mixed-blood writers. *All My Sins Are Relatives* by W.S. Penn (Nez Perce-Osage) traces three generations of his family's urban, mixed-blood life, while *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* by Janet Campbell Hale (Coeur d'Alene-Kootenai) examines the impact that intermarriage has had on her family. In *Completing the Circle*, Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve (Lakota) refers to the circle of her family and its history.<sup>6</sup> The variety of sources underscores the importance of kinship in establishing one's identity.

### THE CONCEPT OF MIXED BLOOD

The label *mixed blood* is most often applied to individuals whose ancestry includes both American Indians and European Americans, although it sometimes includes mixtures of African American, Asian American, or Hispanic American and Indian forebears. The idea of mixed blood came to the Americas with Europeans and to a large degree has been imposed on Native peoples by Europeans.<sup>7</sup> Prior to the Columbian invasion five hundred years ago, of course, the only differences among peoples in the Americas would have been between different cultural or language groups, not between Natives

and newcomers. Europeans chose to ignore many of those cultural differences, lumping Indians into a single category of "other," in opposition to themselves.<sup>8</sup> As Europeans and Indians began to produce mixed-blood offspring, the notion of degree of blood or blood quantum was imposed on Indians by Europeans and later by Americans wishing to define and thereby control a population.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, mixed bloods have been viewed by European Americans as being more receptive to the norms and values of white society. Early American political leaders, including Thomas Jefferson, urged intermixing of Indian and white as one way of "civilizing" the Indians.<sup>10</sup> Nineteenth-century ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan felt that through miscegenation, Indians would blend into the growing white population, with no ill effect on whites.<sup>11</sup> When Indian peoples persisted as populations and cultures, Americans chose to regard mixed bloods as different from full bloods, more progressive and ultimately more capable of being civilized. Blood quantum requirements also became a way for the United States government to limit the number of individuals to whom it owed treaty obligations.<sup>12</sup>

Defining who is and who is not American Indian is problematic and has become more so as intermarriage and urbanization have fragmented traditional communities. Tribal governments, federal agencies, and educational institutions all have their own criteria for membership in this population.<sup>13</sup> Defining peoples of mixed heritage becomes even more problematic, particularly when it involves the notion of "race."<sup>14</sup> Today, the term *mixed blood* is used by both Indians and non-Indians, referring to people whose physical appearance and cultural traditions place them between the two societies, part of each and of neither.<sup>15</sup> *Full blood*, by contrast, refers to people whose biological and cultural heritage is strongly rooted in American Indian communities.

### MIXED BLOODS IN HISTORY

Traditionally, the idea of mixed bloods was foreign to most Indian peoples. Individuals were either part of a group or not, and a variety of cultural practices served to incorporate people into community and kinship networks. Native peoples created kinship ties, both real and fictive, by intermarrying and adopting.<sup>16</sup> Intermarriage across group lines strengthened bonds between communities and lessened the possibilities of hostilities between them. Adoption was common, even between warring groups. Among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) up until the nineteenth century, individuals captured in wars might be put to death, but more often were made a part of the capturing group through adoption, replacing someone lost through earlier warfare.<sup>17</sup> Mary Jemison, for example, was born to European American parents about 1742, then captured by Shawnees when she was a child, and ultimately given to some Senecas in 1758. She became a member of the Seneca nation, marrying a prominent warrior and bearing several children by him.<sup>18</sup> Some Seneca people today proudly claim her as an ancestor, not as a white woman, but as an important Seneca person in her own right.<sup>19</sup>

Other well-known Indian leaders in historic and contemporary times

have been the products of unions between American Indians and European Americans. Sequoyah, the son of a Cherokee mother and a Scots-Irish trader father, was lauded for his creation of a written language for the Cherokees in the 1820s.<sup>20</sup> Joseph LaFlesche, son of a French trader and an Omaha woman, chose to reside with his mother's people, becoming principal chief of the Omahas in the mid 1800s.<sup>21</sup> Quanah Parker was born in 1845, to a Comanche father and a white captive mother, Cynthia Ann Parker. He was a warrior as a young man, then settled on the reservation with the Comanches, ultimately becoming their principal chief.<sup>22</sup> Wilma Mankiller, the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma until 1995, is the daughter of an Irish American mother and a Cherokee father.<sup>23</sup> All of these individuals were and are vital parts of their Indian communities, not peripheral to them. Despite their mixed heritage, and the possibility of moving into the white world, these mixed bloods chose to cast their lots with their Indian relatives.

As European Americans became more and more dominant, they exploited mixed bloods for their own purposes, as interpreters and go-betweens. European Americans had different expectations for mixed bloods, urging them to go to white schools, work for white employers, and succeed in the white man's world. As the United States pushed for greater assimilation of Indians into white society, mixed bloods were expected to lead the way.<sup>24</sup>

Degree of blood, however, did not always determine political or cultural affiliation. Among the Cherokees during the removal crisis of the 1830s, mixed bloods and full bloods could be found on both sides of the controversy. Principal Chief John Ross, only one-eighth Cherokee, led the resistance to removal. The full blood Major Ridge signed the treaty that cost the Cherokee their traditional homelands and led to their removal to Indian Territory.<sup>25</sup>

### URBANIZATION AND MIXED BLOODS

The loss of tribal lands was one of several factors that began the process of urbanization for Indian people. Prior to the last half of the twentieth century, Indian people lived primarily on their homelands, in their original territories. As the United States extended its borders and its settlements in the 1800s, tribes lost hundreds of millions of acres of land. Entire Indian nations were uprooted and removed to different areas. The U.S. government established reservations, which defined and reduced tribal territories. Between 1887 and 1934, individual allotment of Indian lands exacerbated the loss of tribal land holdings, with some additional 60 million acres passing out of Indian control during this period.<sup>26</sup> With no land to call their own, some Indian people chose to try their luck in cities.

Other events also served to move Indians off their reservations. Federal boarding schools, beginning with the establishment of Carlisle Indian School in 1869, exposed Indians to places and ways of life outside their own communities. Some students found themselves alienated from their people and did not return home after graduation.<sup>27</sup> Military service also hastened the reservation exodus. Some 10,000 American Indian men served in World War I, with

some 25,000 serving in World War II.<sup>28</sup> In both cases, service provided Indian men with a look at the white world in the United States and abroad, and some chose to remain in that world. They found jobs and mates in towns and cities, and reservation ties began to unravel.

Urbanization was a slow movement for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Federal Indian policy in the 1950s accelerated the pace at which Indian people were leaving the reservations. The federal government initiated programs aimed specifically at breaking up tribal communities. The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Direct Relocation Program targeted individual Indians and families and moved them from reservations to selected cities, including Los Angeles, San Francisco, Denver, Chicago, and Cleveland.<sup>29</sup> The program provided employment training and assistance in finding housing. For some Indian people, it was a stepping stone to more education and better jobs. For others, it was simply a move from reservation poverty to urban poverty, with the additional loss of a traditional community and kinship network.<sup>30</sup>

An estimated 12,625 individuals participated in the official relocation program,<sup>31</sup> but its effects were more widespread. As other Indians heard about success stories in the city, or rumors of success, they too headed to urban areas. Urban Indian communities increased not only in the relocation cities, but also in other urban centers such as Milwaukee, Detroit, Buffalo, and New York City.

Relocation was discontinued as an official federal policy by the early 1970s, but its effects have continued to the present. Once settled in cities, Indian people began establishing communities with cultural centers and social service agencies. For some Indians, tribal ties remain paramount. For others, the urban pan-Indian community becomes their social network. For still others, there are ties to both reservation and city. In any case, Indians are now a permanent part of the urban landscape.<sup>32</sup>

By 1990, according to the federal census, more than half (54 percent) of the total American Indian population in the United States lived in urban areas. This represents a rapid acceleration in urbanization during this century. In 1900, less than 1 percent of Indians lived in urban areas; by 1950 that number had increased to 13.4 percent, by 1960 to 27.9 percent, by 1970 to 44.5 percent, and by 1980 to 49 percent.<sup>33</sup> And as Indian people moved away from traditional communities on reservation homelands, interaction with non-Indians increased; as did the number of mixed bloods.

Historically, mixed bloods were the exception in Indian nations. Until this century, most American Indians did marry within their own communities or nearby communities, and most remained close to those communities throughout their lives.<sup>34</sup> Demographer Russell Thornton noted several pertinent statistics in his population history of American Indians. As recently as 1970, 65 percent of American Indian men were married to Indian women, while 62 percent of Indian women were married to Indian men. Those figures dropped sharply by 1980, with less than 50 percent of all Indian people married to other Indians, according to the U.S. federal census. The 1980 census also reported that only 87 percent of Indians had one-half or more Indian ancestry.<sup>35</sup> A more recent study of 1990 census data reports an even higher

rate of intermarriage, 59 percent nationally.<sup>36</sup> Clearly, mixed bloods are becoming the norm, at least statistically.

### PHYSICAL AND CULTURAL ASPECTS OF MIXED-BLOOD IDENTITY

While degree of blood has not always determined membership in Indian communities, it does constitute a thorny issue for both Indians and non-Indians today.<sup>37</sup> Blood quantum, based on biological descent, is often the basis for enrollment in federally recognized Indian nations, as well as for certain entitlement programs, such as college scholarships.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, proof of "Indian blood" is required, in the form of an enrollment card or Certificate of Indian Blood.<sup>39</sup> Even with this blood relationship established, mixed bloods must still confront two aspects of their heritage: physical characteristics and cultural competence.

In American society, physical traits are assigned a high degree of meaning, with many people assuming that they can identify individuals and place them in racial categories based on physical characteristics.<sup>40</sup> For Indians, those presumed physical markers include red-brown skin, long, straight black hair, and dark brown eyes. In reality, Indian people exhibit the physical variation typical of any population, with skin colors ranging from dark to light, hair from black to blonde and straight to kinky, and eyes from brown to blue. Mixed bloods, however, hear all too often, "you don't look like an Indian." A Ph.D. candidate in anthropology, Mariella Squire-Hakey discussed her reception as a mixed blood in academia:

The paradox is that, while I may be Indian, White anthropologists don't think I look Indian enough.... In the more urban but still stereotype-driven academic world, I cannot be Indian because of my coloring. I get comments such as "You can't be an Indian, you have blue eyes."<sup>41</sup>

The emphasis on physical traits has extended to include Indians themselves, who have accepted and internalized many of the dominant society's stereotypes regarding American Indians.<sup>42</sup> Even children are aware of physical characteristics and the identities associated with them. In an incident I witnessed in 1989 at the Indian Community School, a private Indian elementary school in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, students in the first grade class began taunting each other about skin color. Many of the students, from urban Indian families, were mixed bloods, representing American Indian, European American, African American, and Hispanic American ancestry. Some of the students proclaimed others to be "too dark" to be Indians, while others were "too light." The teacher, wisely, chose to confront the issue, linking their diversity to their commonality, noting that they were all Indian, but all other backgrounds as well.<sup>43</sup>

Knowledge of and proficiency in the culture is also an identifying factor of Indian people. Mastery of tribal language, participation in ritual activities, and adherence to traditional values all strengthen community membership. In urban areas, cultural competence is often more difficult to demonstrate, particularly when cultural practices are linked to the presence of a tribal reser-

vation community. Urban Indians who wish to maintain ties to their nations may find themselves cultural commuters, returning to home communities for ceremonies and socials.

Often raised in urban areas, mixed bloods may find it difficult to establish or continue reservation ties and sometimes become, instead, the leaders in urban pan-Indian centers. Joan Weibel-Orlando discusses one such mixed-blood leader in Los Angeles, Bill Fredricks, who originally planned to use his college education to work on his reservation. He discovered, however, "that the skills he had acquired in the city and his good intentions were not necessarily appreciated or wanted back home."<sup>44</sup> Instead, he put his talents to work in the urban Indian community, eventually becoming the executive director of the Los Angeles City-County Native American Indian Commission. Cultural competence for this mixed blood became linked to his urban community rather than his reservation homeland.

### CHOOSING TO BE INDIAN

Most mixed bloods must make a decision about their identity. If their physical appearance does not readily identify them as such, they may be able to "pass" in the dominant society, which can be useful. One mixed-blood Cherokee explained to me that his own father, also a mixed blood, "wanted us children to grow up as white boys and girls instead of Indians because I could pass off as a white person almost every day in the week. And he said you'll find that that's an advantage. Take advantage of it. So, I have."<sup>45</sup>

Other mixed bloods have chosen to assert their Indian identity, particularly in recent years as the larger society has become more accepting of ethnic diversity.<sup>46</sup> For some, it means a chance to right a historical wrong, to claim an identity that their parents or grandparents were forced to hide. Joseph Bruchac noted:

There are many people who could claim and learn from their Indian ancestry, but because of the fear their parents and grandparents knew, because of past and present prejudice against Indian people, that part of their heritage is clouded or denied.<sup>47</sup>

The choice to be Indian does not come easily and, once made, is open to dispute. Bill Fredricks of Los Angeles recounted his response to full bloods who questioned his identity, "A person, a 'breed,' has the opportunity. You don't. You *have* to be Indian. I'm an Indian by *choice*. It has a lot more meaning."<sup>48</sup> Terry Wilson, a former professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, Berkeley and a mixed-blood Potawatomi, responded similarly to a full blood:

You seem to have a little problem with me being mixed-blood. . . . You're Indian because you have no choice about it and you can't get out of it. I'm an Indian partly by choice. I could "pass" if I want to, but I don't want to. That should tell you something about me.<sup>49</sup>



A mixed-blood businessman in Milwaukee, who became active in the Indian Summer Festival without previously participating in the urban Indian community, was described as an "Indian come lately" by several full bloods. One person noted, "He didn't used to be Indian when I knew him before."<sup>50</sup> Despite these kinds of comments, more and more mixed bloods are choosing to reject the easy path of "passing" and are attempting to move into Indian communities. For them, it represents a chance to be "no longer scattered and separated from others like ourselves."<sup>51</sup>

### KINSHIP AND INDIAN IDENTITY

Mixed bloods in urban settings face a unique set of challenges, lacking perhaps both physically and culturally distinguishing features of American Indians, and going unnoticed by the dominant society and the urban Indian community. They may even encounter disbelief from others about their Native heritage. Mixed bloods on reservations have their own set of problems, particularly because in many areas they are perceived by full bloods to receive the greater share of tribal jobs and opportunities. Their ties to the people and the place are clear, however, if they remain in their tribal communities. Urban mixed bloods must employ some other means to link themselves to the urban Indian community and to Indian people at large.

One strategy for accomplishing this is to foreground kinship ties. Kinship can serve as an identifier, overriding physical and cultural traits or the lack thereof. By highlighting their kinship and linking themselves to a group of relations, mixed bloods fit into a community and strengthen bonds with community members. Kinship ties may be based on descent, marriage, or adoption;<sup>52</sup> the goal is to create and maintain an Indian identity and a place in the community network. The kinship ties to be foregrounded depend, obviously, on the individual and his or her particular situation.

### KINSHIP THROUGH DESCENT

Existing kinship structures provide the most effective means of establishing ties. Identifying oneself as the son, daughter, niece, nephew, or grandchild of a tribal member provides a culturally appropriate way of entering a community and maintaining a place in it. For mixed bloods who move into a new urban area, calling on relatives already in the city is a way to ease the transition, as it would be for any newcomer. In addition, those relatives provide a public affirmation of identity, creating an undeniable link to family, community, and tribe.<sup>53</sup>

Most often, the kinship ties to be foregrounded are direct and easily identified or confirmed. A mother-to-daughter link was clearly established by a Seneca woman who reentered the Rochester, New York, Indian community after some time away. The daughter is a mixed blood whose coloring is very light. She is often introduced as the daughter of her mother, or her tribal affiliation is given, and the fact that she is the daughter of her mother is added. According to Seneca tradition, the child of a Seneca woman is Seneca, but in

this case that daughter's non-Indian physical traits often prompt the additional information about her parentage. In contrast, another mixed-blood Seneca woman in the same community, with dark skin and hair coloring, is never introduced by her mother's name, but simply by her own name, clan, and nation.<sup>54</sup> A similar link occurred across two generations in Milwaukee when the granddaughter of a Creek-Cherokee full blood began participating in the local Indian community. The granddaughter is invariably introduced as his granddaughter to other Indians and at Indian community functions. She is a mixed blood (one-quarter), light-skinned, blonde, and blue-eyed, but her relation to her grandfather provides her with an immediate place in the urban Indian community.<sup>55</sup>

In my own experience as a graduate student, working and socializing among the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, urban Indian community, I was often identified as a mixed-blood Cherokee from outside the area. Then my father came to visit. Physically dark and culturally knowledgeable, he became a passport for my complete acceptance into the community. As one person told my husband, "We knew she was an Indian, but he's *really* an Indian!"<sup>56</sup>

Links do not always need to be from older generation to younger generation. In Milwaukee, a mixed-blood man married a mixed-blood woman from another tribe, and their daughter married a full-blood Lakota, producing grandsons with a more direct tribal affiliation. The man commonly identifies himself as their grandfather, emphasizing their participation in tribal activities, along with his own, as in "We are going to ceremony at the reservation."<sup>57</sup>

In some instances, mixed bloods must reestablish kinship connections which have been severed through time and circumstance. Greg Sarris, a mixed-blood Kashaya Pomo, Coast Miwok, Filipino, Jewish, German, and Irish, describes the process of discovering the names of his Indian relatives as becoming connected, as going home. Adopted by European American parents, Sarris spent much of his childhood with many different families, some of whom were Indians. "Some I later discovered were my own relatives, though growing up I was never sure of my family lines."<sup>58</sup> As an adult, Sarris met his paternal grandfather, who provided him with family names and photographs and a new certainty of identity. "With names, I now knew how I was connected to everyone I knew. I could trace my genealogy."<sup>59</sup> Kinship served to strengthen and deepen ties Sarris had already made, but could now be confirmed.

More formal genealogical research is also sometimes necessary, particularly when mixed bloods find themselves far removed from their original Indian communities. Sister and brother Patricia Penn Hilden and W. S. Penn recounted their efforts to document their mixed-blood Nez Perce heritage, which resulted in the discovery of additional Osage family connections.<sup>60</sup> Their father's marriage to a non-Indian, and their family's moves to Los Angeles and later to Palo Alto, California, had obscured those connections even though they were only two generations distant. This experience is not unique; mixed bloods often turn to genealogical sources to document their heritage. In 1996 I was invited to speak to the Ontario County (New York) Genealogical Society about tracing Indian ancestry and found myself facing a standing-room-only crowd, looking to verify their family stories.

For those individuals whose blood ties are less direct, more tenuous, or as yet undocumented, kinship is still invoked as the linking mechanism. A powwow princess in Rochester, New York, was introduced to the local Indian community with the phrase, "her tribal heritage is through her great-grandfather." The girl was not enrolled, nor was she eligible for enrollment in her great-grandfather's Seneca Nation, as the Seneca are matrilineal. Nonetheless, her relationship to a recognized member of a local tribe provided her with the background to be a part of the urban Indian community and to represent them as the powwow princess.<sup>61</sup> An even more distant relationship—"he is of Mohawk descent"—was used to describe a man who was active in the Rochester Indian community, serving on boards and doing volunteer work. This phrase, while very general, acknowledged his heritage and established a recognizable link to Indian people.<sup>62</sup> These kinds of ties become more difficult to make if the Indian relatives are unknown in the local community, and mixed bloods may turn to other forms of kinship, such as marriage and adoption.

#### KINSHIP THROUGH MARRIAGE

A limited, but nonetheless important phenomenon is occurring in Indian communities as mixed bloods seek marriage partners among those whose ancestry is less mixed. With the current revitalization of tribal communities and identity, pride in American Indian ancestry is growing. Some mixed bloods consciously seek to link themselves and their children more securely to Indian communities through marriage ties.<sup>63</sup> The earlier example of the mixed-blood couple in Milwaukee whose daughter married a full blood is not unusual. One full-blood father explained to me that he thought a mixed-blood young woman might be interested in marrying his son "as a way of increasing the blood line."<sup>64</sup> Marrying Indian becomes a conscious goal, rather than a circumstance of time or place or emotion.

Mixed bloods seeking to marry up in blood quantum may also face rejection. A full-blood Seneca father actively discouraged his son from dating a mixed-blood woman in Rochester. The woman's mother assessed the situation with the comment, "I guess she's not Indian enough for him."<sup>65</sup>

#### KINSHIP THROUGH ADOPTION

Traditionally, Indian people used adoption to expand their kinship networks, and it remains an option today in some communities. This kind of adoption usually consists of an older Indian person adopting another adult, rather than a legal adoption of an infant or young child. Mary Jemison, the white captive, recounted her adoption by a Seneca family in 1758 when she was about fifteen. "I was ever considered and treated by them as a real sister, the same as though I had been born of their mother."<sup>66</sup> In a more recent example, in 1944, anthropologist Nancy Oestreich Lurie was adopted by Mitchell Redcloud, Sr., through which she "acquired a Winnebago name, a clan affiliation, and a host of relatives."<sup>67</sup> Traditional adoption in many communities

still carries its full import, creating a son or daughter with full standing. For some mixed bloods, adoption can be important in bolstering their identity. As one individual commented, "I always knew I was Indian, but I wanted to be sure, so I was adopted by an elder."<sup>68</sup> This created a link to a recognized member of the community, in this case a clan mother of the Seneca Nation, that would not otherwise have existed. The link allowed the adopted son to claim a place in his adoptive mother's immediate family and her clan. Similarly, adoption is sometimes practiced among the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) to bring an individual more closely into the kinship network. Because the Haudenosaunee are traditionally matrilineal, children born to an Haudenosaunee father and a non-Haudenosaunee mother are not usually considered Haudenosaunee. The father's sister may choose to adopt her brother's children, providing them with a more direct link to his matrilineal kin.<sup>69</sup> Traditional adoption is also a limited phenomenon, but one which demonstrates the power of kinship ties, whether by blood or by custom.

#### PROBLEMS WITH KINSHIP-BASED IDENTITY

Kinship-based identity is employed by urban mixed bloods for the simple reason that it works. Grounded in cultural tradition and the centrality of family, kinship provides a link that is at once strong and flexible. Individuals can build on an existing chain of relations, adding links as they are established. Despite its utility, however, kinship-based identity is not without problems and consequences.

Links to kinship can be forged through marriage, but they can also be broken as individuals move out of the chain, particularly as marriages end.<sup>70</sup> Joe and Lonewolf Miller reported an instance of tribal ties being severed through divorce among the Yaqui in Tucson, Arizona. The Yaqui have become Mexicanized in many ways, but are sensitive to accusations that they have done so.

For example, one Yaqui woman, referring to her former daughter-in-law who was now married to a Mexican, observed, that, "She is not Yaqui anymore—she became Mexican."<sup>71</sup>

Family ties, and through them kinship, can be broken and identities can be altered.

To a large degree, kinship-based identity is also situationally limited. Without relatives in a given community, mixed bloods may find themselves without even the possibility of establishing kinship ties. Their very identities as Indian people are open to question, leading to exclusion or even accusations of pretense. Mixed bloods may be dismissed as "wannabes" or resented as usurpers. Their activities and contributions may be ignored, tolerated, or discouraged by members of the urban Indian community. The lack of kinship ties leaves some mixed bloods without a traceable heritage and with a tenuous identity. As a full blood pointed out regarding mixed bloods, "We just have to take their word for it."<sup>72</sup> For some mixed bloods, their word is not

enough. A mixed blood was turned away from Seneca language classes in Rochester, informed that the classes were only for Senecas. This rejection led to his withdrawal from many activities in the local Indian community.<sup>73</sup>

Individuals who change communities for work or school must reestablish themselves each time they move to a new location. This may mean a mixed blood will be reluctant to make a change, fearing the necessity of reestablishing a new identity in the Indian community with each move. A mixed-blood Seneca woman told me, "I could never leave my community; it would be too hard."<sup>74</sup> Ties to home and family notwithstanding, she would face the additional difficulty of being accepted as an Indian person in a different area, as she did when she went to college in a western state. This is a special consideration if the mixed blood's physical appearance does not readily identify him or her as Indian.

Another problem arises as Indian ancestry becomes more acceptable and even desirable in the larger society today. Mixed bloods, who may have spent their entire lives coping with being between two cultures, are suddenly confronted with the "Indian grandmother" phenomenon.<sup>75</sup> People with any ties to American Indian relations feel compelled to announce those ties, however distant or even farfetched they may be. I do not mean to suggest here that all Indian grandmothers are wishful thinking. Rather, I wish to point out the difference between mixed bloods with longstanding, demonstrable ties to Indian communities and opportunistic Indians, seeking to join the parade of cultural diversity. According to the Urban Institute, seven million Americans claim some Indian ancestry (one in every thirty-five), although only two million of those people identified themselves as American Indian for the 1990 federal census.<sup>76</sup> Kinship is the basis for identity, but cultural and social affiliations are necessary as well.<sup>77</sup>

The opposite problem concerning kinship is the "part Indian" phenomenon. Mixed bloods sometimes identify themselves, or are identified by others, as part Indian.<sup>78</sup> While perhaps strictly true, it is difficult to separate out that part or to put it into a whole with whatever other parts there may be. Susan Clements writes of her own mixed-blood heritage:

I always hated people trying to grate me down into fractions. Fractions always made me feel fractious in the math classes I was forced to take in school, and having my entire being viewed as disconnected parts by flesh-and-blood paragons of human insensitivity makes me very irritable, indeed.<sup>79</sup>

A common sentiment heard among mixed bloods follows along the lines of "I don't know how much Indian I am, but I know which part—I have an Indian heart."<sup>80</sup> The problem arises when that part is not sufficient to be Indian in the eyes of others. An example may be seen in public and private school classrooms across the United States. Teachers ask mixed-blood children to have their Indian parent or grandparent come to talk to the class about "what it's like to be an Indian." In effect, this denies the Indian identity of the child, ascribing that heritage only to the ascending generation. Being

part Indian is not enough to qualify for show and tell in many elementary school classrooms. Mixed-blood children become parts rather than wholes, with fragmented selves and community identities.

### KINSHIP AS A STRATEGY

Being a mixed blood is not easy. Mixed bloods face discrimination from the dominant society for their Indian ancestry, derision from the Indian community for their white or black heritage, and disbelief from both about their multiple identities. In urban areas, the conflicting communities may be literally next door to each other, compounding the problem. Without distinct physical or cultural traits, mixed bloods may find themselves between two (or more) worlds, without a claim to either one.

Kinship provides an effective strategy for urban mixed bloods to employ in their search for a community, transcending the boundaries of physical and cultural identities. Because it involves biological descent, or "blood," kinship connects people on a physical level. Kinship can also be extended through cultural practices, such as marriage and adoption, reinforcing existing links or creating new ones. Once ties are established, mixed bloods can move more easily into urban Indian communities, reclaiming a heritage lost through urbanization and intermarriage. Kinship provides a stake in the Indian community, transcending the fragmented stereotype of the part Indian.

### NOTES

1. Russell Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History since 1492* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 236. See also C. Matthew Snipp, "Some observations about racial boundaries and the experiences of American Indians," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20:4 (1997): 667-689.

2. See Bea Medicine, "American Indian Family: Cultural Change and Adaptive Strategies," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 8:4 (1981): 13-23, for a discussion of the diversity of American Indian family structures and the continuing importance of kinship in Indian communities.

3. Eugene A. Wiggins, "Emerging from the Shadows: A Quest for Self-Identification," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21:4 (1997): 167-168.

4. See Devon A. Mihesuah, "American Indian Identities: Issues of Individual Choices and Development," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 22:2 (1998): 193-226, for a model for examining the variety of influences on individual identity.

5. Joan Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.: Maintaining Ethnic Community in Complex Society* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Jennie R. Joe and Dorothy Lonewolf Miller, "Cultural Survival and Contemporary American Indian Women in the City," in *Women of Color in U.S. Society*, ed. Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).

6. W. S. Penn, *All My Sins Are Relatives* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Janet Campbell Hale, *Bloodlines: Odyssey of a Native Daughter* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994); Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, *Completing the Circle* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

7. Terry P. Wilson, "Blood Quantum: Native American Mixed Bloods," in *Racially Mixed People in America*, ed. Maria P. P. Root (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992), 116.
8. Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival*, 186. See also M. Annette Jaimes, "American Racism: The Impact on American-Indian Identity and Survival" in *Race*, ed. Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjek (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 41.
9. Jaimes, "American Racism," 41–44. See also George Pierre Castille, "The Commodification of Indian Identity," *American Anthropologist* 98:4 (1996): 744.
10. Bernard Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction: Jeffersonian Philanthropy and the American Indian* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1973), 174–80.
11. Robert E. Bieder, *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820–1880* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 219–20, 225–6.
12. Jaimes, "American Racism," 48–53. See also Naomi Zack, "Introduction," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), xvii.
13. See Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*, 186–224, for a full discussion of the ways in which governments have defined Indian people. See also Snipp, "Some observations about racial boundaries," 678–680, for an overview of three standards for defining American Indians: blood quantum, tribal membership, and self-identification.
14. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine fully the complexities of race and racial categories. See Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) for a historical and philosophical discussion of the problems inherent in any attempt to delineate races. See also Maria P. P. Root, ed., *Racially Mixed People in America* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1992).
15. Mihesuah, "American Indian Identities," 195.
16. Jaimes, "American Racism," 42.
17. Anthony F. C. Wallace, *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 29.
18. James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, ed. June Namias (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
19. G. Peter Jemison, lecture at Nazareth College, Rochester, New York, August 28, 1991.
20. Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, *Mankiller: A Chief and Her People* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 81–83.
21. Dorothy Clarke Wilson, *Bright Eyes: The Story of Susette LaFlesche, an Omaha Indian* (New York: McGraw-Hill Books Company, 1974).
22. William T. Hagan, "Quanah Parker," in *American Indian Leaders*, ed. R. David Edmunds (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).
23. Mankiller and Wallis, *Mankiller*.
24. Jaimes, "American Racism," 43–44; Snipp, "Some observations about racial boundaries," 679.
25. William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794–1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 190–191.
26. Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The Indian in America* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1975), 243.
27. Margaret Connell Szasz, *Education and the American Indian: The Road to Self-Determination Since 1928* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1977), 10.

28. Alison R. Bernstein, *American Indians and World War II: Toward a New Era in Indian Affairs* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

29. Donald L. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation, Federal Indian Policy, 1945–1960* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986).

30. James H. Gundlach and Alden E. Roberts, "Native American Indian Migration and Relocation: Success or Failure," *Pacific Sociological Review* 21:1 (1978): 117–128; C. Matthew Snipp and Gary D. Sandefur, "Earnings of American Indians and Alaskan Natives: The Effects of Residence and Migration," *Social Forces* 66:4 (1988): 994–1008. Both studies indicate that, on average, those who participated in the official relocation program benefited economically. However, the findings were not clear-cut and the benefits were not universal.

31. Fixico, *Termination and Relocation*.

32. A number of studies exist of urban Indian communities in the United States. See, for example: Joan Ablon, "Relocated American Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area: Social Interaction and Indian Identity," *Human Organization* 23:4 (1964): 296–304; Diana Meyers Bahr, *From Mission to Metropolis: Cupeño Indian Women in Los Angeles* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993); Bruce A. Chadwick and Joseph H. Stauss, "The Assimilation of American Indians into Urban Society: The Seattle Case," *Human Organization* 34:4 (1975): 359–369; Shirley J. Fiske, "Urban Indian Institutions: A Reappraisal from Los Angeles," *Urban Anthropology* 8:2 (1979): 149–171; Wesley R. Hurt, Jr., "The Urbanization of the Yankton Indians," *Human Organization* 20:4 (1962): 226–231; Janusz Mucha, "From Prairie to the City: Transformation of Chicago's American Indian Community," *Urban Anthropology* 12:3–4 (1983): 337–371; John A. Price, "The Migration and Adaptation of American Indians to Los Angeles," *Human Organization* 27:2 (1968): 168–175; Robert Ritzenthaler and Mary Sellers, "Indians in an Urban Situation," *Wisconsin Archaeologist* 36 (1955): 147–161; Jack O. Waddell and O. Michael Watson, eds., *The American Indian in Urban Society* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971). See also Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.*, and Joe and Lonewolf Miller, "Cultural Survival," cited above.

33. Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust*, 227.

34. See Snipp, "Some observations about racial boundaries," 696–7. Snipp points out that intermarriage between European Americans and American Indians has occurred throughout history. He adds, however, that "intermarriage . . . has become even more common in the postwar decades."

35. *Ibid.*, 236–237.

36. Karl Eschbach, "The enduring and vanishing American Indian: American Indian population growth and intermarriage in 1990," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18:1 (1995): 89–108.

37. See Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle, "'Indian Blood': Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity," *Cultural Anthropology* 11:4 (1996): 547–576. See also Castille, "The Commodification of Indian Identity"; Jaimes, "American Racism"; and Wilson, "Blood Quantum."

38. Mary Crystal Cage, "Claims of American-Indian Heritage Become Issue for Colleges Seeking to Diversify Enrollments," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 29, 1992, A29.

39. Castille, "The Commodification of Indian Identity," 745.

40. Wilson, "Blood Quantum," 122; Zack, *Race and Mixed Race*, 9–18.



41. Mariella Squire-Hakey, "Yankee Imperialism and Imperialist Nostalgia: A View from the Inside," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 227.
42. Wilson, "Blood Quantum," 122.
43. Author's fieldnotes, Milwaukee, 1986–1990.
44. Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.*, 237.
45. Author's fieldnotes, Flint, 1990–1991.
46. Snipp, "Some observations about racial boundaries," 674.
47. Joseph Bruchac, "Notes of a Translator's Son," in *Growing Up Native American*, ed. Patricia Riley (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993), 244.
48. Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.*, 234, emphasis in original.
49. Quoted in David L. Wheeler, "Helping Mixed-Race People Declare Their Heritage," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 7, 1994, A8.
50. Author's fieldnotes, Milwaukee, 1986–1990.
51. Squire-Hakey, "Yankee Imperialism," 228.
52. See David M. Schneider, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 21–29, for a discussion of American kinship by nature (blood) or by law (marriage, adoption).
53. See Virginia R. Dominguez, *White by Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994) for a discussion of the public affirmation of identity.
54. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.
55. Author's fieldnotes, Milwaukee, 1986–1990.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Greg Sarris, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11.
59. Ibid., 140.
60. Patricia Penn Hilden, *When Nickels Were Indians: An Urban, Mixed-Blood Story* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 200–1; W. S. Penn, *All My Sins*, 53–62.
61. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.
62. Ibid.
63. Mihesuah, "American Indian Identities," 206.
64. Author's fieldnotes, Milwaukee, 1986–1990.
65. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.
66. Seaver, *A Narrative*, 78.
67. Nancy Oestreich Lurie, ed., *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), xii.
68. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.
69. Ibid.
70. Medicine, "American Indian Family," 19.
71. Joe and Lonewolf Miller, "Cultural Survival," 190.
72. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Devon A. Mihesuah, *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities* (Regina, SK: Clarity International, 1996), 99.

76. Dan Fost, "American Indians in the 1990s," *American Demographics* 13:12 (December 1991): 26–35.
77. Strong and Van Winkle, "Indian Blood," 555.
78. *Ibid.*, 547–551.
79. Susan Clements, "Five Arrows," in *American Mixed Race: The Culture of Microdiversity*, ed. Naomi Zack (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1995), 9–10.
80. Author's fieldnotes, Rochester, 1991–1997.