

THE URBAN SOJOURNER AMONG AMERICAN INDIANS

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Over the past half century or so more and more North American Indians have migrated from reservations to cities. The overwhelming majority of these migrants move for economic reasons, but after entering into cities they vary in their degrees of commitment to urban life. While some of the Indians find their socio-economic niches and become fully committed into the system eventually, others may shift their employment and residence frequently and never really commit themselves to the city.

At first glance, we might explain such various degrees of commitment in terms of the Indians' length of residence or their intention to stay in the city. For example, studies have suggested that the longer a migrant lives in a community, the stronger communal identity and sentiments he tends to possess (Berry and Kasarda 1977, Ch.3; Omari 1955; Wilson 1972). Another view emphasizes the psychological effects of the migrants' intention: those who intend to return to their places

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of origin (sojourners) tend to differ from those who intend to stay in cities (settlers) in their behavior patterns (Nelson 1976; 1979). That is, a sojourner may live in a city for decades; but since he plans to return to his place of origin, he tends to withdraw from joining voluntary associations or investing money in the urban residence, thus avoiding a full commitment to city life.

These perspectives seem heuristic to a certain extent. However, to explain such a complicated issue as migrants' commitment to the city, one needs to consider more relevant factors like the opportunities a city offers its migrants, various ties the migrants maintain with their places of origin, how these opportunities and ties influence their commitment to the city, and so forth. Taking these factors into account, especially the migrants' ties with their places of origin, I will use the "urban" North American Indians as an example to explicate how and why this group of migrants has been "sojourning" in cities for years, while rarely being fully committed to city life.

This paper claims no comprehensive study of the Indians' commitment to city life, nor does it intend to deal with all varieties of their migration patterns, such as inter-tribal variations and the differences due to the distance between reservations and cities. Rather, the paper limits its focus on explicating how and why a certain group of the Indian migrants tend to sojourn in large cities for years, while still regarding the reservations as the roots of their life. This sojourning pattern refers to what happened primarily between the 1950s and the 1970s.

I. Some Characteristics of the Indians' Urbanization

Perhaps the most important trend in Indian populations after World War II has been the migration from reservations to urban areas (cf. Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977:515). Although American Indians began to move into modern industrial cities before the turn of the century, such cityward migration never reached a significant level until the end of World

War II. In 1950, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) initiated the Relocation Program, which served to facilitate American Indians' move to urban areas. The program aimed at removing surplus labor from Indian reservations, for the subsistence economy in these reservations was being replaced by the market economy and the employment opportunities on the reservations were shrinking (Spicer 1982: 165ff; Thornton et al. 1982:12ff). In addition to the effects this program had brought about, the scale of migration was augmented by the unprecedented voluntary migration. As a consequence, the proportion of "urban Indians" increased significantly: from 7.2% in 1940, to 13.4% in 1950, 27.9% in 1960, 44.5% in 1970, and 52.7% in 1980¹ (Sorkin 1978:10).

These figures indicate that more and more American Indians live in urban areas; but not all Indians who move to cities find and keep employment, nor do all of them stay.² In 1969 the average unemployment rate among Arizona "urban Indians" was around 40%, while in winter it could reach 90% (Weaver and Gartell 1974:86). Graves (1971:280) estimated that fewer than half of the Indian migrants in Denver remained in the city for six months or longer. According to the BIA's estimates, in the 1950s about 30% of the relocated Indians returned to their reservations within the fiscal year of relocation (Sorkin 1978:33), while about 35% of those relocated in the 1960s returned (Spicer 1982:166; Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977:515). Other estimates of return rates of the urban Indians range from 15% among the Southern Plains Indians to 80% for the Shoshone-Bannocks in Idaho (Sorkin 1978:33; Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977:529). In general, however, most estimates fall between 30% and 70% (Margon 1977:19).

¹ According to the 1980 U.S. Census data, among 1,364,033 American Indians in the country, 719,047 were categorized as "urban", while 644,986 were categorized as "rural" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983:20)

² For example, Hodge (1981:6) estimates that more than 60% of American Indians in the U.S. are "full- or part-time residents of cities."

Compared to other migrant groups in large American cities, American Indians are not unique in their "persistence rates". Before the early twentieth century, low persistence rates were common among immigrant groups in many cities (Margon 1977:22). As Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965:49-133) point out, early industrialization is usually characterized by uncertain job markets or inadequate welfare systems. Under such a circumstance, newcomers to the city are likely to find their employment unstable and their life in the city insecure. Thus, the unstable situations that urban Indians face today were not foreign to early European and Asian immigrants decades ago. Instead, what is characteristic of Indian migrants is, first, the ease with which they return to the reservations when the situations in cities become disadvantageous to them; and second, their tendency to move to cities again when they wish or have to do so (Levine 1968: 21ff). This "freedom" to shuttle between cities and places of origin was hardly open to the early European and Asian immigrants.

Among some new immigrant groups, a similar pattern of moving back and forth also seems common. Those whose homelands are close may often remigrate, although their destinations of employment are not necessarily large cities. For example, many Mexican immigrants tend to "move into the U.S. to work in agriculture for a number of months, and bring the cash back home", while some Puerto Ricans are also found "hopping back and forth" in a similar manner (Levine 1968: 22). Nonetheless, there are again important distinctions between these immigrants and American Indians. While these Mexicans and Puerto Ricans primarily move back and forth as seasonal workers, the rationale behind the Indians' "floating" migration seems more complicated. In particular, American Indians have a special legal status. This status allows them to use reservation areas in which the sale of land is prohibited, while properties are exempted from taxation. In a sense, then, it provides them bases of protection as well as constraint, which in turn facilitate a unique pattern of Indian migration.

Many authors emphasize that American Indians “migrate” in a “floating” pattern: they are not only suspended between cities and reservations, but also shift constantly among different cities (Dosman 1972: 84, 135; Graves 1970:36–37; Garbarino 1971:172; Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977: 529; Spicer 1982: 174; Weaver and Gartell 1974:73). Just like a “paradoxical fast-flowing stream of everchanging drops of water” (Tax 1978:128), they float around within a rural-urban system, while having “sunk no roots” in it. These sojourning urban Indians are only transients. Their move to cities can be seen as a “round trip” with which they seek to obtain a niche in the urban-industrial sector, but eventually they become only excluded “Camp Indians” who have a hard time to find a place to settle (Blumenfeld 1965; Wax 1971: 167ff).

The BIA regards those American Indians who have resided in cities for one year or longer as “urban Indians”. For many of these Indians, however, reservations are still their home. For example, the majority of them believe that they will eventually return to the reservations to live (Deloria 1981:149; Hodge 1969:47; Spicer 1982:167ff; Weaver and Gartell 1974:91); and they usually do return to the reservations when they get into troubles in cities, or when the situations there become rough and unpleasant, or simply when they need to take a rest (Hodge 1969:20; Neils 1971:127; Tax 1978:128; Dosman 1972:135). In other words, the reservations remain a sanctuary for these sojourning Indians. Such a sojourning pattern is forced and facilitated by several important mechanisms that must be examined in the contexts of both city and reservation.

II. The Mechanisms of Floating Indian Migration

A. Escape to Cities: The Urban Appeal

The literature on internal migration has overwhelmingly emphasized that economic considerations predominate in the migrants’ decision (Todaro 1980; Gardner 1981). Among the studies of the American Indians, the search for better employ-

ment also plays a major role in cityward migration.

Under the pressure of rapid population growth and the penetration of national economy, the traditional subsistence economy on Indian reservations is bound to be transformed into the market economy. During this transformation, however, the reservation Indians either lack capital or fall short of knowledge and technology to achieve agricultural commercialization. Nor is the Indians' stockraising practice able to form a modern enterprise. Consequently, the reservation Indians lag far behind the modern industrial economy and fall into abject poverty.³ To escape from poverty, the Indians must seek off-reservation wage work, which is easier to find in urban areas (Nagata 1970, Ch.7; Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977:524).

Not only does the abject poverty push the Indians off their reservations, some forms of social pressure also accelerate the emigration. Living in a wealthy industrial economy, the American poor are quite aware of a "standard package of American life" (Rainwater 1968:252ff). Such a standard heightens the poor's sense of deprivation — a sense which makes them demand a better life — and attracts them to pursue better employment. When a significant number of Indians leave for cities, others might follow simply because of emergent social pressures: for example, because "everybody is going" (cf. Nagler 1970:9).

In the Indians' move to the cities, the BIA's Relocation Program has contributed a major part by providing job training, counseling, and grants for traveling. Beyond the facilitation of this program, numerous Indians also manage to arrive in cities by means of unofficial avenues. They usually gain information about urban life and job opportunities from relatives and friends. Some are attracted by better employment opportunities, while some others seek its vibrant social life, the adventure of cityward migration, or the fun, freedom, and excitement it can provide. Specifically, these characteristics seem

³ According to recent estimates, approximately 50% of the U.S. reservation Indians fall below the poverty line (Thornton et al. 1982:26).

especially attractive to those single, young Indians whose position imposes on them the least family responsibility.

For these young Indians, the reservations not only provide little wage work, but also represent an isolation from the outside world that seems to them more interesting and exciting. To escape boredom, they move to cities for wage work and a more exciting life. The city seems more exciting because, on the one hand, its greater and denser population offers a "critical mass" and a better chance to meet friends or similar people (Fischer 1975; 1982; 1984; Brody 1971:4; Nagler 1970:17ff; Weaver and Gartell 1974:73ff; Guillemin 1975:155ff). On the other hand, large cities provide anonymous situations so that one can hide in a public space, in a "world of strangers" (Lofland 1973). This anonymity offers a certain degree of freedom and permits an Indian to "function relatively free from the barrier of racial prejudice" (Nagler 1970:14).

For some Indians, moreover, not all primary groups or kinship ties on the reservations are welcome or solicited, nor are they desired (cf. Moore 1984:72-73; Dewey 1950; Hodge 1969:67). Thus, by moving to cities they can evade undesired kinship responsibilities and annoying gossip. That is, they can "escape the scrutiny of their relatives and meet friends and old acquaintances" (Nagata 1971:131). In short, for some Indians large cities serve as a "temporary haven" that fulfills their social wants and needs. In this haven, they can meet the same kind of people, pursue various tastes of living by their choice, and participate in a "culture of excitement" which can include danger, adventure, frequent traveling, excessive drinking, physical violence, sexual exploits, violations of the law, and so forth (Hodge 1981:7ff; Neils 1971:121-122; Wax 1971:167-168).

Such a "lower-class action-seeking" mode of life tends to appeal to the youth (especially male) in many ethnicities (Gans 1982; Suttles 1976; Wax 1971:168). The North American Indians seem to represent only one more example of this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the Indians do possess an important characteristic that other ethnic groups usually lack:

they can and do return to their reservations frequently, treating the reservations as another haven when the city loses its appeal or when adventure and excitement are outweighed by risk and frustration. Under such circumstances, they can at least retreat into the reservations and easily maintain a minimal level of subsistence. Such ease may help relieve pressures of urban adjustment, but it may also facilitate a particular pattern of Indian migration.

B. Retreat into Reservations: The Homeland Insurance

Many Indians move to the city for better employment, amenities, and excitement, but few of them obtain all they seek. Among the factors that influence urban adjustment, economic ones might still predominate. That is, those who maintain employment and remain satisfied with their jobs tend to enjoy urban life or tolerate it even if they may dislike it. On the contrary, for those who have difficulties in holding a job or who become frustrated with the job, these frustrations may exacerbate other unpleasant experiences they have encountered in the city (Thornton et al. 1982:22). For example, many "successful" Indians like the city's museums, movies, and people from different backgrounds. By contrast, some "unsuccessful" Indians often complain that the city is too crowded, living costs run too high, people around them look hurried and unfriendly, and the like (Garbarino 1971:179ff).

For most Indians who cannot cope with urban life, the reservation remains an alternative, where they can always return for minimal material support from their property or from relatives (Guillemin 1975:11; Nagata 1971:144). The return trips are not only eased by modern transportation, but also guaranteed by the holdings they have retained on the reservations. To obtain this sort of "insurance", therefore, these migrants must preserve some ties with the reservations — whether by leaving families and houses behind, by sending children there for education, by having friends or relatives work their land, or by simply leaving it uncultivated (Nagata 1971: 144; Spicer 1982:167--168; Wax 1971:158ff). Sometimes, however,

even these arrangements are insufficient. These Indians must also visit their reservations from time to time or on ceremonial occasions, in order to remain "eligible for important ceremonial roles" (Weaver and Gartell 1974:84), or to refresh and reaffirm their status and relationships in the reservation society (Stanbury 1975:44).

In addition to these practices, the Indian migrants can also afford to move around by other means: sharing resources among fellow migrants, taking advantage of the shortage of labor on the reservations, and being protected by the legal constraints on the sale of reservation properties. To survive in the urban society, sometimes these Indians (especially the single youth) must share such critical resources as money, transportation, places to stay, and information on work (Guillemin 1975:146). Such support and information not only serve to absorb the shock of unemployment, but also facilitate the access to work. With these resources at hands, an individual can retreat from employment without facing immediate difficulties – at least temporarily. Nonetheless, such a pattern of sharing resources may only play a supplemental role in the Indians' floating migration. To understand how other mechanisms operate, we must turn to the reservation itself.

When an "urban Indian" loses his job, he can either look for another one or turn to Indian agencies (e.g., BIA) for help. More easily, however, he can retreat into peer groups to share resources, or simply fall back on the reservations for a living (Guillemin 1975:82; Nagata 1970: 192ff; Tax 1978:128). Since the market economy has intruded into most reservations, the remaining subsistence economy becomes more or less short of labor. Thus, when the urban Indians return to the reservations, they can easily turn to the traditional subsistence economy which can at least absorb and support these returned migrants (Nagata 1970:192ff, 282). Moreover, the legal constraints of the Indian reservation system inhibit "smooth land transfer on the basis of individual land ownership" (Nagata 1970:295-296), thereby helping most Indians to

maintain a minimal level of living.

For these reasons, the Indians on the reservations rarely sell their farmlands and houses. Some also fear that someday they will lose their land. Therefore, despite some disadvantages attached to the reservation system, few Indians desire it to be eliminated; instead, they prefer to retain the reservation as a form of security (Van den Brink 1974:147,251; Weaver and Gartell 1974:82ff). After all, these farmlands and houses have provided them a refuge which ensures "the possibility at least of going back", by which "their minimal necessities are theoretically guaranteed" (Dosman 1972: 179; Nagata 1971:144; Nagler 1970:3; Neils 1971:131ff). Such attitudes reinforce the observation that these Indians seldom surrender the material basis of their ties with the reservation. As Nagata has observed in Moenkopi, a Hopi reservation in northern Arizona, it is unlikely that an emigrant totally abandons the ties with the reservation, that he

ever reaches the stage where he finally disassociates himself and his family from Moenkopi and is "assimilated" in the population of larger American urban concentrations. In any event, it is clear that most migrants continue to think of Moenkopi as their place of origin and to identify with it, however tenuous their tie with it may be. (Nagata 1970: 278)

In addition to maintaining these material bases of homeland ties, many Indian emigrants also tend to regard the reservations as a major root of social-psychological comfort. The comfort may stem from the intimate ties within a primary group, the insulation of the reservations from outside intrusions, or the less demanding and less troublesome life within the familiar surrounding. One study (Spencer and Jennings et al. 1977:529) shows that about 25% of the returned Indians admit that they return for social or emotional reasons — this top category outnumbers all other answers.

Other studies also emphasize the social-psychological basis of security the reservations can provide. For example, when an urban Indian encounters too much demanding social pres-

sure — such as criticism and rejection by employers, landlords, bureaucrats, the law, or the police — he might feel that it is the time to return to the reservation for a while. Unlike the demanding urban world of strangers, the reservations offer an environment in which the Indian would be “surrounded by the familiar” and could relax while “on furlough from the battle of urban living” (Guillemin 1975:145; Van den Brink 1974: 147ff; Dosman 1972:76).

III. A Population of Straddling Sojourners: Causes and Implications

After years or decades of urban experience, why are so many Indians still not fully committed to city life? To answer this question, one may point to cultural, personality, social-psychological, situational, or structural factors (cf. Horowitz 1983). None of these factors alone seems able to account for the Indians' urban commitment, but a number of studies done in the 1970s have focused on social-psychological and structural accounts, while relatively deemphasized or ignored the others.

Such a trend might be seen as a critical response to “culture of poverty” and “modernization” theories prevailing in the 1960s. Put briefly, these theories would have emphasized the impact of some cultural values or personality traits on the Indians' urban commitment — such as aggressiveness, work ethic, time orientation, delayed gratification, and need for achievement (Lewis 1959; 1968; McClelland 1961). According to more recent studies, however, these “internal” traits seem insufficient to account for American Indians' difficulties with the urban-industrial sector (Dosman 1972:13ff, 81; Graves 1970; 1971:305; 1974; Weppner 1971; Yinger and Simpson 1978:147ff; Paredes 1973:70; Garbarino 1971). Since many of these traits may exert various effects in some circumstances, or may have no significant effect in others, they seem to operate inconsistently and cannot fully explain why some Indians have difficulties in retaining their jobs and staying in the cities.

In examining such a complicated issue, therefore, one

should be careful in assessing how cultural values or personality traits influence Indians' position in the urban sector. Many would agree that cultures are not necessarily fixed entities according to which a member must behave; instead:

Cultures or "cultural values" must be seen not as THINGS or real objects that take root and grow; but as convenient abstractions that help describe the way people live under different situations (Dosman 1972:81; emphasis in the original).

That is, under various circumstances people can select or bend the norms embedded in cultures — a flexibility appears among many urban Indians from the Micmac in Boston to the Navajo in Denver. In particular, these Indians have revealed the capacity to change by developing "new meanings and relationships, adapting old forms where he can, but in novel ways" (Hirabayashi et al. 1972:86; see also Guillemin 1975; Weppner 1971; Tax 1978). Such fluid forms of the adaptive mechanism illustrate that Indians' social learning can add to their cultural strategies, which in turn serve to maintain viable cultures.

To complement cultural and personality perspectives, many students of American Indians seek to explicate Indians' urban commitment by means of the structural circumstances that the Indians face within their reservations, in the city, and in the larger society. For example, researchers have examined or proposed the following features in Indians' migration and urban experience: general problems of socio-economic marginality (Brody 1971:2), the nature of American urbanization (Nagata 1971), the opportunity structure in the metropolitan system (Graves 1971), attitudes of employers (Weppner 1971: 395), characteristics and influences of related institutions, and the structural blockage of the access to critical resources (Dosman 1972:13ff, 87; Graves 1974:65; Jorgensen 1971: 108ff). Often, these authors assert, such circumstantial factors cause the urban Indians' exigencies and influence their adaptive patterns so overwhelmingly that cultural values and personality traits exert relatively minor effects.

Though important as it appears, the structural perspective

must be also considered in connection with the subject's perception of his immediate or distant circumstances for the macro-micro linkage to be completed (Gardner 1981). That is, structural features may be crucial, but they must be understood through the social-psychological effects that accompany them. For example, the experienced urban Indians may perceive that they cannot change the limited opportunities in urban society, nor can their work always render them secure. Responding to the great uncertainty in the city, then, they may simply "refuse to hoard today's gain because there is no predicting tomorrow's feast or famine" (Guillemin 1975:146; see also Dosman 1972:87; Paredes 1973:52ff).

Thus, instead of surrendering themselves to the mainstream culture, these urban Indian sojourners — like the urban poor in general — tend to alter, select among, transform, or evade the wider society's expectations (Gronbjerg et al. 1978: 96). In other words, they do not simply either accept those expectations "compatible" with their own cultural traits, or reject those "incompatible" ones. Rather, they tend to "compromise or 'bend' social norms and values to fit what they see as the exigencies of circumstance" (Suttles 1976:3). Thus an Indian might leave a job as soon as he takes it, according to his perception about the rightness of the social situation (Guillemin 1975: 145; cf. Hodge 1969). From this point of view, one can say that the urban Indians have "invented" various strategies to cope with the uncertainty of their future.

At first glance, it seems simply an act of "withdrawal" when urban Indians retreat into reservations or urban skid rows, which permit a life outside the norms of the wider society (cf. Brody 1971:78–79). However, once they have been exposed to city life, many Indians soon become again dissatisfied with the life on these "refuges". By moving to the outside world repeatedly, young, single Indians may be freed to pursue their desires; by returning to their "refuges", they can obtain comfort and other advantages. Such a floating pattern of migration seems to illustrate their position in this rural-urban system: These Indians want the best of both

worlds (Weaver and Gartell 1974:81), but they also have to evade both systems of social control. By keeping a foot in both camps, they have learned a way of "moving between the advantages of rural-urban settings" (Neils 1971:131ff).

Such a circular move serves to expand their perimeters of activity, for these Indians' social structure seems "elastic enough" to permit such an expansion (Neils 1971:134; Guillemin 1975:68). As Levine puts it, some Indians regard cityward migration as an opportunity to stretch their arms; they regard the city as

a vast game preserve to be raided now and then when one needs money. . . . [I]n moving to cities, Indian people feel merely that they are expanding their perimeters, not moving from a rural to an urban location, but finding new fields to exploit. Many feel that the reservation is still the center of their lives; . . . [they] regard the dominant culture almost as a natural resource, to be raided or exploited for a short period of time, and the spoils brought back home. (Levine 1968:21-22)

In so doing, these Indians seldom abandon their reservations for good, for they would have a good deal to lose. Although some may experience years of urban living, they still regard the reservations as the "home" they can fall back on, while they never fully commit themselves to the city or to economic aspirations of the mainstream culture (Krutz 1973:102). Whether they raid the city or evade the reservation, their move might well contain a large element of opportunism (cf. Hawley 1981:321). Both cities and reservations might be significant and demanding to an Indian (Paredes 1971:258), but he straddles them according to his own perception of circumstances. Such straddling may not lead to an ultimate solution of the Indians' difficulties, but at least it represents a strategy in coping with those difficulties.

In conclusion, the rural-urban migration among American Indians has become a complicated phenomenon that no one single perspective alone can explicate sufficiently. To account for such a phenomenon, this paper has focused on structural and social-psychological explanations and proposed to link the

both. As the foregoing discussion suggests, the extent to which a migrant group is committed to the city may be reflected in the ways these migrants perceive real opportunities in the city and how they utilize circumstances accordingly.

Perhaps the reservation system represents the most important structural element in the Indian's circumstances. Since the Relocation Program was introduced in 1950, American Indians have been freed from the confinement of this system (Neils 1971:125); thus, the reservations no longer simply serve as "prisons", they also function as "asylums". This structural characteristic allows the Indians to adapt strategically to the growing migration and its associated difficulties. In so doing, the Indians have been floating within the elasticity of social structure and the flexibility of cultural strategy while preserving various ties with their reservations. These ties provide an alternative and ultimate base that allows them to sojourn and straddle, to keep floating and act upon the opportunities that present themselves.

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美國都市中的印第安過客

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摘 要

二次世界大戰後，美國印第安人開始大量移入大都市謀生。一九八〇年人口普查時，已有過半數的印第安人經歸類為都市居民。這些「都市印第安人」當中，有一部分經常處於失業狀況，或無法長期在大都市立足，而斷斷續續地返回印第安保留區。

本文根據五十至七十年代的實證研究，試圖歸納出這些移民所呈現出來的特殊遷移型態，並以社會學文獻中的「過客」(sojourner) 概念，來分析部分印第安移民如何將城市視為一種資源，以擴展工作機會和人生經歷，而心底仍然將保留區當作真正的歸屬所在。當都市生活的繁華面給挫折與困境遮蔽時，許多印第安移民通常會返回家鄉尋求庇護和慰藉。但是大部分經驗過都市生活者又往往不耐於保留區內單調、偏狹的生活，於是返鄉後總會找機會再往城市移動。如此反覆往返，游離於城鄉之間，似乎一方面可以伺機在兩者間各求所好，另一方面又可以逃避雙方的社會控制體系。本文即在探討構成印第安移民這種逗留、觀望遷移型態的一些重要條件及機轉。