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# **“We Are Not Free”: The Meaning of <Freedom> in American Indian Resistance to President Johnson's War on Poverty**

**Casey Ryan Kelly**

## **Abstract**

This essay examines how the ideograph <freedom> was crafted through dialectical struggles between Euro-Americans and American Indians over federal Indian policy between 1964 and 1968. For policymakers, <freedom> was historically sutured to the belief that assimilation was the only pathway to American Indian liberation. I explore the American Indian youth movement's response to President Johnson's War on Poverty to demonstrate how activists rhetorically realigned <freedom> in Indian policy with the Great Society's rhetoric of “community empowerment.” I illustrate how American Indians orchestrated counterhegemonic resistance by reframing the “Great Society” as an argument for a “Greater Indian American.” This analysis evinces the rhetorical significance of ideographic transformation in affecting policy change.

**Keywords:** Clyde Warrior, Freedom, Ideographs, National Indian Youth Council, War on Poverty

In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) and created the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to oversee and distribute federal funds to community anti-poverty programs. President Johnson's War on Poverty was a response to a national poverty rate of 19% and the failure of post-war prosperity to proportionally distribute wealth throughout society. Zarefsky (1977) explains that War on Poverty advocates "saw a society in which channels of mobility were closed and the poor were walled into 'the other America': they saw a nation in which the social structure denied the poor the opportunity to achieve values which were shared with the rest of the country" (p. 354). Goldzwig (2003) and Clayson (2010) add that the Johnson administration viewed the War on Poverty as part of the civil rights agenda, one believed to have the best chance of success because of its color-blind approach. Despite the program's egalitarian rhetoric, the poverty problem was anything but color-neutral. Michael Harrington's *The Other America* (1962) exposed not only the unique and disparate impact of poverty on people of color but also the extent to which racism, violence, and poverty were interconnected. In other words, poverty among African Americans, Latinos, American Indians, and other racial minorities was "the historic and institutionalized consequence of color" (p. 72).

In post-war America, American Indians remained the poorest of the poor (Cornell, 1990). Reservations endured unemployment rates ranging from 40 to 90%, Indian workers earned incomes nearly one-third of whites, and only 65% of Indian children attended school (Olson & Wilson, 1984). As a result, American Indians experienced disproportionately high rates of suicide, infant mortality, preventable disease, and alcoholism (Johnson, Champagne, & Nagel, 1999). Thus, to address poverty in total was to delve unavoidably into the realm of Indian policy. In fact, by 1968, Indian anti-poverty programs had grown so significantly that President Johnson established the National Council on Indian Opportunity to coordinate their management.

The nation's short-lived focus on poverty provided American Indian communities with unprecedented access to government funding and the opportunity to bring public attention to the historic failures of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Moreover, because the discursive field of anti-poverty advocacy was populated with key-terms such as "self-help," "choice," "freedom," "community action," "self-determination," and "maximal feasible participation," it prompted many young American Indian leaders to utilize the War on Poverty to circumvent BIA paternalism and create an imperative for local control of all Indian-related federal programs (Deloria & Lytle, 1984). The consultation process mandated by the EOA provided rhetorical venues such as public hearings, leadership workshops, and meetings with federal officials where reservation communities could speak back to the government about the poverty problem. The War on Poverty opened space for Indian activists to also expand the scope of the conversation beyond poverty to rhetorically redefine role of government in Indian Affairs.

The aforementioned key terms were, however, sufficiently vague as to invite what Schiappa (2003) calls a "definitional rupture," in which factual appeals to what "is" are at odds with that which pragmatically "ought" to be (p. 10). For the BIA, abstract terms like <freedom> had long guided Indian policy but were often defined as individual economic mobility within mainstream America; however, for American Indians, the term connoted the collective ability to make choices for themselves. The vast chasm between these definitions was not denotative but ideological: Euro-

American concepts of <freedom> and community were mired in both post-war philosophies of economic individualism and much older commitments to a Lockean philosophy of natural rights and private property, both of which were unsuitable to American Indian self-determination (Engels, 2005; Kelly, 2010).

Indeed, because their definitions are almost always imprecise and reflect the ideology of the user, terms like <freedom> might be more appropriately called ideographs, or one-word summations of a political ideology that structure adherence to a collective political consciousness (McGee, 1980). For the BIA, <freedom> was enacted through the maximization of one's labor power and personal initiative free of either coercion or assistance. Thus, American Indian progress toward <freedom> was indexed by rates of assimilation, acculturation, and urbanization (Fixico, 1986). Ironically, “progress” often involved curtailing Indian-directed initiatives, yet was often presented by policymakers in a language of “freedom, emancipation, and liberation” which “redefined assimilation as the fulfillment of a Native civil rights agenda” (Kelly, 2010, p. 359). American Indian activists who participated in War on Poverty programs also found themselves confounded by Euro-American definitions of <freedom>, and thus called for an entire revision of the term.

In this article, I examine how American Indian activists utilized a moment of definitional rupture to challenge the ingrained ideology of Indian Affairs. I focus on the ideograph <freedom> as a pivotal though contested term that shaped the desired philosophy and practices of Indian Affairs. I examine not the spectacular protest movements of the decade but rather the arduous task of resisting dominant conceptions of <freedom> from within the process of consultation and implementation that unfolded at the reservation level. One of the most prominent voices in this conversation was that of Clyde Warrior (Ponca) and the National Indian Youth Council (NIYC), a radical organization he helped establish out of a profound dissatisfaction with the older generation of Indian leaders and their acquiescence to federal power structures. Buttressed by a radical Indian youth movement that engaged in occupations of federal lands, strikes, sit-ins, and other acts of civil disobedience, the protest rhetoric of activists like Warrior and the NIYC were able to transform, in part, the concept of <freedom> from its individualistic connotations within the lexicon of liberal capitalism to a notion tied to the War on Poverty's commitment to “community empowerment.” I examine Warrior's resistance to the War on Poverty to illustrate how the Indian youth movement appropriated the language of Johnson's “Great Society” to argue for a “Greater Indian American.” This analysis evinces the significance of <freedom> in Indian Affairs discourse and the radical possibilities of ideographic transformation in public policy.

### **Ideographs and the Rhetoric of Indian Affairs**

McGee (1980) argues that ideology in practice is a political language, manifest in slogan-like terminology or one-word summations of collective commitments. For instance, in the American public vocabulary, terms such as <equality>, <rule of law>, <liberty>, and <freedom> rhetorically structure and condition near-reflexive public adherence to the dominant ideology of classical liberalism. “Ideographs” are abstract but highly resonate terms with near universal recognition that recur in political discourse. Their invocations comprise a dominant political consciousness and, in doing so, warrant action, excuse behavior, and garner assent. As McGee explains, “they are the basic structural elements, the building blocks of ideology ... they ‘contain’ a unique ideological

commitment; further, they presumptuously suggest that each member of a community will see as a gestalt every complex nuance in them” (p. 7). Cloud (2004) adds that ideographs are vehicles “through which ideologies or unconsciously shared idea systems that organize consent to a particular social system becomes rhetorically effective” (p. 288). While they often resemble the elements of the liberal vocabulary, ideographs can emerge in the context of particular controversies, and through repetition, become “God terms” that govern rhetorical participation (Cloud, 1998; McCann, 2007; Peeples, 2011; Stassen & Bates, 2010). But an ideograph's meaning is never shaped in isolation from other ideographs. For instance, in capitalist rhetoric, <freedom> most effectively structures adherence to free market ideology when used in connection with other signifiers of the capitalist lexicon, particularly ideographs such as <private property> and <individualism>. Taken together, ideographs compose a political language that circulates within public cultures to signify and structure its collective commitments.

Although ideographs often circumscribe the range of acceptable public beliefs, they are also abstract in nature and often the source of controversy and contestation. Both dominant and marginalized publics often share an investment in defining the same ideographs but diverge over what meaning or interpretation they consider reasonable. By their nature, ideographs are abstract terms, often the result of tenuous agreement, that are open to interpretation. What makes ideographs valuable in the study of the rhetorical process of social change is that they can be taken up by different rhetors—across time and from disparate social locations—to advocate for divergent ideological commitments. Condit and Lucaites (1993) contend that because ideographs lack rigid definition “creative rhetors craft their meaning-in-use as they employ them in public discourse to persuade audiences of the public nature of historically specific beliefs and actions” (p. xiii). Ideographs are sites of rhetorical contestation because they offer rhetors the opportunity to restructure their collective commitments within the same set of publicly available key terms. Thus, ideographs do not only serve the interests of the dominant ideology but instead can be used for both hegemonic and counterhegemonic purposes.

Some ideographs, however, are resistant to redefinition. Therefore, it is important to also account for historical-material conditions that might open an ideograph to reinterpretation and render specific applications appropriate (Black, 2003; Cloud, 1998; Delgado, 1999; Kelly, 2010; McCann, 2007). Such an account explains how rhetors attempt to solidify to restructure society's ideological commitments. The meaning of any particular ideograph is not given, and because they are also imbued with the power to craft public identification with normative collective commitments, they are fraught with tension and contestation. Condit and Lucaites (1993) illustrate how over time Anglo and African American communities laid claim to what they saw as the definitive meaning of <equality>, and explain how “each usage adds as by precedent to the range of meanings available to a particular ideograph” (p. xiii). Thus, the structure of an ideograph is susceptible to redefinition as different communities—dominant and marginalized—work to either ossify or unsettle an ideograph's meaning in accordance with their ideology and material interests.

Therefore, this article conceptualizes ideographs in a dual sense: They can function as a hegemonic method of conditioning behavior or as the discursive centerpiece of re-conditioning against the grain of the dominant ideology. As McGee observes, different constituencies are “*united* by the

ideographs that represent the political entity ‘United States’ and *separated* by a disagreement as to the practical meaning of such ideographs” (1980, p. 8). So, while <freedom> united Euro-American policymakers and American Indian activists in a tenuous agreement that the term should drive policymaking in Indian Affairs, it divided them according to divergent interpretations of the term's meaning and specific policy application. Though there are heretical usages that will be ignored or censured by society, ideographs can be seized and redirected by those outside the dominant ideology to expand or contract the possible range of usages.

This article focuses on <freedom> because it was one of the most frequently evoked terms of the liberal political vocabulary used to justify the policy of termination and later Indian participation in the War on Poverty. In 1953, Congress passed H.R. 108 that announced termination of federal-tribal relations as the new direction of Indian policy. The new directive was the result of collaboration between BIA director Dillon S. Myer and congressional members from western states. Senator Arthur Watkins (R-Utah) secured popular support for this proposal by labeling the policy an “Indian freedom program” that would liberate reservations from federal paternalism (Watkins, 1957, p. 49). In a text containing 28 separate references to Indian <freedom>, Watkins argued “in the view of the historic policy of Congress favoring freedom for the Indians, we may well expect future Congresses to continue to indorse [sic] the principle that ‘as rapidly as possible’ we should end the status of Indians as wards of the government and grant them all of the rights and prerogatives pertaining to American citizenship” (p. 55). He goes on to compare termination to President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the most iconic liberation of racial minorities in the U.S. history: “following in the footsteps of the Emancipation Proclamation of ninety-four years ago, I see the following words emblazoned in letters of fire about the heads of Indian—*THESE PEOPLE SHALL BE FREE!*” (p. 55, emphasis in original). While termination eliminated the legal protections afforded by tribal citizenship, its advocates characterized the program as liberating a people in bondage (see Myer, 1953). <Freedom> caught on quickly among policymakers because of both its lofty abstractness and its manifestly positive connotations. Wilkinson (2005) explains how “the idea of ‘freeing the Indian’ hit the mark dead on. So much so, in fact, that a principled and well-meaning senator, representative, or administrator—or, for that matter, well-informed citizen—could find such a policy self-evident” (p. 66). In the context of Indian administration, <freedom> became a summation of an individual rights philosophy that could only be enacted by assimilating Indians into mainstream capitalism.

Finally, examining the struggle over <freedom> in the rhetoric of Indian policy illuminates the underlying capitalist ideology at work in federal-Indian relations. Fixico (2002) argues that the rhetoric of “Indian reform” often disguises a more deeply rooted ideology in which American Indians are “problems” that must be fixed, impediments to Euro-American progress. This materialist interpretation of the rhetoric of Indian Affairs situates <freedom> as identified with the building blocks of capitalist thought: individualism, private property, and social contract. The broad appeal of the termination philosophy can also be explained, in part, by its resonance with the influential work in post-war neoclassical economics. For instance, Hayek's popular monograph *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) warned that central economic planning contributed to the rise of totalitarianism while Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) argued emphatically that individual economic <freedom> was the precondition for political <freedom>. This backlash

against Keynesian economics tempered New Deal enthusiasm for social welfare and collectivism and placed the economic agency of the individual at the center of policies designed for the collective good. Mileur (2005) notes that even the Great Society embraced a kind of “Cold War liberalism” which “held that the individual, with unique capacities honed to the highest through active participation, was the fundamental fact in social and political life and would in turn produce the good society” (p. 439).

In a diachronic sense, however, commitments to <freedom> go much beyond an investment in neoclassical economics and the anti-communist sentiment of the period. <Freedom> also resonated with the political philosophies that supported Euro-American conquest of North America. In Locke's *Two Treatise on Government* (1689/1965)—perhaps the most influential text in defining U.S. government and civil society—<freedom> and its attendant ideograph <liberty> were derivatives of an individual's labor power, which one harnessed to subjugate the natural world. What one transformed in the natural world became private property, and ultimately Locke viewed government as the guarantor of “life, liberty, and estate” as “natural rights” (Locke, 1689/1965). Scholars note that for many Americans, the Lockean view of natural rights and private property sanctioned the dispossession of tribal lands in name of private enterprise (Engels, 2005; Hall, 2003). Moreover, because the individual is at the center of the natural rights vocabulary, such rhetoric is at odds with most American Indian definitions of community in which land and resources are held in common. Note, for example, that the most severe reductions in the size of tribal lands happened under federal initiatives that sought to individualize land ownership and tribal assets. The 19th-century policy of allotment, enforced under the provisions of Dawes Act (1887), divided reservations into small, individualized plots of land that shrank the tribal land base by nearly 90 million acres (Wilkinson, 2005). Conversely, periods in which federal Indian policy acknowledged the imperative of collective ownership—such as the period between the Indian Reorganization Act (1934) and World War II—Indian nations were in a better position to protect their land base and community resources under tribal constitutions.

This article locates <freedom> at a point of rupture, during which the term was also being used in defense of President Johnson's Great Society that sought to eradicate poverty and more equitably distribute post-War prosperity. As poverty disproportionately affected racial minorities, the vision of the Great Society was seen as an opportunity to define the goals and ideology of public policy to empower the marginalized (Mileur, 2005). However, from the point of view of many American Indians, there was a fundamental disjuncture between <freedom> in the rhetoric of termination and <freedom> in the Great Society. Whereas the former demanded the reduction of entitlements to be free from big government, the later mandated that government provide equality of opportunity by eradicating poverty. As American Indians began to participate in President Johnson's “Great Society,” they saw an opportunity to redefine <freedom> in Indian Affairs to align with the goals of anti-poverty programs under the assumption that it might change the goals and attitudes of BIA administrators in the process. Thus, contestation over <freedom> was not over semantics but instead over which ideology would govern Indian affairs.

### **American Indian Youth and War on Poverty Rhetoric**

One of the many ironies of termination is that it galvanized American Indian resistance to Federal Indian policy (Josephy, Nagel, & Johnson, 1999). Relocation programs lead to the growth of intertribal organizations committed to cultural preservation and political activism. Disillusioned by the poor living conditions, Indian youth began taking an interest in grassroots organizing and direct action (Johnson, 2007). Youth activists such as Mel Thom and Vine Deloria began using the term “Red Power” to identify the emergence of new Indian movement that endorsed social protest over political procedure. While they were certainly inspired by Students for a Democratic Society, the Student Non-Violence Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, and the Third World Strike, Red Power activists viewed their struggle as unique to the history of settler colonialism in North America, and their commitment was to recovering stolen lands (Deloria, 1969, 1985; Shreve, 2011). By 1960, American Indian politics had suddenly become dominated by a new cohort of young, radical, and highly educated activists who broke ranks with the established and reform-oriented national organizations.

In 1961, Clyde Warrior, Mel Thom, Bruce Wilkie, and several others founded the NIYC to express their dissatisfaction with the national leadership and demand that Indian communities change how they engaged the federal bureaucracy. Red Power organizations took direct action by occupying sites significant to the history of colonization in the United States. The NIYC helped coordinate the Puyallup fish-ins in 1964, the Indians of All Tribes occupied Alcatraz Island from 1969–1971, and the American Indian Movement (AIM) occupied dozens of sites include the Bureau of Indian Affairs (1971) and Wounded Knee, SD (1973). Whereas the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) emphasized intertribal engagement with the federal bureaucracy through established channels, Indian youth activists emphasized grassroots control of federal Indian programs. Warrior emerged as a different kind of political leader than the rank-and-file to which the NCAI had grown accustomed. Whereas the NCAI touted professionalism and appropriateness, Warrior and his compatriots spoke of “raising hell.” Warrior argued that his central purpose was to “take that negative image of Indians and shove it down people's throat” (quoted in Smith & Warrior, 1996, p. 41).

Although invested in Indian culture, the NIYC was a distinctly nationalist organization that took cues from both Third World decolonization movements and the New Left (Bruynell, 2007; Smith & Warrior, 1996). The NIYC was one of many youth movements that referenced “Third World” struggles as a “shorthand” for a comprehensive global challenge to Western liberalism (Young, 2006). Like these movements, Warrior expressed a deep concern with inauthenticity of subjectivity under capitalism as well as the older generation's failure to offer the youth an opportunity to lead. In a 1964 essay entitled “Which One Are You?,” he argued Indians lived a world of inauthenticity in which Indian identities in Euro-American society were that “not full, real human beings, or people” (p. 521). He explained that Indian youth “were being turned into something that is not real, and that somebody needs to offer a better alternative” (p. 521). Warrior's concern with the inauthenticity, conformity, and dehumanization of the self resounds the same social critique of modern industrial society that generated from voices in the New Left. The immediate connection between Warrior's ideology and the dissident voices of Third World becomes clear when comparing his arguments to the rhetoric of Franz Fanon's. For example, in *Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon contends that colonialism requires the fabrication of colonial subject: objectified,

dehumanized, and made to serve the empire. Decolonization, on the other hand, “is truly the creation of new men [sic]. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The ‘thing’ colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation” (p. 2).

Warrior's rhetoric can also be understood in the context of other key texts of the New Left. For instance, in the same year as “Which One are You?” appeared, Herbert Marcuse published *One Dimensional Man* (1964), a study on the state of (un)freedom in advanced industrial society. Marcuse illustrated for the New Left that technological progress reduces the capacity for free critical thought, that it necessitates principles of conformity and automation that are inconsistent with <freedom>. Likewise, in their founding Port Huron Statement (1962), Tom Hayden and the Students for a Democratic Society hinged <freedom> to self-actualization: a consciousness obstructed by the depersonalization of life under capitalism that “reduces human beings to the status of things” (Students for a Democratic Society, 1984, p. 180). In these iconic texts of the New Left, the call for youth leadership and direct participatory democracy also arise from a critique of mass society as inauthentic, suffocating, and destructive to any genuine sense of community or democracy.

Warrior patterned the NIYC after the radical politics of the global New Left, but at the same time, he was adept at infiltrating and navigating government procedures. His ascendance to leadership was an outgrowth of his participation in a series of Indian leadership workshops for future tribal leaders from 1955 to 1961 (McKenzie-Jones, 2010; Steiner, 1968). After attending the American Indian Chicago Conference on Poverty in 1961, Warrior and his followers split with the NCAI over what they considered to be a conservative approach to working with the federal bureaucracy. In forming the NIYC, Warrior and Thom organized hundreds of college students and like-minded Indian youths to participate in direct action rather than organizational and BIA educational initiatives.

Unfortunately, Johnson sought the advice and consent of the NCAI, not the NIYC, in the formation of Indian Community Action Agencies (CAA; Cobb, 1998). To gain an audience, Warrior and NIYC were forced to engage the War on Poverty at the local level. Title IIA of the EEO established CAAs by which tribal councils contracted directly with the federal government for funding. The programs were mandated to include “maximum feasible participation” from tribal members, and their expressed goal was to support tribal self-determination (Cobb, 2010). War on Poverty programs, in turn, created an opportunity for grassroots organizations to circumvent the BIA and the Department of Interior to secure funds for community development. Unfortunately, Cobb (1998) notes the rhetorical slippage in the War on Poverty's definition of “community involvement,” noting that for some “maximum feasible participation simply meant involving Indians in decision-making; locally-initiated programs would encourage Indians to enter the mainstream of American life” (p. 74). Put differently, War on Poverty programs were still plagued by the assumption that assimilation into mainstream society was still a desirable goal for Indian CAAs. Thus, the rhetoric of <freedom>, independence, and economic progress advanced in support of CAAs also “lent itself to a justified severing of trust relationships” (p. 75). This context frames Warrior and the NIYC's efforts to critique how Indian leaders engaged federal

administrators and purge the logic of individualism from anti-poverty program so that they might actually promote self-determination.

### **<Freedom> in a “Greater Indian America”**

As both an author and speaker, Warrior was renowned for his irreverent tone, use of invective, and willingness to speak truth to power. One anecdote is of Warrior's 1960 campaign for president of the Southwest Regional Indian Youth Council. After listening to his opponent's conventional pleas for professionalism, Smith and Warrior (1996) recalls that Warrior “mounted the podium, pushed his cowboy hat back on his head and rolled up his sleeves” (p. 42). He gestured to his arms and addressed his audience: “This is all I have to offer. The sewage of Europe does not flow through these veins” (p. 42). Bravado aside, a great portion of Warrior's rhetoric and activism was concerned with eradicating poverty in American Indian communities and resisting Euro-American control of Indian Affairs. In 1964, Warrior delivered a controversial address to the American Indian Capital Conference on War on Poverty programs. He was prohibited from delivering the first version he drafted, as conference organizers felt it was too vitriolic and personal for the forum (Olreck & Hazirjian, 2011). In June 1965, Warrior published the censored version in *New University Thought*. Despite its less polemical tone, “Poverty, Community, and Power,” indicted the federal government's definition of “progress,” framed the BIA as instrument of imperialism, and linked the liberal concept of freedom to the redistribution of resources. In this speech, Warrior adopted of more Marxist tone as he moves from questions of identity and the authenticity of self to a critique of political economy.

As ideograph analysis is concerned with the organic appearance of sloganized ideologies in discourse; this analysis focuses on Warrior's rhetoric that addresses the specific subject of <freedom>. Warrior often vacillates between the noun <freedom> and its adjective <free>, more frequently using the latter. I argue that both versions are in ideographic contestation with the ideological use of <free> and <freedom> in the rhetoric of termination and the Great Society. While his wider body of rhetorical work informs his conception of <freedom> as the inherent right to collective self-determination, the remainder of this article focuses on Warrior's February 2, 1967 address before the President's National Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty in Memphis, Tennessee. In a speech popularly titled “We Are Not Free,” Warrior highlighted his divergence from the political style of the NCAI by indicting the collaboration between organizational Indians and a growing cadre of Indian experts (social workers, bureaucrats, educators, religious groups, and business). Warrior also illustrated how the incorporation of more non-Indian “community voices” into War on Poverty programs had curtailed direct Indian participation in and control of CAAs. Instead of investing faith in members of the helping professions, Warrior believed that only the poor could decide how to effectively end reservation poverty. I focus on this text because it is where Warrior explicitly seeks to expand the definition of <freedom> offered by Euro-American policymakers to include material conditions that far exceed an individualized notion of private property.

In this text, Warrior redefines <freedom> as a kind of agency that is collectively enacted when a people have the political autonomy and material resources to act as a nation. Indian <freedom> was impossible without all the components of nationhood, including land, culture, language,

collective wealth, and natural resources. I argue that Warrior's speech expands the ideograph <freedom> by reframing it as both a collective capacity to make decisions and a value that is measured by the attainment of economic justice for poor.

First, Warrior begins by disassociating <freedom> from its conventional meaning in the capitalist lexicon of termination. He recalls the stories of his grandfather, about times in which “Indians were a great people, when we were freed, when we were rich, when we lived the good life. At the same time, we heard stories of droughts, famines, and pestilence. It was only recently that we realized there were surely great material deprivation in those days, but that our old people felt rich because they were free” (Warrior, 1967, p. 17). Warrior's anecdote locates <freedom> in practice at an abstract time predating the imposition of Western colonialism in North America. As he honors the continuity in traditional Indian thought from his elders, he also engages in a diachronic analysis of the term. That is to say that he recovers a more expansive understanding of what it means to be <free> that draws from traditional Indian thought and stands in opposition to Western conceptions of <freedom> as the maximization of private property. Warrior's look back is less of a nostalgic longing for a pre-modern past than it is an argument by analogy that invites his audience to view <freedom> as a richness of personal and collective agency not material wealth. Indeed, it was <freedom> conceived as richness in spirit that enabled American Indian nations to survive periods of great “material deprivation.” Moreover, his anecdote authorizes him to reexamine the relationship between contemporary poverty and <freedom> outside of the quantitative metrics used by the BIA and OEO. In short, to be impoverished is not the lack private property or material wealth, but instead to lack the ability to make choices freely.

Next, Warrior redefines poverty as a condition of the spirit, and therefore, a phenomenon that cannot be remedied by material wealth alone. The true poverty of Indian country could be indexed more accurately by its people's passivity and hopelessness and alleviated through reinvigorating a sense of responsibility and competence among Indian nations. He explains, “they [elders] were rich in things of the spirit, but if there is one thing that characterizes Indian life today it is poverty of the spirit” (p. 17). Without the ability to make choices for themselves, he laments, “we sit on our front porches or in our yards, and the world and our lives in it pass us by without our desires or aspirations having any effect” (p. 17). The concept of spiritual poverty helped Warrior connect his ardent defense of traditionalism and unencumbered Indian agency with the ultimate success of War on Poverty programs. Thus, he calls for the fight against poverty to be guided by a less adorned definition of <freedom>: the ability to make choices for oneself and community. He continues, “we are poor in spirit because we are not free—free in the most basic sense of the word. We are not allowed to make those basic human choices and decisions about our personal life and about our destiny of our communities which is the mark of free mature people” (p. 17). Here, Warrior supplants what Schiappa (2003) calls a “lexical definition” of <freedom> that unfolded through its common-usage in public policy with a dictionary definition of <freedom> that simply meant to be unhindered by control and coercion. Thus, his *prima facie* case begins with the claim: “We are not free. We do not make choices. Our choices are made for us; we are poor” (Warrior, 1967, p. 17). Note how Warrior deliberately conflates the impoverishment of freedom with impoverishment itself; they are, for Warrior, one in the same.

In support of his claim, Warrior gives examples of how freedom and coercion function in the application of War on Poverty initiatives. These examples serve as anecdotal evidence that agency and choice are more important to achieving <freedom> than material gains. Taking aim at the War on Poverty and Head Start, Warrior illustrates how policymakers and educators confuse material with spiritual impoverishment. As a result, they carry out coercive programs that mistake the greater availability of resources for some with <freedom> for all. He points out “the no-so-subtle racist vocabulary of the modern middle class” in which Indian children are always perceived as “deprived” and in need to “help” regardless of how suffocating it might be. He elaborates further by explaining how “for those of us who live on reservations these choices and decisions are made by federal administrations, bureaucrats, and their ‘yes men,’ euphemistically called tribal governments” (p. 17). The only ones who benefited from the federal government's definition of <freedom> were powerful White communities living adjacent to Indian nations. In fact, “the local White power elites are the very ones who protest the loudest against federal control are the very ones who keep us poor in spirit and worldly goods in order to enhance their own personal and economic station in the world” (p. 18). Here, Warrior alludes to the ways in which CAA's were coopted by local elite and business interests to funnel money and resources away from reservation communities.

Ultimately, Warrior highlighted the tensions between Indian programs at the OEO and the BIA: Whereas OEO programs assumed that local community leadership would offer the best solution to poverty, the prevailing logic at the BIA was that Indians were incapable of running their own affairs. As a result, Warrior points out that what has come to stand-in for the local community has been “cops, school teachers, churches, etc., and now OEO employees.” In his estimation, OEO programs had fallen prey to the same paternalistic impulse that governed all Indian affairs. He explained, “they call us into meetings to tell us what is good for us and how they've programmed us” (p. 17). If OEO programs continued to align themselves with BIA imperatives, the former was doomed to replicate the failures of the latter.

Above all, Warrior's speech illustrates that the rhetoric of “local control” was a mask for those interested in neoliberal deregulations schemes that privatized public goods and socialized their costs. Warrior observes that where the government abdicates its responsibilities or devolves control “federal money is being used to bolster the local power structure and local institutions” (p. 18). Warrior uncovers a fundamental problem with the federal governments rhetoric of <freedom>. Namely, that the BIA and OEO had conflated devolution of federal control with ending the practice of paternalism. Instead, the drive to create “local control” had only forged a strong alliance between “federal administrators and local elites,” in which control was merely being outsourced to state and local governments. Thus, Warrior suggests that what appears to be Indian decision making is illusory at best and coerced at worst. Furthermore, he suggests that federal authority always circumscribes the meaning “maximal feasible [Indian] participation” in OEO initiatives. In policy debates over how to alleviate Indian poverty, however, “no one is arguing that the dispossessed, the poor, be given any control over their own destiny” (p. 18). As a result, any positive results achieved through false consultation or coercion was suspect. Even if there were pragmatic material benefits for Indian communities, such programs were considered a failure by Warrior if they did not preserve the cultural and political elements of Indian nationhood. Either

way, the standard for evaluating whether Indian programs were working to alleviate poverty and strengthen Indian participation were imposed by “local ‘patrons’” (p. 19).

In sum, Warrior distills <freedom> to its most basic denotative sense, removing it from the context in which it is used by federal bureaucrats to justify “liberating” Indians by their own standards of judgment. Warrior presents <freedom> in the most simplified but active sense: the ability to make choices. Warrior infers that local elites and Indian experts distort an Indian demand for <freedom> from federal paternalism to justify taking control of those programs for themselves and making decisions for Indian communities. This is the case because they viewed <freedom> as only the absence of formal mechanisms of control as opposed to a capacity or competence to govern their own affairs. Ultimately, this is also the distinction between self-government and self-determination; self-government *allows* Indian people to govern and self-determination is the recognition that government is an inherent right of people.

By expanding the definition of poverty to include immaterial notions of communal agency, Warrior indirectly shifted the meaning of <freedom> in the discourse of Indian affairs from a *product* or outcome of policymaking to one of *process* that enabled individuals to make choices about the desired outcomes of policymaking. That is, if <freedom> could not be forsaken for the cause of eliminating material poverty, then Indians must be allowed to direct and control all poverty related programs. Warrior exhibits how a process-oriented analysis of <freedom> would likely, in turn, get to the root of why Indian poverty existed in the first place. He notes, “we are the ‘poverty problem’ and that is true; and perhaps it is also true that our lack of reasonable choices, our lack of freedoms, our poverty of spirit is not unconnected with our material poverty” (p. 17). In expanding the concept of poverty to the immaterial, Warrior does not abandon the pragmatic concerns of those in need. Rather, Warrior's argument amplifies the significance of innate Indian capacities in the fight against poverty. To construct this active sense of <freedom>, he continually connects lack of choices and freedoms with a state of passivity and spiritual deprivation. In addition to Indians sitting on their “front porches,” he describes his generation as growing up in a “prison-like atmosphere” (p. 19). He constructs Indians as incapable of material wellbeing in the context of institutional dominance. Indians of his generation were growing up “confused, ambivalent, and immobilized individuals—never able to reconcile the tensions and contradictions built inside themselves by outside institutions” (p. 19). In Warrior's treatment, <freedom> referenced neither a depersonalized product of policymaking nor a passive object that one possessed but a capacity that had to be continually exercised, enacted, and performed. His emphasis on active versus passive agency gave <freedom> a new valence: not simply a state of being uncontrolled but an embodied state of energetic participation in making choices about one's individual and collective future.

Ultimately, Warrior places demands on his audience. For Euro-American policymakers, maximizing <freedom> in Indian Affairs would require them to move beyond consultation to turning over the reigns of power to Indian communities. Furthermore, to uphold their own commitments to liberalism, Euro-Americans would have to put equal resources and commitment to Indian-led initiatives. At the same time, Warrior makes demands on his Indian audience. To be free, Indians must “be able to demonstrate competence to ourselves” (p. 19). Indeed, Warrior

enacts this “competence” himself by making demands, offering critical analysis of federal policy, and showing the character of Indian leadership. Warrior prompts his Indian audience to act as if they always already possessed the power to enact their demands. Later in his testimony, he clarifies that he “does not mean the fictional responsibility and democracy of passive consumers; programs which emanate from and whose responsibility for success rests in the hands of outsiders” (p. 20). Warrior invites his audience take responsibility for their community in advance of any changes in policy, to not place their faith in the idea that material prosperity will be handed to them by the federal government.

Warrior's demands also come with a warning: All too often an earnest plea for <freedom> is often just “slick salesmanship” (p. 20). Warrior draws his audience's attention to both the capitalist orientation and Orwellian vocabulary of Indian affairs and demands that Indians take notice of how programs are packaged. To accomplish this, Warrior uses a series of commercial metaphors to indict how poverty programs were “sold” to American Indians. His remarks point to how grassroots programs and community participation are brands marketed as consumer items. He notes, “it is not hard for sophisticated administrators to sell tinsel and glitter programs to people” (p. 20). Market metaphors highlighted how within the realm of Indian affairs, democracy had been reduced to series of meaningless catch phrase and disposable consumer goods. Warrior goes on to explain how such “slick salesmanship” either coerced Indians into accepting War on Poverty programs or, in their rejection, creating the illusion that Indian people have no interest in either democracy or poverty. He remarks, “Indians can ‘buy’ or once again brand themselves as unprogressive if they do not ‘cooperate’” (p. 20). Consumer and market metaphors framed the War on Poverty as an extension of Western liberal capitalism, rather than its safety valve. Instead, such programs created a “democracy of passive consumers,” presented with the illusion of choice and responsibility (p. 20).

Finally, Warrior inverted the market-oriented definitions of <freedom> as a justification for self-determination. He begins with an earnest defense of mistakes and failures as a part of the process of learning: “We must make decisions about our own destinies. We must be able to learn and profit by our own mistake” (p. 20). <Freedom>, he points out, inevitably produces failures; however, in the case of Indian affairs, failures had been used to level blame. For Warrior, the opposite was true:

A better program built upon the failure of an old program is the path to progress. But to achieve this experience, competence, worthiness, sense of achievement, and the resultant material prosperity Indians must have the responsibility in the ultimate sense of the word. Indians must be free in the sense that other more prosperous Americans are free. Freedom and prosperity are different sides of the same coin and there can be no freedom without complete responsibility. (p. 20)

In this selection, Warrior redirects the rhetoric of personal responsibility and initiative that drove the policy of termination as a justification for Indians receiving full control over their own programs. He forces the rhetoric of Indian Affairs policy into contradiction by asking his audience to consider that if termination supporters and OEO administrators truly believe that <freedom> is the fuel of American prosperity, then why are they so reluctant to give Indians the same control of their own affairs? Ironically, in debates over poverty, the rhetoric of personal responsibility is often employed as a justification for curtailing social services under the assumption it will spur private

initiative (see Asen, 2002). In this case, Warrior cleverly utilizes the market assumption that responsibility and ownership create an incentive to cultivate and protect resources. He even suggests that American prosperity in general, and by implication Indian poverty, is the result of an American ethic of responsibility; however, America has simply not been good at “promulgating this philosophy within her own borders” (p. 21).

By holding his audience's deepest values up against their actions, Warrior opened space for them to both maintain their values and support American Indian self-determination. Pragmatically, the economic fate of Indians and Euro-Americans were tied, as “American cannot afford to have whole areas and communities of people in such dire social and economic circumstances” (p. 21). But also in terms of principles, “American Indians need to be given this freedom and responsibility which most Americans assume as their birthright. Only then will poverty and powerlessness cease to hang like the Sword of Damocles” (p. 21). Yet, his embrace of American prosperity was always at a distance. Confronting the assimilative logic of Indian affairs head on, he contends that it is an “American myth that all people will assimilate into American society, that economics dictates assimilation and integration. From the perspective of the National Indian Youth Council, and in reality, we cannot emphasize and recommend strongly enough the fact that no one integrates and disappears into society” (p. 21). Warrior undermines the false choice between prosperity and preservation of cultural values, ancient and modern, Indian and American. In fact, “only then can we enjoy that fruits of the American system and become participating citizens—Indian American rather than American Indians” (p. 21). Warrior positions American Indians within the priorities of mainstream American culture without compromising Indian identity.

In short, he defends the notion that Indian civic participation and prosperity does not require them to forsake their government and way of life. <Freedom> demands both the responsibility of self-determination and equal access to vast prosperity in American society. He concludes by recommending to the panel that they should “really give these people, ‘the poor, the dispossessed, the Indians,’ complete freedom and responsibility ... let the poor decide from once” (p. 21).

### **<Freedom> Transformed**

To conclude, I suggest that this article makes three important contributions to both the study of ideographic transformation and American Indian resistance rhetoric. First, McGee's thesis that ideographs structure our normative collective commitments does not reduce the job of critics to outlining the ways in which political language structures adherence to dominant ideologies. Although McGee emphasizes that one is not “permitted to question the fundamental logic of ideographs” as signifiers of a political consciousness, they are capable of unsettling or reinterpreting the meaning of a specific ideograph through new and creative usages (1980, p. 7). Of course, Condit and Lucaites (1993) observe this to be the case when they wrote that rhetors need not “pay allegiance to any *particular* usage or interpretation of an ideograph in a particular context” (p. xiii). This article suggests that because ideographs are abstract and dynamic, they invite constant redefinition and controversy. Where this article contributes is in conceptualizing ideographs as part of a political language that allows multiple conflicting advocacies to be advanced within the same set of symbols. This means that marginalized communities need not invent an entirely new discourse to make their case for social change. Instead, as Warrior's rhetoric

illustrates, marginalized groups might pick up the powerful ideographs that structure collective thought and behavior in an effort to commit those terms to counterhegemonic struggles. In fact, it is because we have little control over which ideographs structure our consciousness and that such ideographs are “bound within the culture which they define” that the potential of ideographic struggle is that ideographs demand reflexive adherence, yet their status is always a tenuous agreement between the groups that constantly contest the ideograph's meaning (McGee, 1980, p. 9). Furthermore, this article shows what kind of historical-material conditions might portend an ideographic transformation: namely, when discrepancies between what is and what should be become so palpable that they can no longer be ignored. It is at moments of definitional rupture where ideographs may be unsettled and recommitted to structure adherence to a new set of meanings, and henceforth values, behaviors, and policies.

Second, this study contributes to a greater understanding of the rhetorical practices of Indian resistance that took place within the hegemonic realm of policymaking and the constraints placed on Indian activists as they engaged governmental discourses. As Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) argue, American Indian protest rhetoric has been most successful when activists have been able to educate non-Indian audiences about Indian culture and history. To garner support with non-Indian audiences in the public, media, and government, American Indian protest must place their demands in the context of colonialism and make it easier for members of dominant society to “accept collective responsibility, and to support collective change” (p. 128). Warrior's rhetoric confirms that there may be openings at which dominant society is more amenable or perhaps vulnerable to such calls for collective responsibility. And, despite the celebratory renewal of faith in classical liberalism among many policymakers after World War II, the growing movements of the poor and people of color evidenced the failure of an economically centered individualism to bring about a good society. While ideographs can condition adherence to ideological myths, their failures and slippages can create the groundwork for their redefinition. Significant ideographic transformations are possible at moments in which their taken-for-granted meaning fails to account for real lived experiences. Calls for redefinition of terms like <freedom> are not about accurate reflecting reality, but instead, “calls to change our attitudes and behaviors” (Schiappa, 2003, p. 48).

American Indian responses to the War on Poverty are a useful site at which to examine how changes in material conditions constrain and enable ideographs, and the possibilities for expanding the range of usages. The War on Poverty developed as a response to a gap between the post-war rhetoric of an affluent society consummated in John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958) and the lived experiences chronicled in Harrington's *The Other America* (1962), a vast though invisible community of hard-working Americans living in destitute poverty surrounded by unprecedented levels of prosperity. War on Poverty advocates attempted to open deliberative spaces for reconsidering historical myths and exposing the fantasy that a rising tide of economic progress lifted all boats. Though the Johnson administration was perhaps domesticating emancipatory impulses, War on Poverty rhetoric enabled Warrior and the NIYC to use this moment to invite consideration of how American Indians had been sacrificed for the advancement of American capitalism. Many questioned their own adherence to myths of equal and unending prosperity, providing American Indians with the opportunity to introduce new and expansive definitions to mainstream cultures own failed ideographs.

Throughout the implementation of War on Poverty programs, both federal officials and American Indians laid claim to guiding principles of <freedom> with strikingly different and mutually exclusive notions of its meaning. Yet, through oppositional usage, Warrior and the NIYC helped craft a concept of <freedom> that necessitated liberation from poverty rather than Indian absorption into the mainstream culture. The key challenge for American Indian activists was how they might transform the prevailing language of Indian affairs, as well as the Great Society, to augment then-existing definitions of <freedom> to reflect the goals of Indian communities. Warrior's rhetoric participated in a redefinition of Indian Affairs that by 1975 finally made self-determination its official policy. This article's analysis elaborates on how American Indians were aware of the ideographs used to absorb them into mainstream culture and identifies several strategies employed by Indian activists to enact counterhegemonic resistance to a perverse and distorted concept of <freedom>.

Finally, in the many rhetorical studies on Indian activism, the rhetoric of Warrior and the NIYC amount to little more than a footnote (Lake, 1983, 1991; Morris & Wander, 1990; Sanchez & Stuckey, 2000); however, when academics first took notice of Indian youth activism in the 1960s, Warrior was described by some as the “prophet of Red Power” (Steiner, 1968, p. 66). Most studies of Indian activism focus on the more spectacular protests events at Alcatraz Island and Wounded Knee and pay less attention to the more institutionalized struggles. Tragically, Warrior was never able to see the major national phase of Indian activism. In 1968, Warrior's liver failed, the result of persistent alcohol abuse and several failed attempts at rehabilitation. At 28, Warrior's life was tragically cut short before he could see the changes that he demanded come to fruition. Nonetheless, Warrior's rhetoric illustrates how progressive changes in Indian Affairs were the result not of governmental benevolence but of persistent struggle on the part of Indian leaders to reframe governmental imperatives. Warrior's rhetoric was no panacea, but it helped change the conversation from the rhetoric of termination to self-determination by illuminating the failures of Euro-American definitions of <freedom>.

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