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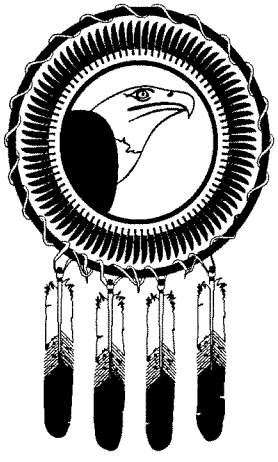

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Abstract

Both sociology and economics have begun to pay increased attention to the role of culture in collective action. We consider this topic through an examination of recent efforts by American Indian tribes to promote economic development on Indian reservations. Some tribal efforts have been successful; others have not. Evidence suggests that a critical variable is the degree of match between the formal institutions by which tribes govern themselves and the informal conceptions of appropriate relationships and forms of behavior that are embedded in indigenous cultural repertoires. This match is made problematic by the fact that most contemporary systems of tribal governance were not designed by tribes themselves. Regardless of their origin, however, our research indicates that where the institutional match is high, economic development tends to be successful; where it is low, development falters. Culture thus serves as a foundation of successful collective action and, through it, of Indian progress against poverty.

Culture as Explanation in Racial and Ethnic Inequality: American Indians, Reservation Poverty, and Collective Action[1]

This paper is an exploration of collective action on the part of American Indian nations. It is occasioned by two sets of issues. First, there is a set of practical issues arising from the historical moment. Persistent Indian reservation poverty has been a matter of concern to both federal and tribal policymakers for much of the twentieth century. However, only recently — thanks to activist Indian politics and changes in federal Indian policy — have Indian nations been able to exercise significant power over decisionmaking on Indian reservations and, consequently, over their own affairs. Today, a set of newly-empowered actors — Indian tribes themselves — are beginning to confront the poverty problem. Their efforts are examples of collective action: tribes and their governments are the primary actors involved, and their activities constitute a set of conscious, concerted attempts to promote forms of reservation economic development that fit their own political, social, and economic objectives.

Those efforts, however, are having mixed success. The practical issue here is to account for diverse results in the Indian effort to deal with the problem of poverty — in other words, to account for variable outcomes in Indian collective action.

Emerging from this first set of issues is a second, which has to do with the role of culture in collective action and, through action, in racial and ethnic inequality. The prevailing tendency in much of sociology has been to explain patterns of inequality largely

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in terms of the externally-generated sets of opportunities and constraints that subordinated populations face, granting to such factors a larger role in explaining inequality than to the internal actions and characteristics of the groups themselves. This approach has substantial appeal: The surrounding environment of political and economic opportunities and constraints demonstrably plays a massive role in the fortunes of subordinated populations, and even in the formation of subordinate groups themselves. An unfortunate by-product of this approach, however, is to underplay or even ignore agency on the part of the disadvantaged in our explanations of outcomes in racial and ethnic interactions.

But when we look to internal factors, a further issue appears: how to think about culture. Accounting for collective action and its outcomes in terms of the interests or the organizational and material resources of the disadvantaged is one thing; introducing culture into the account is quite another, and poses certain difficulties. Culture is a messy concept to begin with, variously defined by different persons, disciplines, or schools of thought, and difficult to work with analytically. Explanatory appeals to the ethereal world of ideas, conceptual paradigms, norms or values often make social scientists uneasy. Our preference is for things we can count or at least readily see, or in the case of collective action, for things whose logic — like that of circumstantially-driven interests — is clear. There is also some concern that cultural explanation somehow will end up blaming the disadvantaged for their misfortunes, and will contribute, thereby, to the preservation of the status quo.[2] Furthermore, especially when it is equated with values, culture can quickly become tautologous, "an extra resource to be wheeled in after other explanations are defeated," resting explanation on something which is itself unexplained (Douglas and Douglas 1989,

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2. See the discussions in, for example, Wilson (1987, chapter 1), Duncan and Tickamyer (1988), Leacock (1971), and the further discussion later in this paper. Appeals to the culture of dominant groups, on the other hand — as in blaming racism for subordinate group misfortunes — frequently present less of a problem. Racism itself, for example, may be seen as a product of material interests and the need to justify their pursuit (e.g., Noel 1972), thus reducing culture to a material reflection and avoiding the messiness of cultural explanation.

p. 34; see also Swidler 1986). As a consequence, culture has tended to disappear from many accounts of collective action.

Recently, however, a concern with culture has been increasingly evident in macrosociology, which, in its efforts to explain large-scale social change, has begun to look beyond the systems of external political and economic opportunity or constraint that collective actors face (e.g., Sewell 1985). Approached with explanatory as opposed to descriptive agendas in mind, culture is seen in this work as a set of identities, conceptual schemes, and tools that don't simply reside in people's heads — aggregates of individual attitudes or psychologies — but are embedded in particular ways of life and sets of social relationships, and that offer guidelines for institution-building and other forms of collective action. These developments have been especially apparent in the historical sociology of revolutions, where Tocquevillean concerns with the interplay of political culture and political institutions have received renewed attention (e.g., Tucker 1977; Hunt 1984; Sewell 1985; Goldstone 1991), in studies of state-building (e.g., Champagne 1992), and in analyses of recent events in Eastern Europe and China, which have paid growing attention to issues of regime legitimacy and morale, the normative bases of political order, and the cultural foundations of rebellion (e.g., Chirot 1991; Calhoun 1991).[3]

Interestingly, the increased attention to culture in macrosociology is paralleled by developments in economics, and especially in theories of economic growth. For economists, the post-World War II era — and particularly the recent economic history of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe — has provided remarkable opportunities to examine the roots of economic development. Among many lessons, perhaps the most compelling is the primacy of institutions of governance, from constitutions and legislatures to judicial systems and contract law, in explaining where and

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3. On the Tocquevillean background and, more generally, on the links between political culture, political community, and self-determination, see Weintraub (1986, and forthcoming, especially chapter 7).

when development occurs (e.g., North 1990; World Bank 1992; Bates 1987; see also Evans 1989). Other things equal, larger endowments of natural resources, human capital, and physical capital clearly promote growth. But too many resource-rich nations remain poor, and too many side-by-side "experiments" by the Koreas, Germanys, Chinas, and others have been run to avoid the conclusion that resources and access to markets provide insufficient explanations of where growth occurs and when it takes off. "Getting institutions right" has become the dominant focus of research conclusions and policy advice.

"Getting institutions right" — from ownership structures in Hong Kong to market pricing systems in Czechoslovakia — is, of course, shorthand. It signifies recognition that the institutions of a society, and particularly its institutions of governance, establish and enforce the rules of the economic game that create the environment of incentives and constraints in which individual and collective action is channeled into either productive or merely resource-using activities. This recognition is problematic for economics. Social institutions, particularly governing institutions, are non-market "public goods" whose products are shared collectively (e.g., North 1990; Ostrom 1990; Hirshleifer 1976; Kalt 1981). While individuals share an interest in productive institutions that pull them out of the Hobbesian struggle, narrowly self-interested individuals might be expected to trap themselves in a prisoner's dilemma by "free riding" on the expectation that others will bear the costs and live under the constraints of institution-building (Olson 1965; Samuelson 1954). The origins, forms, and relative stability of governing institutions are thus vexing problems within economics. One result is a search by many economists for an understanding of the role of "ideology" in institution-building and collective action (e.g., Nelson and Silberberg 1987; Kalt and Zupan 1984, 1990; Brennan and Buchanan 1984; Sugden 1986), or for what North identifies (1990, p. 42) as "a sociology of knowledge." What economists refer to with these terms, fundamentally, is culture, as culture relates to concepts of authority, political legitimacy, and normative order, and where culture is the

source of "implicit contracts" capable of limiting free riding and providing collective cohesion (see Cornell and Kalt 1991, 1992a).

Our own interest in culture parallels these developments in sociology and economics. Our specific concern here is with the tendency, in much of the effort to account for both collective action and inequality, to subordinate group identity, world view, and normative order to external frameworks of opportunity and constraint. But our purpose is not to reverse the arrangement, privileging culture, nor to support what William Wilson (1991, p. 1) has criticized as "simplistic either/or notions of culture versus social structure" in the explanation of inequality. It is instead to argue for a more balanced view that grants to culture a significant and sometimes determinant, or at least complementary, role.[4] Ultimately, our concern is with processes of reciprocal causation, that is, with the causal interplay between social structure — by which we mean patterns of concrete political, economic, and social relations, both contextual and internal to the groups involved — and culture — by which we mean cognitive and symbolic structures, including the normative order.

Preview of the Empirical Argument

The core of our argument has to do with the ways in which culture informs and facilitates institution-building, which in turn facilitates collective action. The arena of action in this case is Indian reservation economic development. In short, evidence from the Indian case suggests that the institutional foundations of collective action in this arena gain efficacy to the extent that they match indigenous cultural repertoires, that is, to the extent that they follow the guidelines embedded in indigenous cultural conception and normative

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4. A number of race relations scholars recently have been attempting, in diverse ways, to integrate or balance these alternative explanatory approaches. See, for example, Wilson (1991), Greenstone (1991), Fugita and O'Brien (1991), Patterson (1989), Yinger (1986).

order.[5] Other things equal, this gives to culture a critical role in Native American efforts to overcome poverty and, ultimately, in racial and ethnic inequality.[6]

The empirical material for the argument comes from a growing body of research on poverty and economic development on American Indian reservations. Reservation Indians are among the poorest populations in the United States, yet some Indian reservations are home today to vigorous and successful programs of economic development. Much of this development is taking place under tribal auspices and in pursuit of tribally-defined objectives, and is yielding net gains in tribal income and employment and in the viability of reservation enterprise (see Cornell and Kalt 1993). Yet development is by no means ubiquitous. Some reservations are emerging as "successful" developers; others are not. The question is why.

Patterned inequality is a product of interlocking systems of action and circumstance, or, put rather differently, of constraint — the distribution of opportunities we face and resources we command — and choice — the decisions we make and our resulting actions. Some persons or groups face severe constraints and, consequently, few choices: their opportunities and resources are limited and the range of available actions is small. Others have significant opportunities and/or resources, and consequently larger ranges of choice. In other words, inequality is more circumstantially determined for some persons than for others.

In recent years, thanks to changes in tribal political circumstances, the range of choices — the range of potentially efficacious actions — available to American Indian tribes

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5. By "indigenous" here we do not mean "traditional" in the sense in which this term typically has been used in work on Native Americans, i.e., to refer to culture least removed from its aboriginal roots. We simply refer to the cultural repertoires — of whatever form — of Indian communities directly involved in the development effort.

6. The basic argument about Indian reservation economic development is developed in Cornell and Kalt (1990, 1991, 1992b). The objective of the present paper is to examine the implications of this argument for sociological thinking about the role of culture in collective action and, through it, in inequality.

in the area of economic development has increased. Because culture, as a set of interpretations, guidelines, and tools, shapes the choices that people make and the efficacy of their resultant activity, this in turn increases the potential role of culture in tribal collective action and, thereby, in tribal fortunes. This more salient role of culture is apparent in recent Indian development experience.

In what follows, we lay out the Indian material first and then explore its wider implications.

The Changing Politics of Indian-White Relations

The new world of reservation economic development had its beginnings in political transformation. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of change in Indian politics. In those years, for the first time in a century, the flow of political influence in Indian-white relations began to shift as a host of Indian groups — tribes, supratribal organizations, informally-organized constituencies — entered the political arena in new and assertive ways. Via litigation, lobbying, and often sensational protest, they eventually altered the shape of federal Indian policy, forcing the federal government, in the 1970s, to adopt a policy of tribal self-determination (Cornell 1984; Nagel forthcoming). This policy, which found its most explicit expression in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 (PL 93-638), was a major departure from prior policies designed to terminate federal services to Indian tribes, undermine tribal entities, and promote the assimilation of Indians into the mainstream society of the United States.[7] The result is that Indian nations have been able to regain a significant measure of power. Under the new policy of self-determination, today they command greater control over their own affairs and their relations with the rest of the society than at any time in this century. Tribal governments are making

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7. On the preceding "termination" policy, see Burt (1982), Wilkinson and Biggs (1977).

increasing use of their authority, which includes powers of taxation, regulation, adjudication, law enforcement, land use control, contract origination, and civil and criminal lawmaking.

Having said that, one must be cautious. The power of Indian nations is neither absolute nor secure. Self-determination today is under attack from several sources. At the very least, Indian tribes remain subject to the will of the Congress and the courts. Both institutions historically have been notoriously fickle in their treatment of Indian peoples, and the Supreme Court in particular is showing signs of being especially dangerous right now to Indian interests (see, for example, Cubberly 1991; Singer 1991). Nonetheless, the progress is real. Tribal sovereignty is no longer merely a dream or a political principle. Partly because of policy developments at the federal level and in the courts, many tribes have been able to give it genuine substance (for some discussion see P. Deloria 1986; Cornell and Kalt 1993). In short, to an unprecedented degree, Indian tribes today have moved into the driver's seat at the reservation level.

This development, coupled with the emergence of a more assertive Indian leadership eager to take advantage of the political openings forced by the activism of these decades, led to further changes in Indian politics. Throughout the 1960s and much of the 1970s, activist Indian politics was substantially a supratribal politics. That is, supratribal organizations — the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Youth Council, Survival of American Indians Association, Indians of All Tribes, the American Indian Movement, the International Indian Treaty Council, Women of All Red Nations, and so on — dominated the political arena of Indian-white relations. At different times during this period these organizations formed the cutting edge of the activist movement, set much of the political agenda, and dominated not only the public spotlight but much of the attention of the federal government.

One of the striking developments in the the last decade is the extent to which these supratribal organizations have been superceded at the center of Indian politics by newly

empowered and activist tribal governments. Today, it is tribes who are setting political agendas and shaping much of the policy debate, moving action in Indian affairs back toward the tribal level. Again, this is happening largely as a result of policy changes which themselves were substantially the product of Indian political assertions and the Indian activist movement.

This new policy environment, however shaky, is essentially favorable to tribal self-determination. In effect, it puts tribes not only in the driver's seat but in the hot seat as well. Success or failure in achieving tribal goals now depends relatively more on what tribes do, and relatively less on what the federal government and other non-Indian actors do (Cornell and Kalt 1992a). This is not to dismiss the impact of federal and other non-Indian actions. Indian tribes still operate within a situational context set largely by non-Indians; the power of tribal governments remains slight in comparison to that of the federal government; and the policy environment could change at any time. The point is that once tribes are in a position of power in Indian affairs — which, to some degree at least, they are today — certain outcomes in Indian-white relations begin to depend more upon them and their distinctive characteristics.

Reservation Economic Development

This policy shift and its implications are perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the area of Indian reservation economic development. For decades, economic development on Indian reservations was largely the responsibility of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which brought neither enthusiasm nor much competence to the task. Tribal governments had the opportunity to participate in federally-designed and funded programs, but they had little control over those programs or the funds they provided (see, for example, Bee 1981; DeMallie 1978; Schusky 1975). Consequently, while they were often blamed for program failures, tribes in fact bore relatively little responsibility for program outcomes.

Today, those Indian tribes that wish to *and* have the institutional capability can exercise considerable control over development programs on their reservations, and increasingly are initiating programs that reflect their own development concerns (Cornell and Kalt 1993). They are passing ordinances and laws regulating development according to their own criteria, and are negotiating not only with the federal government but with local and even multinational investors. In short, they have taken on significant policy- and decisionmaking roles. They continue to face major obstacles, yet their responsibility for outcomes, once virtually non-existent, has greatly increased.

Furthermore, in certain cases, outcomes themselves have improved. Taken as a whole, the reservation population today remains extremely poor. Reservation economies typically are characterized by high levels of unemployment, low per capita incomes, widespread welfare dependency, and an almost complete absence of sustained, productive economic activity (Snipp 1989, chapter 8; Nagel, Ward, and Knapp 1988; Cornell and Kalt 1990). In some cases, that has begun to change (see Table 1). While success stories are still rare in Indian country and the aggregate data on employment and other indicators of socioeconomic welfare remain discouraging, some tribes — for example, the Mescalero Apaches (New Mexico), the White Mountain Apaches (Arizona), the Mississippi Choctaws, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation (Montana), Cochiti Pueblo (New Mexico), Santa Ana Pueblo (New Mexico), the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation (Oregon), and others — have made significant progress toward their development goals (White 1990; Cornell and Kalt 1992b; Odyssey Productions 1984).

For the last few years, the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development has been carrying out a systematic comparative study of Indian reservation economic conditions, trying to understand the emerging pattern of development success and difficulty. We have been looking at the effects on development of everything from

natural resource endowments to human capital to geography to external economic and political relations.

Reservation economic development is a complex process in which all of these factors — and others — matter in one way or another. However, two factors seem consistently to matter more than most of the others.[8] One is *de facto* sovereignty: effective tribal control of tribal affairs. We won't say much about that here; in essence, however, where development decisions are in tribal hands, development seems to have a much stronger record. This typically involves tribal assertions of control over reservation development goals and programs, moving non-Indian decisionmakers such as the BIA into the background.

The logic of this is clear. During the long period of unlimited federal dominance, most of the major development decisions on Indian reservations were made by the BIA. Understandably, those decisions tended to reflect the institutional interests of the BIA (Nelson and Sheley 1985). Yet the negative impacts of bad decisions were visited not on the BIA but on the tribes involved. As tribes take over the decisionmaking role, decisions and their effects are joined together. For this reason, among others, tribes tend to make better development decisions than the BIA.[9]

The second factor, and more to our point, is institutions of governance. This refers not only to the organizational forms of government, but also to legal ordinances and provisions as well: overall, to the formal "rules of the game" that regulate relations among tribal members and between members and outsiders and that formally organize the development process (North 1990; Cornell and Kalt 1992b). It appears that a critical variable in development success is the ability of the tribe to put into place governing

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8. The remainder of this section draws heavily on Cornell and Kalt (1990, 1991, and 1992b).

9. For additional discussion, see Cornell and Kalt (1988). For some empirical evidence, see, for example, Krepps (1992), who demonstrates that tribally-controlled reservation forestry operations are significantly more productive than BIA-controlled ones.

institutions that can create and sustain an environment (1) in which individual behavior is channeled toward productive as opposed to destructive activity — e.g., away from distributional conflicts and toward the enhancement of collective welfare — and (2) in which investors feel secure. "Investors" in this case include everyone from individual tribal members looking for jobs or hoping to start a beauty salon or a locksmith shop, to a bank considering a loan for a tribal convenience store, to an outside corporation thinking of manufacturing on the reservation. Creating such an environment means providing dependable systems of dispute resolution, shutting down opportunistic politics, eliminating corruption, and so forth. Where tribes are effective at putting such institutions in place — at creating such an environment — investors invest, economic development becomes far more likely, and the tribe gains increased control over its affairs and over the goals and outcomes of development.

Constructing such institutions, however, is by no means simple. These institutions of governance have to pass two tests (Cornell and Kalt 1990). First, these institutions have to be functionally adequate: they have to be capable of performing the practical tasks that contemporary reservations face. This means that bills must be paid, contracts must be negotiated, infrastructure has to function, policy has to be implemented. It also means solving the challenging problems of dispute resolution, political opportunism, instability and so on. In other words, they have to get the job done.

Second, it turns out that they also have to be culturally appropriate: consonant with shared conceptions of the feasible and with the normative order in regard to such matters as the appropriate source, social location, and range of governing power. One of the biggest obstacles tribes face is that many of them have governing institutions that either were imposed on them from outside or were designed by outsiders after non-Indian governmental models that fit poorly with indigenous social organization and cultural conception (Taylor 1980; Deloria and Lytle 1984). As a consequence, these institutions frequently have little support from the tribal community and compel little allegiance from

individual tribal members, including, in many cases, governing officials themselves. Such circumstances undermine their effectiveness and stability, with the result that investors feel insecure and development comes to a halt.

On the other hand, it appears that, where governing institutions fit or reflect tribal conceptions of appropriate ways of doing things, more or less conform to preferred patterns of internal relationships and behavior, and reflect indigenous patterns of social organization, they more readily gain the support of tribal members, and are more capable of creating the kind of environment in which sustained, self-determined economic development becomes possible. In other words, the formal rules of the game have to be compatible with the informal rules — that is, with the cultural or normative order (North 1990). Otherwise, those rules lack the legitimacy that is essential for tribal government to operate effectively and for development to succeed.[10]

The Role of Culture

The Indian situation, as briefly outlined here, illustrates the major point we wish to make: the key role of culture in shaping collective action and, through it, outcomes in intergroup relations.

Over the last couple of decades, many sociologists have resisted explanations of racial and ethnic relations and their outcomes in inequality that focus in whole or in part on the cultural characteristics of the groups involved. They have done so for a variety of reasons, among them, for example, the fact that such explanations often appear to blame

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10. For discussion of the cultural bases of governmental legitimacy, see Meyer and Scott (1983), and cf. Tucker's (1977) argument about the sources of legitimacy in early Stalinist policymaking, and Fitzgerald's (1972, ch. 4) treatment of the cultural bases of early Viet Cong legitimacy among South Vietnamese peasants. Further analyses, within the framework of economics, are provided by Bates (1987) and Davidson (1992). Of course institutional legitimacy also rests, over the long run, on efficacy, which underlines the importance of functional adequacy. See, for example, Meyer and Rowan (1983); Lipset (1963); Cornell (1993).

victims for their misfortunes and thereby to justify the status quo.[11] The apparent suggestion — often only implicit — in these arguments is that those who fare poorly in the struggle for economic wealth and political power do so because they lack the values or character traits necessary for success (e.g., Banfield 1974; Sowell 1981). This perspective has quite specific and, for many people, unfortunate implications for policy. But quite aside from their policy implications, these arguments tend to encounter other difficulties as well. They sometimes confuse the causes of poverty with their consequences. Sustained economic deprivation, as Duncan and Tickamyer (1988, p. 251) point out, can have its own cultural manifestations which are then misinterpreted as causal (see also Wilson 1987; Liebow 1967). Furthermore, as Steinberg (1981) and others have shown, arguments that blame poverty on the cultural endowments of the poor frequently ignore the historically varying conditions and sometimes insurmountable obstacles groups encounter in their efforts to improve their situations. Given such neglect, the opportunity sets and material resource endowments of ethnic or racial groups are simply overwhelmed by the supposed explanatory power of their own cultural inadequacies.

Indians often have been objects of this sort of reasoning. In the late 1960s, for example, the BIA concluded that "Indian economic development can proceed only as the process of acculturation allows" (Bureau of Indian Affairs 1969, p. 333). In other words, you are poor because, culturally at least, you are Indian.

During the 1970s and 1980s, a wariness of this sort of "cultural racism" (Wilson 1973) discouraged many scholars from looking to culture as a significant part of our understanding of intergroup relations (for some discussion, see Wilson 1987, ch. 1). Not that we ignore it altogether. On the contrary, in the academy we look favorably on culture, support cultural diversity in our institutions, and expect cultural distinctiveness to be noted

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11. There are other reasons as well, including the difficulty of translating certain cultural elements into easily measurable and manipulable data.

and honored. We're just not sure — in sociology at least — that we want it to *explain* anything. Instead we have tended to defer to social structural explanations, where concrete political and economic conditions or relationships and derivative interests, backed by unequal distributions of power and material resources, offer a ready logic for intergroup outcomes.

Obviously social structural explanations are critical, in the study of Indian-white relations as elsewhere. It is impossible to comprehend the persistent poverty of American Indian reservations, for example, without a thorough understanding of their external economic and political relationships and the processes through which those relationships were established: the historical subordination of Indian nations, the intentional stripping away of indigenous political power, the wholesale expropriation of native economic resources, the situational obstacles many of today's would-be tribal developers face in their search for investment capital and accessible markets, and the continuing discrimination many Indians experience, particularly in areas close to reservations.

At the same time, however, it is impossible to account for differential tribal success in overcoming such obstacles by paying attention *only* to these contextual or social structural factors. For one thing, many of them fail to discriminate effectively among tribes, most of which have experienced generically similar losses of power and resources and have had to operate under similar regimes of external domination. In addition, however, Indian tribes are not simply the objects of action and its relational consequences. They are actors in their own right, with not inconsequential powers of sovereignty. They respond to their situations, and presumably do so, within the limits of externally-constrained possibility, in ways that make sense to them, reflecting internal dispositions, interpretations, and resources — including cultural resources. To suppose they do otherwise is perverse. What's more, those culturally-shaped actions have consequences — large, small; subtle, dramatic — for intergroup outcomes. In other words, whatever the explanatory power of contextual or social structural factors, culture is hardly toothless.

Distinctive cultural practice and conception are not simply a veneer, a set of identity markers or modes of expression, devoid of impact on concrete group fortunes.

At least, this is what the Indian cases suggest. They argue for a view of culture as a constitutive part of collective action. In particular, they suggest that, *within the constraints set by circumstance*, culture does two things of major importance: It provides collective actors with interpretive frameworks that help them to understand their situations, identify their interests, and select directions for action; and it provides them with resources or strategic recipes (Swidler 1986; and cf. Comaroff and Roberts 1981) for the effective pursuit of their objectives.[12] It provides action, in other words, with both meaning and method, or, more precisely, with the conceptual materials from which both meaning and method can be constructed. In so doing, it can have powerful effects on collective action and, therefore, on the concrete outcomes of racial and ethnic relations.[13]

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12. It is worth commenting here on the related and perhaps most obvious part that culture plays in ethnic and racial relations: its role in what J. D. Y. Peel (1989, p. 198) calls the "cultural work" of ethnogenesis, that is, in the construction of ethnic and racial groups themselves (see also Cornell 1990). Boundaries must be perceived. The attribution of significance to particular boundaries — racial, ethnic, class, gender, and so forth — is a symbolizing (i.e., a cultural) phenomenon, and one by no means wholly determined by context. While the objective positions groups occupy within particular sets of relationships surely suggest bases for collective identity, it remains for actors themselves to interpret those sometimes complex positions and to decide which sets of relationships are significant and which are not. These are cultural processes; their outcomes depend on interpretive schemes that, while dynamic and transformable, are already in place in some form or other. People do not enter such relationships conceptually empty-handed; they bring with them preconceived notions of who they are and of how to think about what happens to them. The fact that the specific outcomes of these processes — *which* boundaries receive *how much* significance — demand explanation doesn't change their fundamentally cultural nature. By knowing (or deciding) who or what "we" (and "they") are, we lay in place guidelines for action (see Calhoun 1991), guidelines that may be altered by situational factors but which at the same time shape our responses to those factors, and thereby may alter the situation. While it is too seldom commented upon, and is beyond the immediate concerns of this paper, this cultural aspect of group formation places culture right at the heart of racial and ethnic relations.

13. For other work on Indian collective action that systematically combines external and internal factors, including cultural ones, see, for example, Bradley (1987), Fowler (1987), and Champagne (1992). Champagne's work, with its explicit focus on political institutions, is directly relevant to the present effort. He combines external situational factors, such as geopolitical conditions and links to the world-system, with internal cultural and social organizational factors to create a powerful explanation of different patterns of state-building among four southeastern tribes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For example:[14] Both the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona and the Yakima Nation in Washington have major, potentially marketable wildlife resources on their reservations. The Apaches see their wildlife as a commercial resource; furthermore, they appear to see the efficient exploitation of that resource as fitting very well with their notions of what it means to be Apache in the contemporary world and of the appropriate role of natural resources in Apache life. As a consequence they actively manage their wildlife — elk in particular — for sustained commercial use, and are able to sell trophy-quality elk hunts to wealthy non-Indians for $10,000 or more per hunt. Their wildlife operation is a profitable, tribally-owned and run enterprise.

The Yakimas, on the other hand, see their wildlife as primarily a cultural and subsistence resource, and argue that the animals were put there by the Creator for their own use, not for whites. They carefully regulate tribal hunting and prohibit hunting by non-members, and in so doing forego the tribal income that might come from commercial hunting in favor of other uses of the resource.

Each of these tribes faces, at a basic level, similar circumstances: the combination of significant economic need and a commercially-exploitable natural resource. Yet they act very differently in response to that situation, in part, at least, because they interpret the resource and its place in their lives differently.

Similarly, members of the Lummi Tribe of Washington, presented with a variety of possible economic activities, have persistently pursued fishing as a primary source of household income. Fishing is the traditional source of Lummi sustenance; to be Lummi, in the minds of many tribal members, is to fish. Today, fishing for the commercial market remains the largest single occupation of tribal members, and the tribe itself has started

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14. This and subsequent discussions of the White Mountain Apache, Yakima, Lummi, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation, Cochiti Pueblo, Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Reservation, San Carlos Apache, Crow, and Northern Cheyenne are based on tribal documents, secondary sources where noted, and field interviews by the authors with tribal members and officials, 1987-1992.

several enterprises related to the fishing industry (see Boxberger 1989; V. Deloria 1978). Yet the commitment to fishing prevents the Lummis from fully exploiting other employment opportunities in the regional economy, for the commercial fishing season takes up a significant portion of the year. During the season there is relatively little involuntary unemployment on the reservation. During the rest of the year, however, unemployment rises dramatically, and many families have difficulty surviving on fishing income alone. Nonetheless, they continue to fish while nearby employment opportunities that require full-time commitment year around — and there are a number — often go unexploited.

In each case these tribes appear to have chosen development strategies that fit with particular models of themselves and of their relationships to the material world. Their responses to particular sets of concrete circumstances cannot be understood by reference to those circumstances alone. Without reference to culture — to the ways these groups conceptualize themselves, their situations, and their resources — their actions remain mysterious (for some analogous cases, see Champagne 1989; Sooktis and Straus 1981; Pomponio 1990).

But definitions of self and of the material world are not the only cultural matters at issue here. Culture also offers sets of alternative resources or strategies through which groups can pursue the interests they see. For example: As suggested above, among the problems that Indian tribes trying to deal with persistent poverty face are political opportunism and governmental instability. Like most governments, they face the understandable inclinations of politicians to use political power as a means to advance interests other than those of the collective, frequently at the cost of the collective interest. In Indian country, as elsewhere, this often leads to the squandering of societal resources, sometimes on a massive scale (Cornell and Kalt 1991).

The nature of the formal institutions of tribal governance tends to exacerbate this effect. Most were designed by Interior Department staff and bear little connection to indigenous models, preferences, or social organization. Even in those few cases where the

designers of tribal governments conscientiously took tribal characteristics and social organization into account, they did so at a time — the 1930s — when the effective power tribes could exercise was exceedingly small and the power of the Department of the Interior over tribal affairs, while nominally reduced by the formation of these governments, remained largely unchallenged.[15] The designers of these governments scarcely imagined tribes would ever achieve the degree of genuine self-determination they exercise today, or that tribal governments would one day be trying to manage major resource endowments and high-impact relationships with corporations or federal and state governments. As a consequence many of these governments not only lack strong community support, but lack any effective system of checks and balances as well, have poorly-developed mechanisms of dispute resolution, are bureaucratically inefficient, and exhibit rapid rates of turnover in leadership. The result is a highly unstable institutional environment that takes full advantage neither of indigenous methods of governance nor of the institutions of the mainstream society, and in which sustained economic development becomes virtually impossible.

A number of tribes have wrestled with these problems via personal exhortation, government ordinances, constitutional reform, and other means. But much of the issue here is the match or mismatch between, on the one hand, attempted or imposed solutions to institutional problems and, on the other, the sociocultural resources of the tribe. Where the match is relatively good, the institutions do a better job of mobilizing community support. Where the match is poor, the institutions tend to fail and development fails with them. Elsewhere we have reported empirical examination of these phenomena (Cornell and Kalt 1990, 1991, 1992b); a partial summary is provided in Table 2. Even after accounting for such plausible explanatory factors as resource endowments, educational achievement

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15. Many contemporary tribal governments have their roots in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. For discussion of the IRA, the process of governmental design, and the tribal governments developed under either its provisions or its influence, see Deloria and Lytle (1984); Taylor (1980); Ducheneaux (1976); Philp (1977).

within the reservation population, and the strength of surrounding off-reservation economic opportunities, we find that sustained economic development — as measured by change in income, 1977-1989 (see Table 1) — is not taking place in any case where there is a mismatch between the formal governing institutions inherited from the waning era of federal domination and the informal cultural foundations of governing legitimacy, as reflected in the legacy of the tribe's indigenous institutions.[16]

Two tribes that appear to have had some success in dealing with this problem are the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation in Montana, and Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico. But their solutions are very different.

Flathead employs an elaborate set of formal bureaucratic and constitutional mechanisms drawn largely from the surrounding society: a personnel grievance board, an independent tribal judiciary, parliamentary election of the tribal chair, staggered terms of office for tribal leaders, formal limits on political power, and so forth. In contrast, Cochiti Pueblo has no written constitution, legal codes, or ordinances controlling behavior. Essentially a theocracy, it gains stability instead from traditional Pueblo culture and from the unimpeachable standing of the tribe's religious leaders, who annually appoint the politicians who administer the tribe, stand as the ultimate protection against violations of the public trust, and provide a stable foundation for the political process. The culture itself, with its normative proscriptions against opportunism and self-service and its informal mechanisms for ensuring compliance and continuity, is capable of compelling disinterested behavior from its politicians, who for the most part refrain from placing their individual interests above those of the community. While there is annual turnover in individual political leadership, both the tribal objectives and the institutions used to achieve those objectives remain unusually stable.

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16. Boolean analysis of these and related data suggest that match of cultural norms to constitutional type, the presence of cultural norms supporting specialization and trade, and the absence of a general council form of government "together constitute a set of necessary, but not sufficient conditions for economic development" on Indian reservations (Cornell and Kalt 1991, p. 41).

These two tribes face similar institutional problems, but deal with them very differently. It seems unlikely that the Flatheads, who are a confederation of groups only loosely linked aboriginally, and who have experienced considerable interpenetration by mainstream American culture, retain enough of their diverse, older cultural repertoire to institute an effective Flathead version of what Cochiti has done. Instead, they turn to what are, to them, a compatible set of institutional resources in the larger society, select those they find useful, and replicate them in their own political structure. Cochiti rejects most of those resources in favor of its own, indigenous cultural and normative endowment, which remains substantial.[17] Each tribe has found an approach that uses the very different resources it has at its disposal. Importantly, both tribes also have been notably successful, not only at dealing with these institutional problems, but at economic development.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota presents a significant contrast to these two cases. Pine Ridge occupies some of the poorest counties in the United States (Johnson 1987) and exhibits some of the worst poverty in Indian country. A number of factors contribute to this situation, but institutional ones appear to be significant. The tribal government is highly centralized, with a President and tribal council who control most resources and wield considerable power on the reservation. Unfortunately, this centralization fits poorly with traditional Oglala social organization, which only loosely linked a set of highly autonomous Sioux bands and has been reproduced to a significant degree in the reservation settlement pattern (DeMallie 1978; Powers 1977). It also fits poorly with attendant cultural conceptions of appropriate governing relations, which still emphasize local allegiances and a high degree of local autonomy, and only minimally support identification with the tribe as a political entity.[18]

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17. On traditional Cochiti political organization, see Lange (1990), chapter 7.

18. At Pine Ridge, for example, writes DeMallie (1978, p. 274), "The tribal organization has been made to accept administrative responsibility for the whole reservation, but it seems certain that the local people, the Oglala living in the various district communities, do not as a whole believe in a representative form of government. They do not identify with the tribe as a political group and would prefer to run their own affairs at the local level...."

Such situations, in which subtribal identities or culturally-legitimated strategies of action are at odds with emergent tribal institutions, can be found on a number of reservations (Champagne 1987; Cornell 1988, chapters 5 & 6). The result at Pine Ridge is that certain sociocultural resources — among them, localized collective identities and kinship relations and normative prescriptions for action — in effect are unavailable to the tribal government, which has difficulty mobilizing community support for tribal enterprises or broad-based development strategies, or persuading tribal politicians — who share the localized loyalties of their constituents — to honor the tribal interest above subtribal or personal ones. This contributes to an unstable, opportunistic, and often highly conflictual political environment discouraging to investors both within and outside the tribe.

The San Carlos Apache Reservation in Arizona illustrates a different version of the matching problem. In general, the Apache tribes have experienced relative success in the development arena (see Table 2; also Cornell and Kalt 1993). This has occurred under centralized governments with particularly strong chief executives, relatively weak legislatures (councils), and weak or non-existent formal judicial systems. This governing structure appears to be consonant with traditional Apache structures which democratically empowered single band leaders on the basis of demonstrations of charismatic, publicly-interested leadership (see Basehart 1971; Opler 1955; Spicer 1962). At San Carlos, however, and in contrast to both the White Mountain Apache and Mescalero Apache situations, a conscious and concerted federal policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created concentration camp conditions among the most severe in Indian country (Spicer 1962). It set out explicitly to eradicate indigenous leadership and leadership structures, replacing them with highly intrusive federal controls of virtually every aspect of Apache affairs. Along with a melting-pot policy that gathered diverse Apache and non-Apache groups on the San Carlos reservation, this seems to have seriously

undermined the community's ability to generate and sustain indigenous leadership and make enduring strategic decisions (Cornell and Gil-Swedberg 1993). Today the reservation is in the midst of a constitutional crisis in which electoral processes are faltering, governance itself is in disarray, and even modest economic development seems unlikely.

At the same time, as noted above, institutional match alone is not sufficient to guarantee development success. Institutional solutions also have to be workable within the constraints set by the larger environment. Circumstances have their own demands that cannot simply be ignored. The Crow Tribe of Montana, for example, has a tribal government that departs significantly from most of the governments designed under the influence of the IRA, which the Crows themselves rejected. While the degree of fit between this system and traditional Crow governance is debatable, at least it was designed in part, in 1949, by the Crows themselves (Hoxie 1992). The problem is that it doesn't work very well. In terms of natural resources, the Crows are one of the wealthiest tribes in the country, and exercise considerable control over their resource base. Yet their current governing institutions appear incapable of efficiently translating this wealth into socioeconomic well-being for the Crow people. Socioeconomic conditions at Crow remain among the poorest on the northern plains; despite major efforts, the Crows gain little from their abundant resources (see Table 1).

Crow government takes the form of a general council, essentially an Athenian democracy. This combines a weak executive with a legislature (the general council) that possesses virtually unlimited authority and includes every voting-age member of the tribe. A majority of participants at quarterly general council meetings can dictate policy, overturn past tribal resolutions, and initiate impeachment proceedings of standing tribal leaders (Champagne 1989, ch. 4). The result is a kind of free-for-all politics in which not only tribal leadership but tribal strategic or political direction can — and do — change frequently and at short notice, and in which individual politicians, in order to remain in office, must

sustain coalitions in part through more or less continuous distributions of jobs, money, and other goods to constituents.

To be sure, traditional Crow society likewise supported weak executive authority, emphasized individual freedom and achievement, and encouraged intense competition for status among individuals (Nabokov 1987; Champagne 1989, ch. 4). However, the path to leadership and tenure within it depended less on distributions of wealth or patronage and more on individual performance, and while authority was dispersed, on certain occasions it could be heavily concentrated in the hands of chiefs and military societies (Voget 1980; Lowie 1956, 1943; Hoxie 1992). Councils of warriors and councils of clans exercised limited governing authority over foreign/military and civil/economic affairs, respectively, with some separation of powers. Indeed, current Crow governance is more reflective of the reservation years early in this century than of aboriginal Crow society (Hoxie 1992). But regardless of the degree of cultural fit at Crow, the instability of contemporary Crow governing institutions equips them poorly for sovereign government in a situation in which the tribe is natural resource-rich but financial capital-poor, and therefore must negotiate with outside actors who demand certainty and stability as conditions for investment.

In other words, just as the impact of external factors often cannot, in and of itself, account for development and other outcomes in these cases, so culture, in and of itself, cannot necessarily overcome the constraints imposed by external conditions. Consequently, the shape of development has to be found in the interaction between the two: the requirements posed by context and material resources on the one hand and the social resources and dispositions offered by culture on the other.

Culture and Collective Action

As often pointed out, culture is a complex and contested term on whose meaning and significance social scientists frequently disagree. The meaning and significance we

give to it are, we hope, at least implicit in the argument so far. We now attempt to make these explicit.

"To adopt a line of conduct," writes Ann Swidler (1986, p. 275), "one needs an image of the kind of world in which one is trying to act, a sense that one can read reasonably accurately (through one's own feelings and through the responses of others) how one is doing, and a capacity to choose among alternative lines of action." Culture meets these needs. In Howard Becker's words (1982, p. 517), culture provides "the shared understandings that people use to coordinate their activities." We can think of culture as a conceptual vocabulary or repertoire of intellectual tools with which people struggle to give meaning to their situations and to find courses of action that, literally, make sense (cf. Stinchcombe 1990, p. 292).

These understandings can cover any number of topics, but, among other things, they include interpretations of the self or person, of appropriate relationships among persons and between persons and the material world, and of "how things work." In effect, culture provides paradigms of self, society, and the world around us which can be used to construct "sensible" courses of action, informing us of what the "best" course of action is.[19] Culture, then, is both constraining and facilitating. It is constraining insofar as we

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19. The economist might argue that the "best" course of action is that which most efficiently meets the individual's preferences (or utility function). In this perception, if culture plays any role at all, it is a preliminary one as the black box out of which individual preferences — tastes — somehow arise. But how to most efficiently pursue one's preferences is frequently obscure. Even the methodological individualism of economics recognizes that individuals operate under "bounded rationality" (March and Simon 1958), but this, too, is a black box. Part of what culture does is to provide standards by which to measure various means of pursuing interests. More importantly, it is a source of identity. It specifies the nature of the person, of the self, and in so doing elucidates the logic of interests themselves (cf. Calhoun 1991). This definition of the self may vary significantly and along a number of dimensions. For example, it may range from the essentially autonomous individual to the individual as anything but autonomous, as constituted by social relations and acting in terms of and on behalf of those relations (see, e.g., Lieber 1990; Geertz 1973). This cultural construction of the actor is nicely illustrated by Larcom's (1990) discussion of the Mewun, for whom individual identity is fundamentally constituted by relationships. Mewun identify themselves primarily through their relationships; to be stripped of one's relationships is to become virtually a non-person. Even their courts treat individual action as relational: relatives may be held as responsible for the actions of the individual as the individual is, regardless of intention. Thus interest definition, preferences, and utility functions are not simply individual matters. The extent of their individuality is itself a cultural product. It may be that we act in ways that serve the larger interest because we gain some individual satisfaction from doing so, and have learned to evaluate action in terms of the individual benefits we

make sense of things and construct courses of action using the intellectual tools at our disposal. Not all things are possible with any given set of tools, and our tools are limited by our experience (including our interactions with other persons or groups using other tools) and our intellectual inheritance. At the same time, culture is facilitative in the sense that these shared understandings offer bases for collective action: They make particular actions coherent, and thereby make them both more possible and more likely.[20] We plan our action within the understandings and with the tools that culture offers.

Of course the sharedness of such understandings varies. They are themselves the products both of experience — of the attempts we make to survive, solve problems, live together, be happy, and so on — and of the inherited interpretations of previous such attempts. As a consequence, the understandings themselves are dynamic, and sharedness is seldom, if ever, perfect. However, to the extent that people form bounded communities of interaction over time, they create such understandings, which in turn facilitate and shape their interactions. Thus culture is both product and producer of social relations.[21]

As sharedness decreases, on the other hand, the ability of persons to effectively coordinate action declines as well, with the result that acting in concert becomes more problematic. In economic terms, as sharedness decreases, constraints on free riding are weakened (e.g., Ostrom 1990), and the chances of *collective* action in pursuit of mutual

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gain. But it may also be that we act in particular ways that serve a larger interest because such action is the only conceivable way to be whom we have learned (or decided) we are (cf. Turner 1974 on "root paradigms," and Calhoun 1991, pp. 61-63). Thus both tastes and even, to some degree, opportunity sets are at least in part sociocultural constructs — products of what even economists are beginning to call "a sociology of learning" (North 1990).

20. An extended illustration of how culture constitutes a particular consciousness that shapes action is Thompson (1963). We are partly indebted here to Stinchcombe's (1990, ch. 8) commentary on Thompson's book. See also Bradley's (1987) discussion of how, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the cultural conceptions of the Onondaga Iroquois served both as constraints on their responses to European contact, trade, and invasion, and at the same time as bases of institutional innovation (especially ch. 5).

21. In this sense culture is itself a structure of the durable but transformable type that Sewell (1985, pp. 60-61) talks about in his discussion of ideology. Sewell also reminds us in that discussion of Giddens's (1976, p. 161) point that all structures are both constraining and "enabling."

ends, such as economic well-being, decline. Collective action is easier, in a sense, at Cochiti Pueblo and on the Flathead Reservation than it is at Pine Ridge, in part, we would argue, because the sharedness of understandings is greater at the first two than at the third. It is in part the discontinuities between the understandings expressed in the organization of Pine Ridge tribal government and the diverse understandings expressed in Pine Ridge community life that make the two — government and community — work so often at cross-purposes. It is in part the fit between government and community that both Flathead and Cochiti, each in its distinctive way, have achieved that allows them to function more often in concert.[22]

Of course the sharedness of cultural understandings can increase as well as decrease. The Northern Cheyennes, for example, have long been divided over whether or not — and how — to develop the coal deposits on their Montana reservation. Tribal resistance to coal development has been based in part on conceptions of the tribal-land relationship that do not allow for strip-mining or for the commercialization of the resource (Champagne 1989, ch. 4; Sooktis and Straus 1981). But in the face of federal cutbacks and the failure of other development efforts, more members appeared to be willing in the late 1980s to consider coal development. A new, shared conception of the resource may be emerging — however reluctantly — at Northern Cheyenne.[23]

A more substantial reordering of cultural understandings is historically apparent on many reservations, among them the Yakima Reservation in Washington. The Yakimas — officially the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakima Nation — are a composite of

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22. Why there is such variation in the sharedness of culture among these reservations, though beyond the present inquiry, is itself an interesting question. Much of the answer surely lies in their very different histories of internal and external relations and in demographic and social organizational differences. For a comparison of three Apache cases, see Cornell and Gil-Swedberg (1993).

23. This impression — and it is not much more than that — is based on conversations and observations on the Northern Cheyenne reservation, 1988 and 1989. Of course even the fully-commercialized coal resource may prove inadequate to Cheyenne economic needs, particularly as the coal market has deteriorated in recent years.

fourteen related but autonomous tribes and bands, forcibly brought together under a treaty signed between these groups and the federal government in 1855 (Josephy 1971, ch. 8). Today, while the structure of the tribal council, with its fourteen seats, symbolically represents the fourteen original groups, the Yakimas have long since become in their own minds a single nation. The tribe identifies and honors the Treaty of 1855 as "the single most important written document in our lives" (Yakima Nation Review 1978a, p. 1) which precipitated, eventually, "a new, merging society," the Yakima Nation (Yakima Nation Review 1978b, p. 1).[24] The tribe, today one of the most assertive in Indian country, has consciously reordered its own component understandings to fit drastically-altered circumstances, and turned a new understanding into the basis of shared peoplehood.[25]

Even where conceptions and interpretations are widely shared, of course, the cultural construction of action may not be simple. Culture typically is more a repertoire of tools, ideas, and guidelines we use as we wrestle with our dilemmas than a coherent system that specifies, in every case, appropriate forms of action (see, for example, Comaroff and Roberts 1981; Geertz 1973; Archer 1988, chapter 1; Stinchcombe 1990,

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24. This conscious reconstruction is part of the tribe's public self-presentation. For example, the Yakima Nation sells t-shirts, coffee mugs, and other items at its cultural center and museum in Toppenish, Washington. Even an idle examination of the coffee mug, as we discovered, can be instructive, not simply for the stated facts but for the evident pride in both tribal sovereignty and ethnic construction. One side shows the Yakima coat of arms; the reverse states the following: "One nation under the name Yakima created by treaty between the United States of America and the Yakima, Palouse, Pisquouse, Wenatshapam, Klickitat, Klinquit, Kow-was-say-ee, Liaywas, Skin-pah, Wish-ham, Shylks, Ochechotes, Kah-milt-pah, and Se-ap-cat, at Treatyground, Camp Stevens, Walla Walla Valley, June 9, 1855. U.S. Senate ratification with two thirds present concurring, March 8, 1859. Accepted and signed by President James Buchanan, April 18, 1859. Thus the Yakima Nation was created by treaty with the United States of America thirty years before Congress granted statehood to Washington State, November 11, 1889."

25. One might argue that the circumstances of treaty-making and reservation consolidation are sufficient in themselves to account for this, but what is interesting is the response to those circumstances. Informal Yakima accounts suggest that a process of conscious, cultural entrepreneurship has been involved. There are other composite situations, such as that of the Arapahoe and Shoshone of the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming, in which distinct tribes, forced together during the treaty years, have responded quite differently, maintaining clear internal boundaries and very different understandings of who they are.

We might note that sustained economic development has not yet followed on these tribal assertions. One reason may be the modified general council form of government under which Yakima operates, which makes tribal council actions subject to general council approval.

chapter 8). It presents us with a range of alternatives and, if we're lucky, a set of recipes for negotiating among ourselves within that range. Cochiti Pueblo, for example, where the sharedness of culture is considerable, is by no means conflict-free. But it has within its cultural endowment stylistic recipes for resolving issues, recipes that have enough support within the community to prevent conflict from destroying completely the tribe's ability to make decisions and act upon them.

This suggests that culture plays a role in collective action that is partly similar to, partly different from, that played by social structural factors. The relative sharedness of culture as a body of understandings helps to determine, with social structure, the range of the possible. As a set of specific ideas and norms, however, culture determines the range of the permissible or appropriate as well.[26] In this dual role, it emerges as a primary factor shaping collective action, including economic development (which, after all, is not necessarily something that *happens* to us; it's something we *do*).

Cultural Explanation

The practical thrust of the argument is to suggest that difficulties in economic development at, for example, Pine Ridge and Crow — and development success at Cochiti and Flathead — are at least partly a matter of culture. Is this blaming the victims? In part, yes. The altered political situation of Indian tribes means that today, more than at any previous time in this century, the choices tribes make matter. Their power is limited but significant. They thus bear some responsibility for what happens to them.

To say so, however, is not to absolve victimizers. All collective action is constrained to some degree by external factors over which actors themselves have little or no control. Even today, these constraints are more severe in Indian country than in most

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26. We are indebted to Bennett Berger for suggesting a formulation along these lines.

places, and they are far more systematically imposed upon Indians than they are upon most of us. By focusing on culture we do not mean to suggest that, as the BIA report quoted earlier would have it, if only Indians could get the cultural stuff "right," their problems would be solved. The constraining impacts of social structure cannot be so easily dismissed.

At the same time, in all cases, Indian and non-Indian, the constraints on collective action include cultural ones. The fact is that some kinds of culture are more useful than others in any given set of social circumstances (for some discussion see Greenstone 1991; also Fugita and O'Brien 1991). This still privileges social structure; Indians did not create the social structural conditions with which they now have to deal, and some cultural tools may be inadequate for dealing with those conditions. Thus, for example, the highly competitive and unstable system of Crow politics, itself in part a Crow product of three quarters of a century of reservation life, produces an environment too politically uncertain to sustain investment in the contemporary period. This is not to dispute the fact that Crow development prospects have been and, in many ways, continue to be at least as thoroughly undermined by the regime of outside domination and interference in which the Crows have been forced to operate. It is simply to point out that even if outside interference and domination were to disappear, economic development at Crow might still require institutional innovations not wholly supported by either traditional or contemporary Crow culture. That means development may remain problematic at Crow for some time, although altered external circumstances certainly would improve the prospects.

At Pine Ridge in South Dakota, on the other hand, development success may require at least as much change in governing institutions, but *toward* indigenous Lakota models. A development strategy that emphasizes smaller-scale, decentralized activity would fit better with the sociocultural resources of the reservation, but it would require a devolution of power toward communities and away from the political center, not an easy thing to accomplish, especially now that a centralized power structure is well entrenched.

What is at issue in each case is not so much the culture itself — although that clearly matters — as the relationships among culture, formal institutions, and circumstances or external social structure. *The point is not to get the culture "right" but to get the relationships "right."* That may require change in any or all of the three elements involved. Culture, then, is not the sole explanation, nor can it be separated from these other factors, but it is *part* of the explanation for development failure and success and, therefore, of the socioeconomic outcomes of racial and ethnic relations.[27] Put simply, institution-building is one key to power and, therefore, to development. To a significant degree, it is a cultural process.

Conclusion

We perceive danger in attributing too much to culture in our explanations of what happens to people: Are our victims then to blame for their fates? Are concepts of culture too amorphous to serve us as social scientists? Of course there is another danger in attributing too little to cultural explanation, which is that we deny indigenous understandings any significant role in people's actions, which then become little more than reflections of the social conditions groups encounter. Lately it has been claimed that studies of Native Americans too often treat them as victims rather than as makers of their

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27. Of course much depends on how "success" is defined. At a very practical level, successful economic development may mean different things to different groups (Cornell and Kalt 1990; Trosper 1988, 1992), and certain cultural/institutional combinations may do better than others at yielding particular kinds of results. Tribes that choose to pursue economic growth to the exclusion of other goals are likely to find that certain patterns of organization and action are more effective at achieving growth than others. Tribes choosing to pursue a different goal may find other arrangements are more effective. Whatever the case, the central question is an institutional one: how can the tribe effectively exercise control over the development process and its outcomes? The argument here is that culture is a critical element in determining the answers tribes make to that question. The further point is that, based in particular on the comparison between Cochiti Pueblo and the Flathead Reservation (and on more recently-gathered evidence from Santa Ana Pueblo, not included in this discussion), there seems to be no reason to believe that, in and of themselves, "traditional" tribal cultures are necessarily crippling of tribal development efforts. To focus on cultural obstacles to development is both to miss much of what is important in the dynamics of the reservation development process, and to miss the ways in which even apparently conservative cultures can serve as the foundation of institutional innovation.

own lives. In either case we carefully skirt the abyss: yes, they are victims but are not wholly products of their misfortunes; yes, they are actors but are not wholly responsible for their fates.

Luckily, the middle ground is exactly where we need to devote our attention: to the ways in which culturally-derived, contextually-conditioned strategies of action lead to particular kinds of outcomes. There is at least some truth both in Indian activist Clyde Warrior's anger in 1967 (1971, p. 72) — "We are not free. We do not make choices. Our choices are made for us" — and in Indian law professor Sam Deloria's warning to scholars twenty years later (1986, pp. 205-206) — "We have made mistakes, and you do us a disservice by almost uniformly shifting the blame elsewhere. We need hard-nosed analysis of those mistakes so that we can avoid making them in the future."

The task, as Bennett Berger suggests (1991, p. 11), is to trace the ways in which particular combinations of social structural conditions on the one hand and of cultural capital on the other lead to passivity or agency on the part of actors and to particular patterns of action. For a long time Indian cultures had relatively little impact upon outcomes in Indian-white relations precisely because of the enormous weight of the economic and political constraints under which tribes had to operate. But recent changes in the policy environment have thrust cultural phenomena closer to the forefront. Once the policy regime changes, culture becomes increasingly important, because now tribes can play a larger role in shaping their futures, and the tools they use and the assumptions they make begin to register more directly in the working out of concrete historical processes.

What the Indian case makes clear is that if we take agency seriously — if we treat racial and ethnic inequality not as totally determined by circumstances and the actions of dominant groups, but as the work, in part, of subordinated actors who, with varying degrees of influence, power, and success, struggle to create their own futures — then we have to take culture seriously as well. This is not to argue against the social structural approach. At the very least, any complete understanding of culture likewise will have to

acknowledge the impact upon it of the concrete political and economic relationships from which group experience is fashioned, and that contribute their own distinctive elements to cultural resources and shared understandings.

Furthermore, the role of culture outlined here assumes that collective actors have at least some degree of choice in their actions. While culture can be as much of a constraint on the range of possible choices as social structure can, it cannot easily overcome many of the constraints set by political and economic circumstance. Some groups — certain kinds of prisoners or slaves, for example — may face behavioral constraints so severe as to leave them almost no choices at all.

But for the most part, even under difficult conditions, there remains a range of theoretically-possible responses we can make to the situations in which we find ourselves. Both helped and constrained by the conceptual apparatuses, tools, and guidelines of our changing cultural heritage, we eventually figure out ways to respond within that range, and thereby shape, to some degree at least, our own fortunes.

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Table 1

Economic Conditions On Selected American Indian Reservations

	Change in Income 1977-1989	Adults with 1989 Income > $7000	1989 BLS Unemployment	1989 Total Unemployment
Flathead	16%	39%	20%	41%
White Mountain Apache	12%	33%	11%	21%
Cochiti Pueblo	10%	43%	10%	22%
Mescalero Apache	9%	18%	52%	58%
Mississippi Choctaw	9%	36%	26%	27%
Muckleshoot	6%	16%	50%	57%
Pine Ridge Sioux	-1%	21%	61%	73%
Passamaquoddy	-3%	19%	56%	66%
San Carlos Apache	-7%	16%	51%	62%
Rosebud Sioux	-10%	4%	90%	93%
Lummi	-11%	19%	46%	58%
Hualapai	-11%	11%	45%	74%
Yakima	-12%	20%	61%	63%
Crow	-12%	11%	67%	78%
Northern Cheyenne	-15%	29%	48%	55%
All Reservation Indians	-1%	24%	40%	48%

Note: "Change in Income" refers to the change in the percentage of adults with incomes in excess of BIA poverty levels ($5000 in 1977 and $7000 in 1989). "BLS Unemployment" measures adults looking for employment but not finding it. "Total Unemployment" measures the percent of the tribal workforce not working.

Source: The table is from Cornell and Kalt (1992b, p. 4). Data are from U.S. Department of the Interior (1989).

Table 2

Economic Performance, Cultural Match, and Governmental Form On Selected American Indian Reservations

	Sustaining Significant Economic Development	Cultural Match to Governmental Form	Form of Government
Cochiti	Y	Y	T
Crow	N	N	A
Flathead	Y	Y	P
Hualapai	N	N	C
Mescalero Apache	Y	Y	C
Muckleshoot	Y	Y	P
Northern Cheyenne	N	N	C
Pine Ridge Sioux	N	N	C
Rosebud Sioux	N	N	C
San Carlos Apache	N	?	C
White Mt. Apache	Y	Y	C
Yakima	N	N	A

Keys: Y = Yes
N = No

T = Theocracy, strong chief executive (theocrat)
A = Athenian democracy
P = Centralized, parliamentary system
C = Centralized, strong chief executive