

APPENDIX A

ALTERNATIVE GLOSSARY: A NEW WAY TO LOOK AT SOME OLD TERMS

AGRICULTURE The cultivation of the land and soil for the purpose of growing plants; may also include the raising of domesticated animals for food, transportation, and other uses. Many textbooks use agriculture as the first sign of the development of civilization, which implies that if American Indian tribes are not creating a food surplus through farming, they cannot develop a specialized culture and social structure. This understanding of cultural development is misleading in two ways. First, contrary to popular belief, many American Indian groups did “farm.” (The Southern Paiutes of southern Utah, for example, developed sophisticated agricultural and irrigation technologies long before white settlers started farming there.) Second, and perhaps more importantly, many non-agricultural tribes had specialized social structures, disproving the assumption that an agricultural surplus was a prerequisite for those structures.

ASSIMILATION The absorption of people from one culture into the dominant culture. Many federal government officials, including several presidents, felt that by leaving their native culture American Indians could become part of the dominant white society. This often led to policies that attempted to destroy Native American cultures and lifeways.

BAND A group of American Indians, smaller than a tribe, often based on family or kinship ties. Today, the term “band” can also mean a smaller portion of an American Indian tribe who live in a distinct geographical location. In anthropology, this term refers to small hunter-gatherer groups that had little formal political organization.

CLAN A social grouping, larger than an individual family but smaller than the tribe, based on a shared biological or cultural ancestor and/or a spiritual being. In many American Indian cultures, clan ties are essential to social organization and spiritual belief, and members of clans may participate in distinct leadership positions, social roles, rituals, and customs.

CIVILIZATION The term “civilization” is often associated with Euro-American ideas of advancement or progress and can refer to a society that has developed elaborate intellectual, social, and religious institutions and complex material culture (such as arts, crafts, trade goods, etc.). Historically, civilization was understood hierarchically, and complex cultures were assumed to be inherently superior to those that did not create such complex institutions. In the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, this idea of the advancing stages of civilization was also tied to the Euro-American belief in a racial hierarchy and white superiority, and the view that Indian cultures were “uncivilized” was used to justify policies that benefited white Americans at the expense of native peoples. A more neutral definition of civilization is the type of society and/or culture that existed in a particular region during any given time period.

CULTURE The distinct set of learned beliefs, social institutions, knowledge, values, conventions, and practices shared and created by a specific group of people, which are transmitted from one generation to the next. It is important to note that while we use the all-encompassing terms “Native American” and “American Indian,” these labels actually refer to a number of groups and/or tribes that each have a distinct culture.

- DISCOVERY** The act of obtaining knowledge about, or making known, something that was previously unknown. This word is often controversially used to describe those events in which non-Indian explorers first encountered certain geographic places. These areas had long been known to the native peoples who inhabited them, and using the word “discovery” can inaccurately imply that Indian cultures did not exist (or matter) before the arrival of non-Indian people.
- EDUCATION** The process of providing information and training and of assisting in mental, emotional, and physical development through teaching and learning. Additionally, education can mean to provide information for the purpose of persuading an individual to accept a particular point of view. Education is a vital part of the transmission of culture from one generation to the next and the word carries a complicated legacy for American Indians. The intergenerational trauma caused by federal Indian boarding schools led to an understandable suspicion of Anglo-style education. Some Indians fear that the purpose of education still is to assimilate Indians and destroy their traditional cultures.
- HISTORY** The research, analysis, and interpretation of events of the human past. Often history is associated with a formal, written, systematic account of a certain time period or subject based on written records. More loosely, history can be defined as any story told about the past. American Indian history has been passed from generation to generation through the process of oral transmission, and oral history needs to be recognized as an invaluable historical record of the American Indian experience.
- MYTHOLOGY** A set or system of stories and beliefs, often about supernatural beings or heroes, which usually seek to explain the worldview and beliefs of a particular people or culture, including ideas about the creation of the world and human beings and the workings of natural phenomena. Often American Indian spirituality is inaccurately defined as “myth,” while Euro-American belief systems that are being actively practiced generally receive the more value-neutral label of “religion.” Another way to define a myth as a commonly held belief that is not necessarily accurate, and in this sense there are many misunderstandings about American Indians that can be referred to as myths. For example, the idea that all American Indians lived in teepees would be a myth.
- NATION** The word “nation” has several different definitions. The political definition of nation is that of a group of people in a defined territory who are under an independent and sovereign government. “Nation” can also mean a group of people who share common culture, ancestry, language, etc., who may or may not live within a defined territory. While the traditional assumption is that three nations—the United States, Canada, and Mexico—make up North America, American Indian tribes are also nations with deeply rooted claims to sovereignty.
- NEW WORLD** A term used to describe the countries and continents of the Western Hemisphere, usually the Americas. It should be noted that this term is Euro-centric, as the Americas were in no way “new” to the Indian peoples living here when Europeans first arrived.
- OLD WORLD** Those countries and continents in the Eastern Hemisphere, usually Europe, Africa and Asia. See “New World.”
- ORAL HISTORY** The transmission, recording, and study of past events and experiences based on spoken accounts rather than, or in conjunction with, written records. Oral history is a vital component of the transmission of culture and history for many Native American tribes. It is also a valuable source of knowledge about those tribes.

- RELIGION** a system of beliefs and practices that seek to explain the nature and purpose of life and the universe. These beliefs often include the worship of a supernatural being or beings, specific moral and ethical guidelines, and specific ritual observances, narratives, and symbolism. In Euro-American culture, religion is often seen as separate from the “earthly” or “physical” world, but in most American Indian cultures this distinction does not exist.
- RESERVATION** areas that are defined by treaties, presidential executive orders, acts of Congress, or other agreements between the federal government and a particular Indian tribe or tribes for the use of that particular group. Reservations serve as important land bases for the exercise of tribal sovereignty
- SOVEREIGNTY** The ability, right, and power of a governing body to control its territory, and the actions therein, free from external influence. For American Indian tribes, sovereignty is both inherent and enmeshed in an important and ongoing struggle for the right to control their own lands and live free from outside interference.
- SPIRITUALITY** Generally refers to an individual’s ideas and beliefs about things not directly connected to the biological body or physical matter, sometimes referred to as the soul or spirit. Spirituality often includes ethical and ideological values and involves the ways in which an individual understands the purpose of life and the ways in which the world functions. See also “Religion.”
- TERMINATION** A United States government policy of the 1950s and 1960s, strongly supported by Senator Arthur V. Watkins of Utah, that attempted, through federal legislation, to dissolve federal recognition and responsibility for American Indian tribes, including the division of tribal lands and assets to individuals. This policy terminated the government’s recognition of tribal sovereignty, ended federal support systems on Indian reservations, and ended American Indians’ exemption from state and local taxes. Not all tribes were terminated, but the consequences were devastating for those that were, including the Southern Paiutes of Utah. This controversial subject can be further investigated by watching the *We Shall Remain: The Paiute* or exploring the high school lesson plan about the Paiutes.
- TREATY** A contract or binding agreement between two nations. From 1778 to 1881, the United States and individual groups of Native Americans signed treaties, which usually dealt with the transfer of land to the United States in exchange for certain rights and or goods, possibly including other land, monetary compensation, and/or continued rights to the use of land for hunting, fishing, and other purposes. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the United States consistently failed to fulfill its treaty obligations to Indian nations.
- TRIBE** A group of people, larger than a band, tied by kinship and/or shared culture and traditions. When the term is used in anthropology it often refers to groups associated with more permanent settlements stemming from agriculture. Today the word is often used to designate an organized group of American Indians who share cultural, political, and economic ties, regardless of the size of the ancestral social organization or settlement pattern of that group.